Trotskyist International

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China
One country, two systems?

Ireland
Republicanism at an impasse

Russia
The left and capitalist restoration

Italy
Criminal capitalism

BOSNIA
No imperialist solutions!

English language journal of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

Dave Hughes memorial fund

Dave Hughes, a leading member of the LRCI, died aged 43 in August 1991. As a fitting tribute to his expertise on and passion for the Soviet labour movement the LRCI launched a Memorial Fund for work in the USSR/CIS. Since then we have received donations totalling £4,150.

This has provided us with essential resources for our work in the CIS. We have produced four issues of a Russian paper, *Rabochaya Vlast*, and have sold hundreds of copies of each issue. The *Trotskyist Manifesto*, programme of the LRCI, has been published in Russian and sold widely. The money has enabled us to undertake an ambitious programme of translation of our theoretical material into Russian, essential if we are to help overcome the ideological confusion that pervades the Russian working class and radical left. With this material we intend to launch a regular journal as a complement to a series of leaflets and news-sheets with a more interventionist character.

But our work has not only been of a literary or theoretical character. Throughout the last year we have maintained an active presence in Moscow. The money has been used to finance regular extended visits by LRCI comrades to strengthen our work there. We have debated the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists, taken the initiative in organising a public demonstration of left forces and intervened at the Stalinist organised demonstrations, raising the voice of internationalism against the Great Russian national chauvinism and anti-Semitism of the Stalinist-fascist bloc as well as intransigent opposition to Yeltsin and restoration.

We marked the 75th anniversary of the October Revolution by helping to organise and participate in a demonstration in Moscow that ended in Manezh Square. We handed out thousands of LRCI leaflets denouncing both Yeltsin and the anti-Semitic Stalinists of Trudovaya Rossiya. Later in November we held a weekend school which over thirty people attended.

A profound and crippling crisis of leadership affects the working class and the left forces in the CIS at all



levels. We are determined take steps to resolve this crisis. A small but vital measure will be the creation of the first nucleus of a CIS section of the LRCI. We have trained comrades in languages, organised a permanent presence, and demanded self-sacrifice from our militants in order to carry out this work.

Despite the current ascendancy of the capitalist restorationists and the growth of reactionary nationalism in the CIS, opportunities for genuine Trotskyism do exist. The LRCI is determined to grasp these opportunities. This will take considerable material, especially financial, resources. In responding to this task we will always be inspired by the memory and example of Dave Hughes, who devoted much of his time as a revolutionary militant to analysing Stalinism and the political situation in the USSR. We would like to thank all those comrades, supporters and friends of Dave who have contributed so generously over the last year. We urge you all to continue to support us in this work through further donations to the Memorial Fund.

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Foreword

After more than a year of diplomacy the imperialists remain incapable of stabilising the conflict in the Balkans.

The article here traces the roots of imperialist indecision but also explains why socialists should be implacably opposed to any future imperialist intervention into Bosnia, whether by peace plan or military action.

Two twenty fifth anniversaries figure in this issue: May '68 was a turning point in the history of the post-war left. Here we look at the role of the Trotskyist groups in this pre-revolutionary situation.

1968 was also the year that the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland grabbed world attention. Its brutal suppression led to the birth of the Provisional IRA.

Here we look at the republican movement's present conception of "victory" in the context of important developments within the world of petit bourgeois nationalism as well as in the relations between Britain and Ireland in post-Maastricht Europe.

Our polemic in this issue centres on certain international Stalinophile sects who have posed [illegible] ●

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Cover: Monitoring and murdering Muslims [illegible]

War and Peace in Bosnia
No imperialist solutions!

Dave Stockton assesses the west's options after the Bosnian Serbs' rejection of the Vance-Owen plan

Bosnia-Herzegovina is like the Hell of Dante's "Inferno". It has many circles each lower and more horrific than the next. For nearly two months its people have been hanging on the edge of yet another fearful precipice.

Three more terrifying alternatives face them. One possibility is that the brutal forces of the Bosnian-Serb statelet headed by Ratko Mladic will complete their genocidal assault on the fragmented Bosnian Muslim and multi-ethnic enclaves.

The second alternative is that Clinton will order an aerial bombardment of the Serbs that will throw a spark into the Balkan Powder keg, although the implementation of this option is held back by the divisions between the US and EC, as well as the divisions within Europe itself.

The third, and the favoured alternative of imperialism, is that the Bosnian Serbs could be forced into signing up to a peace agreement.

Far from being a progressive solution the ill-fated Vance-Owen plan was from its inception a recipe for "ethnic cleansing", unjust by any democratic, let alone working class standards.

From the moment the Vance-Owen map was published a series of violent Croat-Muslim conflicts broke out and Ratko Mladic began the first Bosnia-wide co-ordinated campaign to seize the northern corridor and to eliminate the enclaves in eastern Bosnia.

Two months ago there was a large enclave, around Cerska. But Serb militias conquered Cerska in March, killing hundreds and forcing out 10,000 Muslim inhabitants who then swelled the refugee population of Srebrenica to over 30,000.

Then it was Srebrenica's turn. The siege of Srebrenica began in April 1992. No food convoys or UN humanitarian aid reached the city until November. By 18 April—with nearly 3,000 dead and over 14,000 wounded—Srebrenica was a conquered city, passing over to effective Serb political control if not yet military occupation.

If the Vance-Owen plan were ever to be realised on the ground it it will entrench ethnicity and appointment as an everlasting system. Its provinces are given a Lebanon style system of governors, chosen according to ethnic group with only Sarajevo retaining a multi-ethnic character.

It neither separates the nationalities on a democratic, sovereign state basis nor does it allow for the mixing of peoples—the unity of workers on a class basis. It freezes all the reactionary horrors of the last two years and would, in turn, unleash another round of forced population transfers, "low intensity" guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

The Bosnia envisaged in the plan is not a "state" in any meaningful sense of the term; there is to be no common legislature, no general judiciary, no state army, probably no central bank or common currency. In short, the Vance-Owen plan is a plan for the permanent division of the country. Their only desire is that it can prevent the Serb and Croat held territories from being absorbed into their respective "motherlands".

As far as the reactionary nationalists are concerned the plan is a complete non-starter. The plan obliges the Serbs, who have won over 70% of Bosnia on the battlefield (particularly eastern Bosnia around Srebrenica, Gorazde and Foca), to give these back to a Muslim dominated province.

They also have to abandon their attempts to conquer a "corridor" in northern Bosnia to link Bajna Luka and the Krajna to eastern Bosnia (and Serbia). Virtually every one of the ten areas contains a significant minority population. The enclaves are not to be entered by the forces of the majority nationality so in reality these are likely to remain armed to the teeth to defend themselves against their new rulers.

Faced with the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 it was suicidal for the Bosnian Muslim community to follow the utopia of "national independence" advocated by Alia Itzetbegovic. In his intoxicated drive for EC-recognised independence he drove many Serbs and Croats into the hands of the nationalists. The Serb boycott of the independence referendum doomed Bosnia to civil war.

At the start of the war in Bosnia the LRCI supported neither the Croat-Bosnian government nor for the Serb's. We recognised the right of every community, Muslim, Serb or Croat or, indeed, integrated and mixed areas, to defend themselves against ethnic cleansing.

But we argued that workers should not align themselves with the war aims of any of the three leaderships or with the "victory" of any of them. Each of their solutions to Bosnia's problems was reactionary.

Events in the autumn of 1992 altered the situation with regard to the Bosnian Muslims. The collapse of the Muslim-Croat alliance and the secret deal between Serbia and Croatia to carve up Bosnia made it clear that the character of the war had changed. For the Muslims and their other ethnic allies—the Gypsies, the mixed populations, the non-nationalist Serbs and Croats—it became a war against national, political and social oppression; a war against genocide.

The regime of Alia Itzetbegovic was not thereby transformed into a progressive force. He remained a protagonist of "Muslim ethnicity" and a willing accomplice of imperialism in

restoring capitalism in the region.

Nevertheless, the Bosnian government cannot be seen in any way as the favourite, let alone the main tool or instrument of imperialism. Imperialism, through the UN, has imposed an arms embargo that effectively disarmed them.

The Bosnian Serbs had limitless supplies of weaponry, inherited from the Yugoslav army, shipped in from the large scale Serbian armaments industry. The Croats too have been armed by Germany. It was Bosnian Muslims who were specifically disarmed by this embargo.

The Vance Owen plan confirms the Bosnian Muslims as the main victims; while they are awarded more land than they now hold the Muslims—who represent 44% of the population—will be allocated much less than one third of the land.

Support for the Bosnian Muslims in no sense means that people should endorse all actions their militias may take. Our support is critical. We do not pretend that their forces have committed no atrocities.

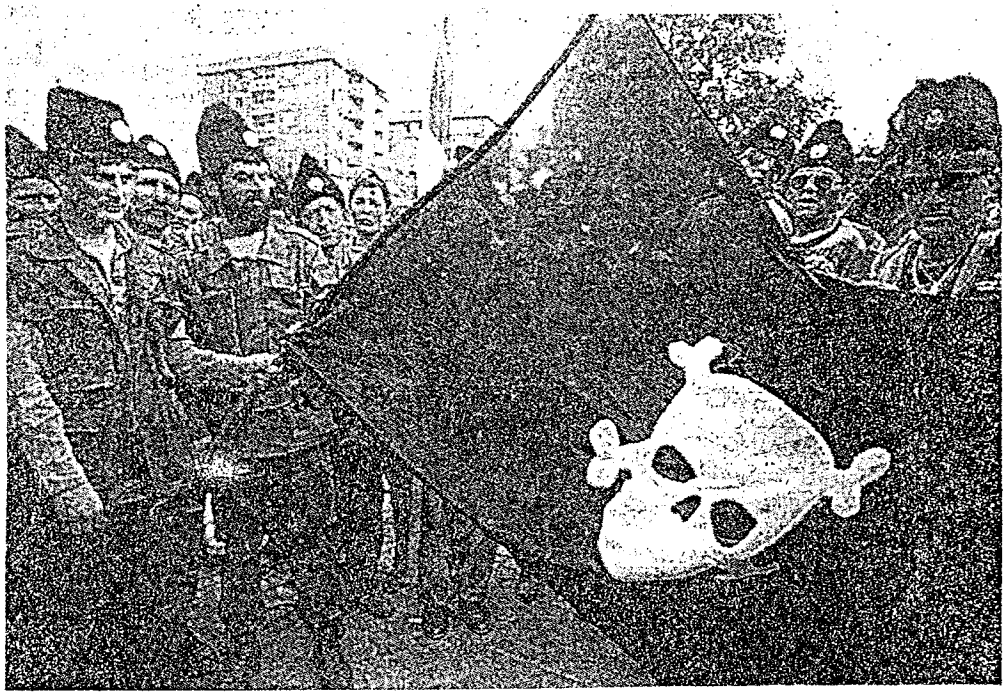
As recent events around Vitez show, all sides remain capable of ethnic cleansing. And all ethnic cleansing must be condemned. But after the fall of Jaice and Prozor the war was transformed into one primarily aimed at the destruction of the Bosnian Muslims as a community.

The fatuous argument that both sides carry out atrocities may comfort priests, petit-bourgeois moralists and sectarians.

For Leninists approaching the national question, the task is to say who is systematically oppressed, who is fighting a justified war of national defence, who is fighting a war for national privileges and aggrandisement?

When the war itself became a war of survival revolutionaries had no option but to side with the Bosnian Muslim forces. We are in favour of their victory against their enemies to stop their further displacement and to recover the areas from which they were driven and had control. Moreover, we support their right to return to all homes and villages from which they have been expelled.

Yet in no circumstances can we support the intervention of western imperialist forces, in the shape of the UN and NATO. When the UN troops went in it did not defend working class communities and only acted to enforce the reactionary plans of the imperialists. That is why we do not support calls emanating from the windbags of Social Democracy for intervention.



FASCIST SERBS IN LOZNICA, ON THE SERBIAN-BOSNIAN BORDER

The imperialists' current dithering over intervention has real material roots. Imperialism has not yet adopted the political goal of smashing Milosevic, for several interrelated reasons.

First, Tudjman has resolved to reconquer every inch of Serb held territory in Croatia. Western intervention would signal the start of this and the imperialists would find themselves in alliance with the fascist HOS militia.

Secondly, an anti-Serb intervention would split NATO and the EC, destabilising the whole region. Greece fears expanding Turkish influence in the Balkans. It has refused to allow Turkish planes to overfly the country to implement the no-fly zone in Bosnia. At the same time a faction of its government is covertly pro-Serb because of the Macedonian question.

Thirdly, Serbia remains a strong military power with its own arms industry which could not be simply bombed and fought into submission like Iraq without enormous overhead military and political costs to the west. An older generation of imperialist politicians recalls that the Serbs (and the Greeks) held down and defeated some of Nazi Germany's best divisions in a bloody guerilla war.

However, the recent display of imperialist indecision faced with these potential costs emboldens the Bosnian Serb leaders—Mladic and Karadjic—and may lead them to press on with their arch-reactionary project of seizing all but the Croat dominated west of Bosnia.

Such a total flouting of the will of the US, the EC and the UNO could force the bickering allies to take some sort of punitive military action in Bosnia, not out of compassion for the victims of genocide but to defend imperialist "law and order" worldwide.

In that situation workers the world over should have no hesitation in denouncing it, campaigning for troop withdrawal and giving critical support to those fighting the imperialist presence.

Given Milosevic's compliance with the Vance-Owen plan any initial intervention would likely be a limited air attack on Serbian Bosnian emplacements.

This would not in and of itself constitute an attack on the Serbian degenerate workers' state but such action should be condemned and any action by the Bosnian Serbs to defend themselves should be supported.

However, such an attack would not in nor of itself change the character of the war in Bosnia and oblige us to renounce our defence of the Muslims.

In the meantime the working class has to face the fact that there are no easy solutions to the conflict. To stop disaster now may be impossible. Revolutionaries have to address this situation by drawing a class line in the conflict, refusing to be drawn into the orgy of national chauvinism, and preparing for the moment when exhaustion with the hate and carnage forces workers to look to a revolutionary alternative, just as they did at the end of the First and Second World Wars.

Immediately we can and must campaign for the lifting of the imperialist blockade on all the warring participants. It is in fact an arms blockade of the Muslims only, since the Muslims have no heavy weapons and cannot make them.

The economic blockade of Serbia, on the other hand, hits the Serbian workers. It closes more factories and increases the ranks of the desperate lumpenproletariat who flood to join the chauvinist militias and the parties such as Vojeslav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party.

Workers should actively seek to mount solidarity with the Muslims fighting to defend themselves, so they are not driven into the arms of US senators and ex-Prime Ministers who call for a lifting of the arms embargo.

We have to campaign vigorously for the right of the refugees to enter the EC and other European states. Workers should announce that all the refugees of this war are welcome!

We say to the hypocritical liberals and Social Democrats; if you want to do something for the Bosnians then call for the opening of the borders to refugees and provide homes, food and clothing for them until they want to go home.

We have to spell out to a whole generation of youth, not only in Eastern Europe but in the west, a fact that is becoming blindingly obvious: the imperialist new world order is a hell without end.

If capitalism is allowed to survive—with its poisonous racism and nationalism, its military machine, its hypocritical politicians—horrors like the Bosnian conflict will proliferate and draw millions into the holocaust. ●

New Zealand: election on the horizon

Leo Brown, in Auckland, reflects on the causes of the present turmoil in the National Party

New Zealand's main political parties are in flux and disarray. The immediate cause of this is the overwhelming victory of Winston Peters in the April bye-election in Tauranga, a typical "middle NZ" constituency in the North Island.

Peters has, for some time, been an outspoken opponent of the leadership within the governing National Party. When the leadership refused to adopt him as the prospective candidate he stood independently, effectively challenging the leadership to dare to stand against him.

It is a significant indicator of Peters' standing that not only the National Party but also both the other significant electoral forces, the Labour Party and the Alliance, declined the opportunity to measure themselves against him. Confronted by nothing more threatening than "McGillicuddy's Serious Party" and, "The Blokes' Liberation Front", Peters gained a huge majority and, thereby, gave notice that he could be expected to play a crucial, but as yet undefined, role in the November General Election, which will be the last under the existing "First Past the Post" electoral system.

Peters' decision to open a gulf between himself and the leaders of the party in which he has been a leading figure for very many years is a symptom of a deep-going crisis within the political system of New Zealand.

This is the inevitable result of dramatic changes in the economic structure of the country in the last decade, as New Zealand capital has tried to adjust to the steady decline in its traditional markets for agricultural produce in Britain after EC entry and to the oil price rises of the mid and late 1970s.

The initial response was state funded energy investments, import controls, a wage and price freeze and strong exchange controls. But this led to a rapid increase in public sector spending, a growing budget deficit and 15% inflation by 1983.

In 1984, in an almost textbook example of the role of such parties in a period of capitalist crisis, the Labour Party used its electoral victory to introduce a series of economic policies designed by the IMF and the OECD. In fact, New Zealand under Labour became the first full scale experiment in the application of the privatisation and deregulation policies that have since been applied on a more piecemeal scale elsewhere.

With the speed dictated by New Zealand's three year electoral cycle, Labour rapidly removed all controls on prices and deregulated transport and banking. In agriculture, the policy of price support, which added up to approximately 50% in 1982, was stripped away completely, whilst regulation of the prices in state monopolies like electricity was ended.

More upward pressure on prices resulted from dismantling the system of import tariffs and fixed exchange rates and a 20% devaluation. As a prelude to privatisation, state assets were, "corporatised" under boards of

directors charged with putting them on a commercial basis.

The almost immediate consequence of all these measures was a dramatic slump in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors of the economy. Overall, the manufacturing sector was to lose a third of its workers by 1988. But, having adopted a more right wing policy than the traditional right wing National Party, Labour managed to win re-election in 1987 and continued to entrench its policies.

This took the form of full scale privatisation, of Telecommunication, the Post Office, the Rural Bank, the Post Office Savings Bank, the national bank, the Petroleum Company and the national airline, Air New Zealand. These constituted some two-thirds of state assets and realised $NZ 10 billion. In addition, income tax was reformed to reduce the amount paid by higher bands and indirect taxation was greatly increased by a system of value added tax.

At the same time, New Zealand was hit hard by the stock market crash of 1987 and this, alongside high interest rates, resulted in a further contraction in the economy as firms were forced to "rationalise", often going over from manufacturing to assembly of imported components. Unemployment rose sharply from 4% in 1987 to 10.5 % in 1992.

The figures would, no doubt, have been a great deal worse, were it not for considerable emigration of the unemployed to Australia. Similarly, greater integration into the Australian economy in this period was a factor in sustaining firms that would otherwise have collapsed completely.

The political effect of Labour's policies was the erosion of its electoral support within the working class. This was not simply a loss of votes or low opinion poll ratings for prominent goverment figures but the much more serious loss of the affiliations of major trade unions to the Labour Party itself. Many electors concluded that even the National Party could not be worse and, in 1990, the National Party was elected.

Political realities soon asserted themselves. Despite their rhetorical appeal to New Zealand's past when, for example, in the 1950s it had the world's eighth highest per capita GDP, rather than the twenty-fourth as in 1990, and their promises to safeguard "middle NZ's" social services and pensions, the National Party rapidly moved to attack precisely these things. More, it moved to attack employment and trade union rights, the one area which Labour had shied away from "reforming".

The Employment Contracts Act effectively removed employers' obligations to negotiate with, or even to recognise, the unions. The results have been a field day for the employers as they have driven through redundancies and productivity increases whilst union leaders have sabotaged all attempts by militants to defend long-established conditions and rights.

In the electoral sphere, Labour's disastrous anti-working class record led to the emergence of a split, the New Labour Party, led by Jim Anderton. In an attempt to buttress its prospects, it took the lead in creating the Alliance which also includes the Liberal Party, the Greens and the Maori party—Manu Motuhake. Despite initially high opinion poll ratings, this rag bag of minor hopefuls now lags well behind both Labour and the National Party.

National's own record, however, has also begun to eat into its traditional electoral support. Attacks on the trade unions were one thing, but the introduction of the "user pays" principle for social and health services, in a country that has had a state funded social security system since the 1880's, was very definitely another.

Similarly, the reorganisation of state schools into trusts, and of hospitals into "Crown health enterprises" strikes hard at the "traditional values" of the "middle class".

These are the policies against which Peters has raised his standard and these are the voters that he is hoping to win. For the moment, however, he lacks a viable electoral machine to translate his supposed 60% electoral support into actual seats in the November elections.

Meanwhile, also as a reaction to government policy, the Labour Party's fortunes appear to have made something of a recovery with a 45% poll rating against National's 33%.

Labour has taken heart from Keating's victory in the recent Australian elections and has unveiled an economic policy which owes much to the ideas of "state management" which Keating counterposed to the radical market reforms of his Conservative opponents.

Having discovered that National can be even worse than Labour, and having been unable to defend themselves through the unions, it would not be surprising if workers were to turn once again to the Labour Party as a possible electoral answer.

The chances of this are increased by the possibility of some union reaffiliations in the months before the elections. Understandable as such a move would be, revolutionaries would have to campaign hard to counter any reliance on Labour.

Whatever changes the party has introduced into its programme would prove to be entirely cosmetic if it were to win in November.

As before, its first priority would be to safeguard capital's interests, probably by seeking closer integration with Australian capital.

Far from this proving to be a "socialist" solution to New Zealand's economic problems, it would rapidly turn out to be a signal for more of the same attacks on social services, welfare spending and employment rights and conditions. ●

Spring wave of militant protest rocks Bolivia

In March teachers, tin miners and peasants mounted mass resistance to the government. Demonstrations, hunger strikes, and repression followed fast upon one another. Sam Lowry reports from Bolivia

Bolivia goes to the polls on 6 June. But before the electoral campaign began, the country was rocked by a militant wave of working class struggles. On 1 March sixteen leaders of the COB (Bolivia's trade union council) began a hunger strike in protest at government plans for yet more cuts in public spending.

Within four days, there were twenty such hunger strikes involving 154 strikers. Nine days later they had been joined by over 600 more at 43 sites.

The strikers sought an end to government privatisation plans in health and education as well as the state mining company (COMIBOL). They hoped to halt further cuts in the already inadequate social security provisions.

They aimed to get uncultivated land owned by the *latifundistas* transferred to indigenous and rural communities. The COB's central demand was for a basic monthly family wage of 1,462 bolivianos ($348) as compared to the present minimum of 300b ($74).

The COB's campaign was by no means unproblematic. For example, it accepted the rights of the latifundistas to hold huge tracts of land despite the 1953 land reform which clearly gave land rights only to those who work the land. Equally, it failed to distinguish between state control of nationalised industries and workers' control and it did not warn against the dangers of planned joint venture projects in the mining industry.

Nevertheless, it provided an important focus for the entire labour and peasant movement and showed the potential to mobilise the working population against the government on a massive scale.

The hunger strike is a classic tactic of the Bolivian class struggle. In 1978, a mass hunger strike started by miners' wives, and involving more than 1,000 people, was the catalyst in bringing down the hated Banzer dictatorship.

The current hunger strike was intended to act as a national focus for the growing discontent in the country, sparked off by the government's "offer" of between 9% and 16% wage rises for teachers, health and other public sector workers.

In Santa Cruz, the Civic Committee issued a call to arms if the regional budget should be cut and workers occupied an important oil installation. There was a regional strike in the Department of La Paz.

Nevertheless, the hunger strike is essentially a defensive and passive tactic. The best and most courageous militants who join the strike become cut off from the rank and file and it is very difficult for the mass of workers to develop longer term tactics and strategies.

They become fearful for the health of their leaders and, thus, the dimensions of the campaign are set by the stamina of the hunger strikers. What was necessary to take the campaign forward was the direct mobilisation of the mass of workers themselves.

At the same time as the COB hunger strike, the miners' union, FSTMB, was preparing its own action against government cuts.

Historically, the tin miners have been the vanguard of the Bolivian working class. Before the collapse of the market in October 1985, there were 27,000 miners in COMIBOL, today there are just 4,350 and, with tin prices still low, the World Bank is demanding still more cuts as the basis for further loans.

The immediate plans of the government of the ex-left nationalist MIR of Paz Zamora involved sacking 836 miners, closing the least efficient pits at San José, Bolivar, Machacamarca and Santa Fé and introducing joint venture schemes at the more economic mines such as Huanuni and Colquiri.

The intention was then to await the results of the 6 June elections before announcing a further package which would cut the workforce to a mere 343 miners.

During the first week of March, miners began arriving in La Paz. They held daily demonstrations with the teachers who were mounting a nationwide campaign against the government's pay offer. Thousands took part in these marches which were violently broken up by the police and army using tear gas.

Support for the demonstrators was widespread because of the impact of government price rises of 8% for petrol and diesel and 4.5% for the bottled gas which is the normal cooking fuel in Bolivia.

Added to this, Paz Zamora signed a deal to export liquid gas to Brazil at a price widely believed to represent a financial loss.

When a landslide ruptured the main internal fuel pipeline, leading to shortages everywhere, disgust turned to anger and spontaneous blockades of major roads by furious housewives

added to the government's problems.

On 8 March, after a series of delegate meetings, the COB called an indefinite general strike to be joined, in stages, by different sectors of workers. On 12 March, the oil workers came out and peasant union leaders announced plans for a nationwide road blockade on the 15th.

Although the oil workers' strike ended after two days and the road blockade was called off, the pressure resulted in a new round of talks between the government and the COB on 18 March. Under pressure from the rank and file, no agreement was reached and the government broke off all negotiations with a final, take it or leave it, offer of 20% for the teachers.

At the same time, it ordered a national crackdown on "public disturbances". This took the form of a national ban on all demonstrations with armed soldiers patrolling the streets of the major cities. A full scale, national "state of siege" was politically impossible because, constitutionally, such a measure has to last at least ninety days and this would have included the election period.

Nonetheless, a regional state of siege was declared in Potosi where the Civic Committee, in contrast to many around the country, had been pursuing its part in the national mobilisation with great vigour. In ensuing street fights with the army, many workers and students were injured, two disappeared, a police station was burned to the ground and one 14 year old student was killed.

Despite the repression, miners and teachers continued their struggle. In many towns, soldiers drove hunger strikers from their pickets with tear gas and around the country leading trade unionists were arrested, some being tortured for information about their comrades.

On 22 March, in defiance of COB instructions, miners and teachers led a militant march from El Alto on the outskirts of La Paz into the city itself. They confronted armed soldiers and police with sling shots and rocks and two police stations were razed after prisoners in them were released.

In the early hours of 23 March, the COB signed a deal with the government. This accepted the 20% for teachers but only 9% for health workers.

Detainees were released, the privatisation of health and education was put on ice and there was a vague agreement to consult over future privatisation plans. In the mining sector, FSTMB's misguided plans for worker management (i.e. worker liability for losses) were to be "considered" and privatisation was formally rejected.

However, this did not rule out joint ventures which would undoubtedly lead to further redundancies. Miners themselves only gained a 12% pay rise, barely keeping place with inflation.

This settlement was clearly a sell-out and was seen as such by the militants. Many hunger strikers, despite being close to coma, opposed the deal but their isolation from the actual arena of struggle left them helpless.

The rank and file of the peasant union, CSUCTB, belatedly called a national congress in order to discipline and replace the treacherous leadership that had called off the national road blockade at the height of the struggle.

Although the teachers and miners left La Paz, the fight continued in some pits for another two weeks until troops occupied them.

A final attempt to secure further strike action in early April was derailed by the leaders of the COB and of the teachers' and miners' unions. This marked the end of the period of mobilisation in which the workers had succeeded in defending and extending their organisations and had secured a number of partial gains on the economic front.

At the same time, it is clear that much more could have been won had the full potential of the mobilisations been realised. Once again, the lions of the Bolivian working class have been led by donkeys.

Poder Obrero (Bolivia) was energetically involved from the start. In the aftermath of the sell-out, Trotskyists in Bolivia must be quick to draw the important lessons of the struggle. Crucial to taking the strike forward would have been the creation of local and regional councils which could have coordinated direct action, forged a national command and seized the initiative from the vacillating national leaderships.

Such councils, composed of militants from all the workers' organisations would pledge to fight uncompromisingly against all privatisations.

Using the tactics of direct mass action—occupations of the pits and factories, the blockade of all major roads, general strikes and the creation of workers' defence forces—workers would have been able to draw in the support of the peasant organisations across the country.

They could have formed the basis for a campaign that went beyond the defensive and immediately economic demands of the COB and called for workers' control of industry and the public sector, full scale land reform and the end to payments on the external debt to the imperialist banks.

In time, such councils could have established themselves as the recognised leadership of the working class. In the short term, however, it was necessary to fight to convene an extraordinary congress of the COB to demand that the existing leaders planned and coordinated the escalation of the action or, if necessary, to replace them altogether.

The end of the mobilisations and their replacement by the electoral circuses of the main parties has only served to highlight the lack of a working class political party in Bolivia.

The election is a contest between reactionary bourgeois blocs. The most important candidates are Hugo Bánzer and Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada.

Bánzer was the ferocious anti-communist dictator between 1971 and 1978. Ironically, he is backed today by those parties that he used to persecute—MIR and the PCML.

Sánchez is the author of the neo-liberal model and head of the MNR. Other important bourgeois candidates

are Max Fernández (UCS), Carlos Palenque (Condepa) and Aranibar (MBL).

Despite all their promises of reforms, new investments, the creation of half a million new jobs, and an end to all privatisation plans, any of these candidates, once elected, would immediately begin to implement the IMF and World Bank's plans which will spell yet more misery and hardship for the workers and peasants of Bolivia.

Last year, a call was made by the congress of the Santa Cruz COB for the creation of a workers' party. This was also endorsed by the COB leader Jesús Yavari.

Present circumstances make clear the burning need for such a party but all the indications are that what the COB leaders have in mind is a Bolivian equivalent of the Brazilian Party of Labour, an electoral machine rather than a weapon for prosecuting the class struggle to a victorious conclusion.

Such a party, which breaks completely with the politics of the bourgeoisie and bases itself on a revolutionary transitional programme, will only be built as a mass organisation within the context of the scale of workers' mobilisations seen in March.

The future will hold many more such battles and the task of Trotskyists now is to convince the best militants of the lessons of the March events so that they can organise now the nucleus of the future revolutionary party. ●

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

The Spring 1993 edition of *Revolutionary History*, Vol 4 No 4, is entitled "Colour and Class; Origins of South African Trotskyism." Articles include: Ian Hunter's "Ralph Lee and pioneer Trotskyists of Johanesburg" and Baruch Hirson's "The Trotskyist Groups in South Africa". This issue also includes a study of the trade union policy of various Trotskyist groups.

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Africa: Popular revolt and national conflicts

José Villa examines the effects on the continent of the failure of post-colonial bourgeois regimes to break with imperialism

In no continent is the bankruptcy of capitalism demonstrated with so starkly as in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa possesses two thirds of the 30 poorest countries in the world. One third of its people receive less than the minimum number of daily calories necessary for medium term survival. Africa has the highest infant mortality rate of all the continents.

The 1980s have been particularly cruel for Africa. Production per capita fell more than 10% over the decade. Africa's share of world trade fell by half from the already meagre figure of 2.4%, smaller now than the smallest European imperialist countries like Switzerland, the Netherlands or Belgium.

This state of affairs is not due to some natural deficiency. The continent's agricultural and mineral resources are enormous. The cause of this seemingly inescapable poverty is the weakness of semi-colonial capitalism, and behind this the effects of imperialist domination. Africa suffers at one and the same time from a lack of capital and from the depredations of capitalism.

Capital came primarily in the wake of the colonial powers and after the imperialist division of the continent. Rather than destroying and replacing earlier modes of production imperialist capital preserved them and combined its own super-exploitation with them.

It led to the withering of certain sectors of production, those which met the needs of the indigenous inhabitants, and the overextension of others that were necessary for the economies of the European metropolis.

The axis of the African economies was the extraction and export of mineral resources and the production of export crops. Leaving aside South Africa, there was little industrialisation. In the 1980s this historic pattern was intensified. In sub-Saharan Africa millions of peasants were pressed by their governments to abandon subsistence production in favour of entering the world commodities market.

The pressure to do this originated with the world economic agencies of imperialism, the World Bank and the IMF. These agencies held enormous power over the African states because they had been ensnared in a staggering level of debt. From 1973 to 1993 this increased approximately twenty times.

Yet the changes to African agriculture brought not food and plenty but famine and ever greater indebtedness. In the 1980s recessions the prices of agricultural exports fell by half whilst interest rates soared. The degenerative effects of large scale export agriculture combined with primitive methods (expansion of cattle grazing, clearing of trees for fuel) exacerbated the drought problems and the expansion of the desert.

Millions of the rural population were driven from the land into the cities, creating huge shanty towns in which

large families live in rural style houses without water, sewers, electricity or made-up roads.

It should not be imagined that there is no wealthy classes in Africa. In fact the continent has the most revolting contrasts between a few rich and the vast army of the poor. Where 90% of the population live in squalor there are mansions whose inhabitants consume the clothes and perfumes of Paris, who have bank accounts in London or Zurich, private jets and private armies to guard their wealth.

In the Ivory Coast the luxurious egomaniac Houphuet-Boigny recently had the Pope consecrate a replica of Saint Peter's cathedral in Rome, larger even than the original.

Since independence the great majority of African states have been ruled for most of the time by one-man dictatorships or military juntas. Around a corrupt military elite is assembled an elite of state bureaucrats with strong mutually beneficial links to the imperialist multinationals.

A few states—Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, Benin, Congo, Mozambique—often not much different as far as the character of their ruling elites were concerned, proclaimed themselves anti-imperialist, even "Marxist-Leninist". They cultivated strong links to the Soviet Union.

These regimes nationalised some foreign companies, carried through agrarian reforms, promoted a black consciousness culture, supporting other anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements. Economically, they created a highly protectionist and state capitalist structure but despite the economic plans and the Marxist-Leninist ideology these were not workers' states.

During the Cold War

Africa was a key point of conflict between the USA and the USSR. The US gave billions of dollars in military aid to anti-communist regimes or to fund anti-communist revolts against states which were regarded as pro-soviet. Each side attempted to utilise and inflame inter-ethnic contradictions within their rivals. Thus Africa became wracked by nationalist wars and guerilla uprisings.

But at the close of the 1980s the situation began to change. With the decline and fall of the Soviet bureaucracy in the Gorbachev years, 1985-1991, the source of military and economic aid dried up.

One after another of Africa's "Marxist" or "socialist" states began to move ever closer to imperialism, throwing overboard all the paraphernalia of Stalinism in favour of a newfound enthusiasm for the market.

This was the pattern in Ethiopia (even before the fall of Mengistu), in Somalia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Angola and Mozambique. This also applied to the "African socialist" and pan-Africanist regimes such as Nyerere's Tanzania or Kaunda's Zambia. and Rawling's Ghana.

Now these states are seeking large scale investments from the multinationals and accepting IMF austerity programmes in order to qualify for assistance in the future. They have been pressured into the usually IMF recipe: massive privatisations, pulling down protective barriers, putting the economies of theses states totally at the mercy of the world market.

In these conditions the imperialists really had no further use for the corrupt military dictatorships they had maintained for so long as a barrier to communism. Indeed, the corruption of these regimes was a drain on the multinationals that had to pay-off a whole stratum of generals and state bureaucrats for their contracts.

The imperialists decided that "cheap government" was "democratic" government. Suddenly, their hypocritical propaganda about "human rights" was switched from Eastern Europe to Africa.

But on its own, imperialist pressure would not have worked. The mighty revolt of the black proletariat of South Africa in the years 1984-6, as well as similar mass democracy movements from Chile to the Phillipines had an impact on students and trade unionists in the African dictatorships.

Last but not least, the popular upheavals in Eastern Europe, which toppled seemingly impregnable dictatorships, encouraged revolt in Africa. Since 1989 in state after African state the one-party regimes or one man dictatorships collapsed or quickly reformed themselves.

This process was not simply one of reform from above or from outside pressure. Often it involved big street demonstrations, barricade fighting and general strikes.

Imperialism could afford to support or encourage this process because multiparty democracy could control the social forces emerging and their was no immediate fear of "communist" intervention, or a genuinely revolutionary socialist leadership developing in the short term. Most of the new democratic parties were pro-market and indeed pro-imperialist.

But with or without democracy the economic prospects for these states are grim indeed. All of them face enormous problems inherited from the failure of both imperialism and the semi-colonial ruling classes to solve the ethnic and national antagonisms that are pulling the state structures apart.

Black Africa is divided into nearly fifty states yet nearly all of them are multi-ethnic in character, consisting of more than one linguistic and even national communities. The borders of these states were created not by these communities or groups of communities in the process of their own development but by the colonial powers demarcating their territory from one another. Yet since the the imperialist powers withdrew their governors and garrisons all attempts to unify the states of the continent have failed.

The dreams of the founders of Pan Africanism have proved unrealisable. This is not simply because the predatory actions of the imperialist powers were determined to maintain the balkanisation and plunder of the continent. It is no less the work of the parasitic ruling class that the colonialists left behind to exercise power for them.

The Organisation of African dis-Unity, the club of imperialist stooges, refuses to see the colonial borders called into question and for good rea-

son. Virtually none of these states has a well-founded national basis.

The unity of the existing post-colonial states has been called increasingly into question. This was due at first to the conflicts between the pro-imperialist states and the pro-soviet or "anti-imperialist" states.

The worst examples were the "civil wars" in Angola and Mozambique, where South Africa armed and supported the former Maoist UNITA and the criminal bands of Renamo. The other region of long and bloody conflict was the Horn of Africa and the north-east of the continent.

In Sudan there has been ten years of bloody civil war between the Christian and animist third of the population in the south and the Islamic and Arabised north. In the last two years a new civil war started between the two different ethno-linguistic groups (the Dinkers and the Nuers) in the south.

In the Horn of Africa there are nearly one hundred linguistic or cultural communities that approach the condition of separate nationalities.

It was an alliance of several of such nationalities that eventually brought about the down fall of the Ethiopian Mengistu regime which was based on the historically dominant nationality within the Ethiopian state, the Amhara. It has been replaced by a coalition of Tigrean former "Marxist-Leninists", now "democratic" and pro-IMF.

Eritrea has just made history not only by winning its independence from Ethiopia in a long and bloody war but in getting the OAU to recognise it. Yet Eritrea is no solidly founded nation either. True, Ethiopian oppression and the struggle against it bound the separate ethnic groups together to a large extent.

Yet Eritrea remains composed of up to nine distinct nationalities or ethnic groups, belonging to different linguistic families and their are two religious cultures, Christian and Muslim. There are peoples like the Afars, divided between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti who have developed strong nationalist movements.

Whether the new state can forge the nation behind it remains to be seen; but the backward semi-colonial condition of capitalism there raises the strong possibility that stable social classes embracing all ethnic groups and at the same time cutting across them will not emerge.

Somalia is the strongest proof of the extreme crisis of nation-state formation in Africa. It is the most ethnically homogeneous state in Africa. There is a great degree of linguistic unity. There are historical and mythological "memories" that bind the Somalis together giving the best subjective basis for a true national state in the entire sub-Saharan region.

Yet Somalia has fallen to pieces, with warlords heading different clan and tribal movements. Why? Basically the political leaders of the Somali state have never been able to transcend their tribal or clan power bases.

Thus the rule of any one of them has tended to degenerate into privileges, power and corruption for his own tribe or clan and exclusion and oppression for others.

Siad Barré came to power in 1969 promising a socialist society and the transcendence of tribalism and clan politics. It was not to be. Barré was unable to develop Somalian capitalism and provide a stable economic basis for the further homogenisation of Somali society.

Instead, Barré leaned upon a part of the population; the southern clans got the privileges and the northerners, especially the Majerteen and the Isaaqs, were subjected to savage oppression. Even when Barré was eventually overthrown the coalition of his enemies rapidly broke apart. The result is today's civil war and the imperialist intervention.

Neither the United Nations nor the USA can solve Africa's problems. They are the cause of both the economic and the political ones. The ambition that some rulers nurture, that each state or even new mini-states can become a new Hong Kong is a total fantasy.

The perspective of creating a whole new series of national states, whilst they might coincide more closely to linguistic groups or tribal communities, would not aid the economic development of the continent.

These mini-states would be even more the pawns of the IMF than before. Besides in a regions marked by large nomadic populations the idea of drawing clear state boundaries around ethnically compact areas is a utopia.

The best and only consistently democratic solution lies in the struggle to unite the continent into a federation. Within such a federation the self-determination of nations and nationalities could be fully realised without violating the rights of minorities or majorities.

But it is a utopia to expect such a federation to be created by the semi-colonial bourgeoisie, or with the good grace of the imperialists who carved up the continent.

Only the proletariat, the only modern and progressive class can provide the leadership to all the exploited and oppressed classes, nationalities in such a struggle. It can do this by the formation of councils of elected and recallable delegates, of workers of peasants of the shanty-town poor as organs of the struggle for power.

Only the victorious proletarian revolution can lift the entire continent out of misery, disease and starvation and offer it a perspective of cooperative production in agriculture, and planned industrial development by the working class and its allies.

This is no utopia. The natural resources are there in abundance, the human resources are there too.

The African proletariat would turn to its class brothers and sisters in the imperialist countries and in the other semi-colonies for help in their struggle with the multinationals, the banks and the imperialist war machine.

To fight for such a perspective—the perspective of permanent revolution—Trotskyist parties are needed throughout the continent as part of a new revolutionary communist international. ●

China: "socialism" with capitalist characteristics

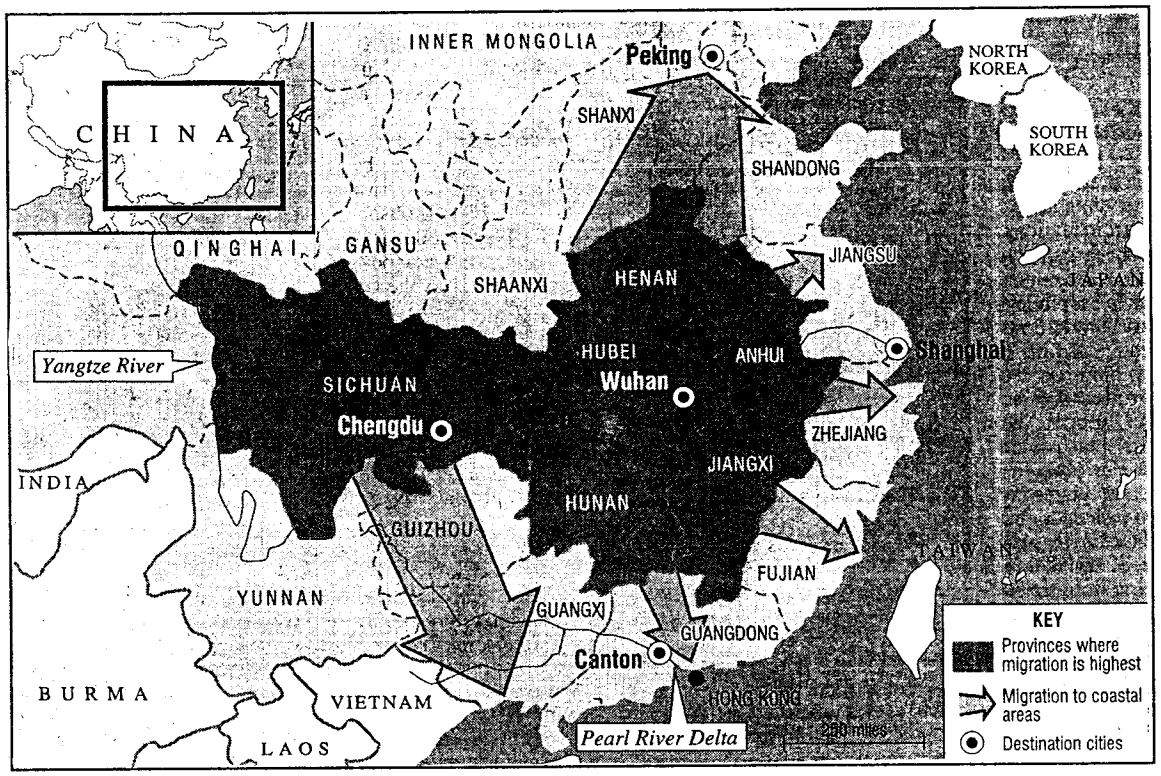
On present trends China could be the biggest economy in the world by the year 2010. But will it be capitalist? Peter Main explores the contradictory dynamic of the present phase

China's first big step towards the restoration of capitalism began fifteen years ago with Deng Xiaoping's privatisation of agriculture. In 1989 the Tiananmen crisis led to a temporary slowing down of this process. But from August 1991 the influence of the more conservative bureaucrats around Li Peng began to wane and, after Deng's visit to Canton in early 1992, the tempo of restoration picked up once again.

Many western commentators now see the "Chinese road to capitalism", with its combination of political authoritarianism and economic free-wheeling, as a far superior model to the celebrated "Big Bang" of Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, the fundamental problems associated with breaking up the bureaucratically planned economy in China are not so very different from those already seen elsewhere. The most obvious of these is the problem of how to subject the heavy industrial core of that economy to market forces without plunging the country into economic and, therefore, political crisis.

This problem has created deep factional divisions within the ruling bureaucracy. The old bureaucratic conservative faction centred in the repressive apparatus regained some influence in the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen. Predictably enough, this faction is the least dynamic and independent and, having gained a 15% increase in the budget for the armed forces, has been content to take a back seat in the last year. Within the bureaucracy the "market socialist" tendency, whose official slogans are "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "two systems; one country", is predominant. Their aim, like Gorbachev before them, is to utilise massive concessions to market forces and even to allow large scale capital penetration of China to revitilise the moribund planned economy and thus preserve the rule of the bureaucratic caste.

But within this faction tensions and differences have developed. One trend, identified with Li Peng, seeks to maintain overall control by a system of state trusts. It tends to see *state* capitalism as the predominant form that should be allowed to operate. The more powerful trend around the "paramount leader" Deng, is enthusiastic about encouraging foreign capital from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and the USA



via joint ventures and an expansion of the Special Economic Zones. These groupings are not necessarily hermetically sealed off one from another but they do express, in however distorted a form, the pressure of the major social forces within China.

It is developments within the Chinese economy which form the essential background to the manoeuvres of the different factions, and which reveal the prospects for the restoration process in the medium term. When Premier Li Peng opened the National People's Congress on 15 March, he said that China's growth rate in the coming year would be approximately 8%. Despite the fact that this is at least 4% less than the average growth rate of recent years, western commentators immediately concluded that the most pro-market wing of the Chinese bureaucracy, led by Deng Xiaoping, had consolidated its hold on power.

They were probably right. A year ago, Li Peng only grudgingly accepted the possibility of a 5% growth and reality has clearly proved him wrong. The political significance of this argument over the figures lay in the fact that Deng's forecast was based on the prospects for the province of Guangdong in which both foreign and domestic capital had been given the freest rein. Li's attempt to establish a less rapid growth rate reflected his concern to retain a greater degree of central control over economic development as a whole. That he now has to accept a much higher figure for the coming year suggests that the faction favouring giving market forces their head have become even more dominant over the last year.[1]

The strength of Deng's faction reflects the confidence of different elements of a proto-bourgeoisie whose existence and growth sets China apart from the other degenerate workers' states. In Eastern Europe, for example, the lack of a reliable stratum of domestic entrepreneurs and managers has not only held back internal capitalist development but also deterred foreign capital from commiting major investments. The greater progress made by the restorationists within the Chinese bureaucracy flows from their greater success in stimulating the growth of a domestic capitalist class and in opening China to overseas capital, predominantly overseas Chinese, capital.

Part of this development is the growth of rural capitalism (see box). Although rural enterprises have notched up important gains recently, there cannot be any doubt that the main contributors to the growth of China's national economy as measured for example in GNP and the value of exports, have been the Special Economic Zones (SEZ's). There are now reckoned to be more than 8,000 of these across China and what this indicates is that the term is now being used by virtually every important city or township authority to describe any concessionary tax-break deal with which capital is being enticed into making some degree of investment. The really important ones are centred in Guangdong and Fujian provinces which, respectively, neighbour Hong Kong and Taiwan.

It is here that the difference between China and Eastern Europe is most obvious. By the 1980's, Chinese capital in both Taiwan and Hong Kong had already left behind its origins in low wage sweat shops and even its more high tech production was beginning to relocate to other parts of South East Asia. Hong Kong, in particular, needed to find a new role more suited to the structure of its capital. The opening of Guangdong to investment from Hong Kong was, therefore, as much a saviour for its capitalists as it was a road to

Class differentiation in the countryside

Productivity in agriculture had stagnated since the mid 1960's as state control imposed arbitrary and often inappropriate decisions on the communes created in the 1950s.

Freed from bureaucratic diktat with the restoration of private agriculture in 1978, Chinese peasants rapidly reintroduced mixed farming and, limited only by the need to deliver fixed quotas of some crops—primarily grain—to the state, took quick advantage of the many gaps and shortages in the urban and industrial economy to grow those crops which produced the highest return.

The results were impressive; "grain output grew by a third in six years, cotton almost trebled, oil-bearing crops more than doubled, fruit production went up by half. Real incomes, per capita, in the countryside grew even more spectacularly, three-fold in eight years."[1]

Of course, this rise in incomes has not been uniform within the rural population. A considerable degree of social differentiation has taken place. At one end of the scale, a class of rural capitalist entrepreneurs has come into existence and these have begun to branch out, investing in small scale industrial production, albeit often disguised as co-operatives or joint ventures with "foreign" capital from Hong Kong. In other words, through a process of initial capital accumulation from agriculture, a rural bourgeoisie is emerging.

The clearest expression of this is the growth of the "Township and Village Enterprises" (TVE's) which have absorbed 100 million peasants during the 1980s. This category includes the former collective property of the communes (many of which operated sizeable industrial installations ranging from food processing to coal mining) as well as cooperative ventures run by village communities. The TVE's achieved a staggering 22% growth in 1991 and then 36% in the first quarter of 1992.[2] They now account for 32% of coal production, 25% of cement, 42% of paper, 36 % of all nylon and 80% of all clothing produced in China. Although not privately owned, these are, essentially, capitalist formations which operate in a market economy. They have expanded operations to the world market where they sold $11 billion worth of goods in 1991 and accounted for 15% of China's total exports.

Such an explosive rate of growth suggests that the TVE's must be approaching a stage where they will have to pass beyond the framework of community ownership within which they have developed so far, into fully fledged private capital.

Already there are reports of conflicts between party cadres at local level and figures such as clan leaders whose social role was never entirely eradicated by Maoism. Up to the present, whether they were making their money by plugging the gaps left by bureaucratic planning, by pilfering state-owned goods or by illegal trade and currency dealing, the methods by which the TVE's have accumulated capital generally pre-supposed the existence of the state sector.

There must come a time, and it has probably been reached, when the most efficient of them find it necessary to centralise and concentrate capital. This will bring the nascent capitalist class up against the existing property relations and their legal framework which do not make provision for their needs;

"Resorting to court adjudication, however, is no guarantee of justice, nor have demands from Beijing that cadres treat contracts as binding alleviated the problem.

Cadres operating within the fluid boundaries of the political and legal systems have routinely overridden or ignored contract provisions in order to confiscate land, businesses or other assets. Courts simply refuse to hear some cases on the grounds that there is no law on which to base a ruling".[3] Capital in China comes up against this barrier as an insufferable limitation on its development.

At the other end of the social scale, peasant net income per person is around $135 a year. This is about half the level of the urban worker. Having been the pride and joy of the Chinese bureaucrats in the first half of the 1980s peasant agriculture is now heading for a serious crisis. The growth figures have tailed off. Output grew only 3% in 1992 and the official China Daily commented recently, that grain production is likley to fall in the next years due to "shrinking able land and deflated enthusiasm among farmers." Most investment funds have been channeled into industry and agriculture has suffered. The land cannot support the 900 million farmers and their families any longer.

The "household registration system", which legally inhibited the rural unemployed from moving to the cities to find work has been relaxed. Officially, 15 million peasants have moved to the cities in the last five years, the start of one of the greatest population transfers from country to town in history.

Official statistics now suggest that of 400 million rural labourers 160 million are surplus to requirments.[4] This is the pool of cheap labour whose exploitation has already allowed capital to accumulate in the countryside and which is increasingly being used as sweated labour in the Special Economic Zones. Those that cannot be absorbed will drift to Beijing and other cities without prospect of job or home, reserve army of labour in the making.

NOTES

1. Quoted in *The Economist*, 28 November, 1992.
2. Figures from T R Gottschang, *Current History*, September 1992.
3. T. White, "Reforming the Countryside" in *Current History*, ibid, p275.
4. *Financial Times*, 10 May 1993, p14

economic regeneration on the mainland. What the bourgeois analysts refer to as the "servicing sector"—banking, insurance, financing, marketing and so on—together with massively expanded infrastructural and cargo-handling facilities, have, for the moment, maintained the social stability and effectively ensured the allegiance of the Hong Kong bourgeoisie.

Between 1978 and 1990, Guangdong's GDP grew by an average of 12.4% p.a., the fastest anywhere in the world over such a period. Last year it rose by 19%. Since 1978, its foreign trade has grown by 22% and the province has received 40% of all the foreign capital actually invested in China. The greater part of Guangdong's, and 60% of China's greatly increased foreign trade, goes via Hong Kong and this explains the continued vitality of the colony despite the fact that much of its productive capacity has now been transferred to the mainland.[2]

Within the coastal provinces, and especially within the SEZ's, capitalist investment and production have been growing at a frenetic rate. In 1992, agreements were reached for $58 billion of investment. The trade surplus with the USA reached $18 billion in the same year. The rapid increase in economic activity is straining the infrastructure, especially rail transport and power generation, to their limits and oil production is stagnating at 140 million tonnes per year despite demand increasing at 7% per year. Contracts worth $500 million were reported in April for two power stations but many foreign contractors are still wary of such long term deals which could be at the mercy of government instability or fluctuating exchange rates.

Fears such as these were given substance by the experience of the French whose firms had been hoping for a big slice of the $1 billion worth of contracts for the construction of the Guangzhou (Canton) underground railway but found themselves barred from even tendering for the work in retaliation for sales of French Mirage jets to Taiwan. Thus, whilst firms like Alcatel, Ericsson and Siemens are jockeying for position to grab the Chinese market for modern telecommunications, reckoned to be worth up to $75 billion, much of the investment actually made in the last two years has been in real estate and, while this fuels economic activity, it also stokes up inflationary pressures.

The continued centrality of statified property can immediately be seen by comparing the 105,000 state owned firms with the 18 million Township and Village Enterprises (TVE's). The state firms employ 106 million workers, 70% of the urban, and 18% of the total, workforce, whilst the TVE's employ 96 million rural workers, 25% of the rural workforce. Because of their greater use of machinery, state firms, which account for 65% of all fixed assets, are far more productive than the TVE's and, "produced 55% of the gross value of industrial output, accounted for over 80% of total transportation volume (railways and large shipping firms are state owned) and contributed more than 60% of state revenues"[3] in 1990.

Workers: suffering and resisting

The rapid development of capitalism within the workers' state has had a drastic impact upon the workers. In the rural interior the TVE's, operating at a primitive level of technological development, are already notorious for their disregard of the health and safety of their workers.

In 1991, there were 10,000 deaths in the quarrying industry, 70% of these were within the TVE sector.[1] Life has always been very tough and dangerous in China's rural industries, but the more the TVE's take on an unambiguously capitalist character, and the more the stratification of society becomes apparent, the more this will undermine the stability of the rural sector which will have important ramifications for the national political arena.

In the SEZs the situation confronting the workers is, if anything, worse. Hong Kong capital now employs over 3 million workers in Guangdong in conditions which recall the most primitive period of capitalist development in early nineteenth century Britain.

The most widely reported example concerns a textile plant in Shipai which employed 135 women workers, working an average 15 hour day with one day off per month. In their barracks-like accommodation, directly above the factory, there were two bathrooms for the entire workforce.

At night this dormitory was locked and barred. On 30 May 1990, the entire building, including the dormitory, went up in flames. Only fifty people survived the fire, most with serious injuries sustained when they jumped from the fourth floor dormitory which had no fire escape and remained locked. Nor is this an isolated case, according to the Guangdong government's own statistics, there were 1700 factory fires in 1990, 26 of these were characterised as "disasters" which, "cost hundreds of lives."[2]

Not surprisingly, none of the factions of the Chinese bureaucracy allows the workers the slightest form of self-orgainsation in which to fight back against this kind of super-exploitation. But tensions exist within the the official trade union confederation (ACFTU) as can be seen in the latter's willingness to produce figures for unemployment which challenge the government's statistics, suggests that it is finding it necessary to distance itself from the state.

Working from official figures, the "pro-democracy" and pro-restorationist "Workers' Autonomous Federation of China" has calculated that there have been 1,400 strikes in the last two years alone. Beyond that, it is known that trade unions were effective in raising wages in the Shen Zhen SEZ, near Hong Kong, to the extent that

The figures are complicated by the subsidies that are paid to keep open loss-making state firms. Estimates vary between one third and two-thirds of all state firms as loss-makers. As in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the principal mechanism for these subsidies appears to be "soft loans" from the state banks which still hold 85% of all financial assets. Inasmuch as these subsidies take the form of workers' wages or maintenance of cheap prices for raw materials etc, they actually contribute, in part, to the accumulation of the private sector. Such systematic printing of money that is not matched by increased output must add to inflationary pressures.

Despite its great weight within the economy, however, the state sector has decreased steadily since 1978 and less and less of it is directly controlled by central planning directives. Even in 1978 China had a much less centralised planning system than the European degenerate workers' states, (leaving aside Yugoslavia). The State Planning Commission had repeated difficulties in framing or enforcing more than annual plans. Longer term plans were often disrupted by the nearly decennial factional struggles within the bureaucracy which frequently burst into open social struggles.

Effective planning often took place at the level of the industrial ministries and regional governments with local party bosses controlling local economies. The economic reforms have cut away or greatly reduced the central levels of planning. In its survey of China, *The Economist* revealed that 700 kinds of producer goods were directly allocated by planning in 1978. That number has now fallen to 20.[4] Similarly, in September 1992, state price controls were removed from 571 types of produce, leaving only 89 still controlled where, two years before, there had been 737.[5]

The decline in central allocation results from a very large measure of decentralisation of economic policy and regulation from Beijing to the provinces. This response to the inefficiency of bureaucratic planning was also seen in the other degenerate workers' states and, as has been argued in these pages before, does not of itself alter the class character of the property relations involved. The economy continues to function on the basis of the proportions established in the earlier period. What must eventually happen, however, is that the greater initiative devolved to the provinces will lead to the disintegration of the established lines of supply and, therefore, disrupt those proportions. This is particularly true in China where provincial authorities are increasingly accommodating their production to the market forces originating in the TVE's and the SEZ's. Consequently, while the State Planning Commission can still be a prime mover within the economy, as with its planned $11 billion Three Gorges Dam on the Yangzi River, or its supervision of the Pudong Development Area near Shanghai, these will not necessarily be undertaken as integral components of an overall planned economy. They could, as well, become state capitalist trusts or joint ventures with foreign capital.

Elsewhere in the state sector, important reforms aimed

employers began transfering production further along the Pearl River Delta to Zhu Hai. In early April a strike of 3,000 workers at the Canon plant in Zhu Hai broke out over a demand for protection of wages against inflation. This was joined by a similar number in two shoe factories. This is the biggest union dispute yet seen in Guangdong SEZ. The official daily paper, Renmin Ribao, acknowledged the strike but insisted that "in the present historic period, their sacred duty is to ensure that the enterprise reforms and the turn to the market are successful."

All this tends to suggest that the alienation of the working class, which organised general strikes in many cities throughout China in the aftermath of Tiananmen, has not been assuaged by repression or continued job security. However, it is most unlikely that more than local independent organisation has yet been achieved.

Worse, as in Eastern Europe and in Russia the results of Stalinist repression have strengthened illusions that capitalism and the market are the only foundation for trade union and general democratic liberties.

Other factors as well as the enforced atomisation of the bureaucracy divide China's proletariat. It has to be remembered that the working class, although huge, 106 million in the urban state sector alone, is also divided between town and country and between state, cooperative, joint venture and foreign owned enterprises.

Large numbers of workers, especially in the SEZ sector, are recent arrivals from the countryside. The heavy industrial state sector is located in north-east and inland central China, far from three new centres of semi-private industrialisation.

In all probability their fights will appear to be spontaneous, elemental and confused but that has always been the case with working classes either emerging from decades of repression or just coming into existence; in China both conditions apply.

As in Eastern Europe the crucial questions will be those of organisation and leadership. Will the movement of China's workers and their natural allies the rural poor fall into the hands of agents of the imperialist and Chinese bourgeoisie? If it does then mass unemployment and economic breakdown face them. But the restoration process generates the need to defend elementary past gains as well as to make new ones. In those coming fights, the most advanced elements can and must be won to a working class programme independent of all wings of the bureaucracy and of the different fractions of capital.

By uniting with the rural poor the proletariat can create a social force which will be able to defend the territorial integrity of China, which can develop its vast potential in their own interests.

Under their own democratic planning they can open up the road to real socialism; they can even rekindle the flames of social revolution for the oppressed and exploited of all Asia. ●

NOTES

1 Quoted in "Chinese Workers", Newsletter of the Workers' Autonomous Federation of China, April 1993

2 ibid



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at similar rationalisations and reductions in state spending have been initiated. The subsidising of the price of grain and edible oils, which reportedly took 11% of the state budget in 1990, is being phased out. This is not as dramatic as it might appear because increased production has lowered market prices recently anyway and these items are no longer as large a part of the urban population's diet as they were when the system was introduced in the 1950s. Of greater long term impact will be the decision to implement the Bankruptcy Laws and to end job security (the so-called "iron rice bowl" which guaranteed workers' jobs and pensions). Officially, unemployment is said to be around 3% but the state run trade union federation has suggested 20 million which is more like 18%. Even this figure is regarded as low by commentators because it ignores all those made redundant via "early retirement".

In the industrial sphere prices of coal and oil are being raised nearer to market prices, a first step towards bringing all of China in line with the free market in these goods which operates already in Guangdong. According to figures reported in The Economist (28.11.92) the subsidy for coal and oil currently accounts for some 40% of financial losses in the entire state sector. Finally, in what looks likely to be the first of many such moves, one million state bureaucrats in Beijing alone are due to be made redundant this year, reflecting the declining role of the state in the overall economy.

We should take note also of the crystalisation of a state capitalist sector out of the planned sector's industrial and commcercial associations. This includes institutions, such as the Bank of Communications, which have been floated off from the central bank and are supposed to be run on strictly commercial lines. Whilst this means that the bank is not obliged to make "policy" loans to ailing state enterprises it also cannot rely on central funds if it makes losses itself. Within its sphere, the bank has been successful, opening branches in Hong Kong and New York and, in 1992, its profits rose by 40% on the previous year. However, this is not the stuff of which a turn round in the economic fortunes of the Chinese state sector is going to be made. In order to make its money the bank concentrates on very short term loans, almost all of them for less than a year, and on foreign currency dealings. On this basis it cannot be seen as a source of the longer term loan capital required for large scale industrial investment.

At the other end of the scale is the China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC). This is a conglomerate which has close connections to the party leadership and is also intermeshed with Hong Kong companies in a series of joint ventures. One of these, Citic HK, is controlled by Wang Jun who happens also to be in charge of Polytechnologies, a leading Beijing arms dealer. Coincidentally, he is also the son of Wang Zhen, China's Deputy State President. It has been through Citic and its related companies, that China has been investing overseas, in Australia, Latin America and the USA, primarily to secure access to raw materials. The corporation is also seen as a conduit for investment funds on a huge scale, for example, $3.5 billion in the next decade, into Pudong, the new development area near Shanghai. Pudong is the native city of Rong Yiren, head of Citic and, prior to the Cultural Revolution, a big wheel in the Shanghai party leadership.

In addition to its investment operations CITIC has also to take responsibility for a number of loss-making state firms. Out of its profits it has to finance the retention of "surplus" employees and state regulated low prices. The expectation has to be that, in time, it will begin to rationalise these "assets", either transforming them into genuine state capitalist trusts or preparing them for some form of privatisation.

More than a hundred years ago, a senior Mandarin advised the Imperial Court that the strategy of the western barbarians for taking control of China could be likened to the peeling of an onion. First they had annexed the tributary states of the empire, Korea, Vietnam, Burma etc, then they had established the Treaty Ports along the coasts, next they had demanded, and gained, extra-territoriality in their "spheres of influence" and soon they would begin to demand access to the interior provinces.

It is not difficult to see the parallel with the present strategy for the restoration of capitalism within China. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao have acted as the bridgeheads for capital penetration of the coastal provinces and both Chinese and foreign capitalists are now eager to link up to the domestic capitalist class developing in the interior.

But the obstacles in their way are both political and economic. Capital in China is, as yet, a very disparate set of forces. Township and village capital, as we have seen, is still at a very low level of development and benefits largely from the inadequacies of the state sector, from corruption and the exploitation of sweated labour. In effect, its immediate future prospects are tied up with the continued disintegration of central controls which allow it to make the most of its often crude and lawless ways.

The top bureaucrats and the provincial government and party cadres who are running, and often profiting, from the influx of foreign capital into the SEZ's equally have no love for any restoration of central controls or too close a supervision of their sweat shops. But, impressive as their growth rates

are, a great deal of their production is destined for export so that, although their production is included within the Chinese GDP, they are, to a large extent, insulated from the internal economic system. Consequently, the chances of them thrusting aside the main elements of the internal industrial sector by economic means alone are slim indeed.

Meanwhile, the really big capitalist operators, be they Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan, or "foreigners" from further afield, are increasingly demanding that the Beijing government commit itself to the "Rule of Law" and the eradication of "unfair competition", both of which would seriously undermine the position of the less well-developed capitalists within China.

Similarly, the major imperialist powers are talking openly in terms of retaliation against China's ever growing trade surpluses. The European Community has imposed restrictions on 200 product lines from China and, internationally, China faces more than 200 "dumping" charges. Although China hoped to re-enter GATT this year, the USA is blocking this because China has an $18 billion trade surplus at the same time as maintaining a 42.5% import tariff on 6,000 products.

Matters are made worse, from the foreign capitalists' point of view, by the consequences of decentralisation within China. Whilst welcoming the break up of the statified economy, they do not like the arbitrary controls introduced by provincial authorities in order to protect their fledgling capitalist enterprises.

In addition to this, Western investors are angered by the steady devaluation of the official exchange rate of the Chinese currency (Renminbi, but usually known by the traditional name, Yuan) from 1.7 to the $US in 1978 to nearly 6 at the present time.

This has the effect of further stimulating exports, reducing imports and diminishing repatriated profits for those firms which already have production facilities within China, especially those who are allowed to sell into the Chinese domestic markets.

These contradictory interests[6] among the capitalists limit the potential for the development of a coherent political leadership able to wrest control of the economy, and the state, from the existing authorities, at least on the national scale. At the same time, the possibility of major political advances at a provincial level, above all in Guangdong, cannot be so easily discounted.

Taken separately from the rest of China, the economy of this region might already be said to be dominated by the law of value and a serious economic and political crisis could precipitate a qualitative decline in its links to the national economy.

Nor can such a crisis be ruled out. Quite apart from the destabilising effects of the eventual death of Deng, whose bonapartist role has become more and more important to resolving the crisis within the bureaucracy, the most likely trigger would be a return of the inflationary pressures which preceeded the Democracy Movement uprising of 1989. According to Baring Securities, a Hong Kong stockbroker, consumer inflation in the cities is already running at 20%. [7]

Many factors are fuelling such a development and preparing for future social explosions. Government deregulation of food prices and a decline of 1.5%, or 1 million hectares, in land devoted to grain productionwill feed through, in time, into further increases in the cost of living in the cities.

Just as the plans of the old imperialists to penetrate China did not proceed smoothly so also it is highly unlikely that the capitalist elements within China will simply be able to push aside the remnants of the planned economy.

The working class remains a big obstacle, far greater than when China was ruled by the Imperial Court. The same Mandarin remarked that those who peeled onions were likely to end up in tears. ●

NOTES

1 Recent reports state that Li Peng is suffering from ill-health and has been temporarily replaced by Zhu Rongji a close protegé of Deng, closely involved with the development of the special economic Zones (SEZs).

2 In the last ten years, manufacturing employment in Hong Kong has declined from 900,000 to 600,000. Figures from, Zeng Ming, "The Plight of Workers in Hong Kong and South China", in *WAFC Newsletter*, April 1993

3 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 January 1993

4 These figures underestimate the specific weight of statified property in the Chinese economy because much of their pricing is held below market rates. For example, coal is priced at approximately one-third of the price on the open market. In addition, power generation and transport both operate as a subsidy to the non-state sector.

5 TR Gottschang, (Current History, September 1992, p.271) estimates the scale of the subsidy required as 13% of state spending, according to *The Economist* it is 14%.

6 A further illustration of this clash of interests can be seen in the different demands on Chinese wages in the SEZs coming from Hong Kong and US capitalists. The latter demand that they are raised in order to make it more difficult foar Chinese exports to compete with US goods; but Hong Kong capital resists this since they employ most of the workers in the SEZs.

7 *The Economist*, 23 January 1993, p61 . We have already mentioned the consequences of the large scale subsidising of inefficient industries which goes a long way to explaining the 40% increase in circulating currency in the last year and the effects of the investment boom in the SEZ's.

Irish republicanism at an impasse

It is twenty five years since the civil rights revolt gave birth to the modern IRA. Here, Matt Docherty assesses republicanism's strategy for a united Ireland today in the light of the recent historic changes in world politics

Unlike many radical nationalist forces around the world, the Irish Republican Movement[1] has been neither demoralised nor disoriented by the collapse of the "socialist" countries or the junking of Stalinist ideology.[2]

The main reformulation of tactics and ideology has been due to the increasingly negative balance sheet of a 25 year long struggle within Ireland and Britain. The revolt of the oppressed minority against the British-guaranteed oppressor state in Northern Ireland is ever more isolated. But in rationalising this state of affairs and in posing new solutions to it, there is evidence that the retreat and even capitulation of petit-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist movements in other parts of the world haseffected Irish republicanism.[3]

Only in the 1960s did Stalinism establish an influence in the openly organised party of the movement, Sinn Féin. Attempts by Stalinists in the mid 1930s to draw worker members of the IRA into a left-wing block were repudiated by the conspiratorial leaders of the IRA who consistently asserted their anti-communism right up to the end of the 1950s.

For three decades this "Republican Movement" was little more than a tiny illegal armed conspiracy engaging in sporadic guerrilla actions with no mass support. Although they could occasionally win localised electoral support in the South, refusal to take up seats was a sacred principle.

During the 1960s the IRA re-created Sinn Féin as a small but open campaigning political party among sections of radicalised youth in both parts of the country. They responded to the new conditions of secularisation and international investment in Ireland by abandoning their explicitly Catholic nationalist, anti-communist baggage. They adopted a left-wing posture against imperialist capitalism. The small Stalinist Communist Party of Ireland hoped to guide the new republican movement into a popular alliance for democracy and civil rights north and south, embracing electoral politics.

In 1968-69 an explosion of popular nationalist revolt among the half-million Catholics trapped in the north split the Republican Movement. For the first time in 50 years republicans were faced with popular nationalist support for armed action against the sectarian state which systematically oppressed them.[4]

The republicans split into "Official" and "Provisional" wings early in 1970. The Provisionals split was ostensibly over an IRA decision to end the 50-year-old boycott of the Southern parliament but it was the conflict over how to respond to the nationalist revolt which really mattered. It was this split which was to keep the republican movement of today out of Stalinist control.

The Provisional IRA in 1969-72 grew rapidly in conditions of mass demonstrations against the Loyalist state[4] which had interned hundreds of republican and socialist campaigners. They developed as a defence militia in local nationalist communities which they in part protected from Protestant loyalist gangs and uniformed state thugs.

The discredited Official IRA ceased all military action and attacked the Provisional IRA as anti-democratic, religious-sectarian and 'fascist'. Developing as an electoralist Stalinist party, they expelled the remaining anti-imperialist elements in their own ranks who wanted to combine class struggle with continued anti-imperialist struggle in the north. Eventually they built a small base of support among white-collar trade unionists and became "The Workers Party'.

They became notorious for supporting state repression against their former republican comrades. It was left to them not Sinn Féin to declare the Stalinist states to be bastions of socialism.

This bitter and occasionally bloody split was a major setback for Stalinist ideology within the present republican movement. Since then the republican movement has established a relative independence of Stalinism.

Nor did the republicans' military wing suffer by the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, for these were never a significant supplier of weapons or funds. A major source of funds has always been nationalist sympathisers among emigré Irish communities in the USA. IRA volunteers were never schooled in Moscow like those of the FMLN.



As for arms, in the mid 1980s Libya alone supplied at least two ships full—much more than IRA guerrilla units had the capacity to use. Subsequent police seizures of sophisticated automatic weapons had little effect on the IRA campaign because its major activity has been to cause havoc by planting bombs and to attack police stations with its own "mortars' rather than engage in raids or gun-attacks, like those of guerrilla movements in Latin America.

For all of its 150 years republicanism in Ireland has been a petit-bourgeois party rooted among the Catholic masses. Apart from the period of the armed popular front of 1919-21 this current (Fenianism, IRB and finally IRA/ Sinn Féin) has always been hated and vilified by reformist bourgeois Catholic nationalism.

Petit-bourgeois republicanism has therefore always claimed to champion "the men of no property" as against the propertied nationalist ruling class. The republican programme has never been for socialism but rather strived for an idealised self-sufficient Irish society of citizens relating to each other as small property-holders. It would mitigate class antagonisms rather than pursue the struggle of classes to their final abolition. It is a programme little different from that of a hundred radical nationalist movements across the globe in this century.[5]

But despite this petit-bourgeois programme the provisional movement's reliance after the 1971 split upon the largely working class nationalist ghettoes in the North obliged them to create a new "socialist" rhetoric.

This was forced on them by the sharp increase in unemployment and social misery arising out of the 1974 recession. By 1978 the new generation of northern republican activists were turning Sinn Féin leftwards, taking over its national weekly and displacing the traditionalist leadership based in the South.

The new current eventually installed Gerry Adams as a "left-wing" leader of the movement. In 1979 in a significant turn for Sinn Féin, Adams declared:

"The task that we, as republicans, have set ourselves, and the ills affecting our people and our country are too complex to be satisfied merely by a British withdrawal or by the establishment of a 32-county neo-colonial Free State. We are not, and never have been, merely a "Brits Out" movement . . . We stand opposed to all forms and all manifestations of imperialism and capitalism. We stand for an Ireland free, united, socialist and Gaelic ... Our movement needs constructive and thoughtful self-criticism. . . . It needs to be done now because to date our most glaring weakness lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build an alternative to so-called constitutional politics' .[6]

British and Irish bourgeois propaganda seized upon such left-wing rhetoric in order to associate the IRA with communism. They hoped to undermine support for the IRA among their right-wing Irish-American sympathisers. Adams countered truthfully: "There is no Marxist influence within Sinn Féin. It simply isn't a Marxist organisation. I know of no one in Sinn Féin who is a Marxist or who would be influenced by Marxism" [7]

Adams and the Sinn Féin lefts were adamant that there could be no struggle for "socialism" until first they had won "national liberation". This outlook dictated their attitude to nationalist revolutionary victories in Nicaragua (1979) and Zimbabwe (1981) which were hailed uncritically by Sinn Féin. There was no recognition that the continued extremes of social inequality among the workers and poor peasants in those countries necessitated a continuation of the social and class struggle and to challenge the capitalist basis of their societies.[8]

Despite having its only concentrated bases of support among the most oppressed urban nationalist communities in Northern Ireland, it has remained both politically and socially petit-bourgeois in character and leadership.

Self-consciously working class organisations have never adhered to Sinn Féin. Even the weight of the urban bases of support in the north is counter-balanced in Sinn Féin by its rural and urban petit-bourgeois support scattered throughout the country and among emigrants in the US. For

Sinn Féin versus IRA?

Many actions of the IRA in recent years have outraged the working class and masses throughout Ireland and Britain by killing random passers-by and, occasionally, deliberately killing Protestant civilians. Sinn Féin leaders openly criticised some of the most damaging IRA actions. Endless speculation about a potential split in the movement, however, has come to nothing. Events seem to confirm that the IRA and its "physical-force" strategy remain decisive within the republican movement as a whole.

Sinn Féin remains an open, legal and formally democratic party selling about 30,000 copies of its weekly paper. Though censored in the broadcast media, and denied municipal halls for its meetings, its conferences are open to the press. The deep reluctance of the ruling class to suppress this party reflects the reality that it is not simply a front for the IRA but a political current with a limited mass base in the North and a minority current throughout Ireland. It has a political life of its own on many fronts, but is tied to the IRA by defining its political essence in terms of the "strategy" of the physical-force struggle. For Sinn Féin to reject the IRA would be to dissolve itself completely.

The SDLP and leading churchmen at present seeking to exploit the republicans' own rhetoric about peace have no way of knowing whether now, or ever, the IRA can be persuaded, through Sinn Féin, that a ceasfire will eventually be rewarded with a place at the "negotiating table".

The IRA remains firmly set on inflicting the maximum possible physical damage on the British state until such time as Britain declares its intention to end its sovereignty. Only if their passive support in the most oppressed ghettoes is undermined will the IRA "suspend" their campaign. The legacy of 25 years of brutal conflict, however, suggest that such a development is extremely unlikely.

As well as the many killed and wounded in the conflict, countless nationalists have been "convicted" and jailed, or even remanded for years pending trials which never took place. Juries are abolished. Legal procedures are routinely perverted to exonerate uniformed thugs while putting away republican suspects with no real evidence for long prison terms. Two prisoners are now in their 21st year in prison—longer than 'life' sentences for other 'criminals' in the British system. There are 600 IRA members in prison at present, mostly on long sentences. They represent several generations of youth who have been drawn into the struggle since 1968.

Surveillance and harassment is the constant lot of nationalists, with frequent police and army raids on homes, wrecking them and dragging away "suspects" for interrogation. Mobilised uniformed forces currently amount to 19,100 military and 12,900 police—one army or RUC member for every four nationalist males of active age, and expected to increase. The pretence of the British Army that it came to enforce peace between nationalists and loyalists in 1969 was discredited within a year. But loyalist terrorist attacks have never ceased and are a significant reason for continued support for the IRA.

Among the most oppressed sections of nationalists, hostility to the Northern state and British Army is more entrenched and bitter than ever. Commumity divisions are deeper than ever.

In such conditions almost no action that the IRA might take could be so self-defeating as to finally undermine this core of support. ●

all these reasons conscious Stalinists made few gains within the new "left turn" of Sinn Féin.

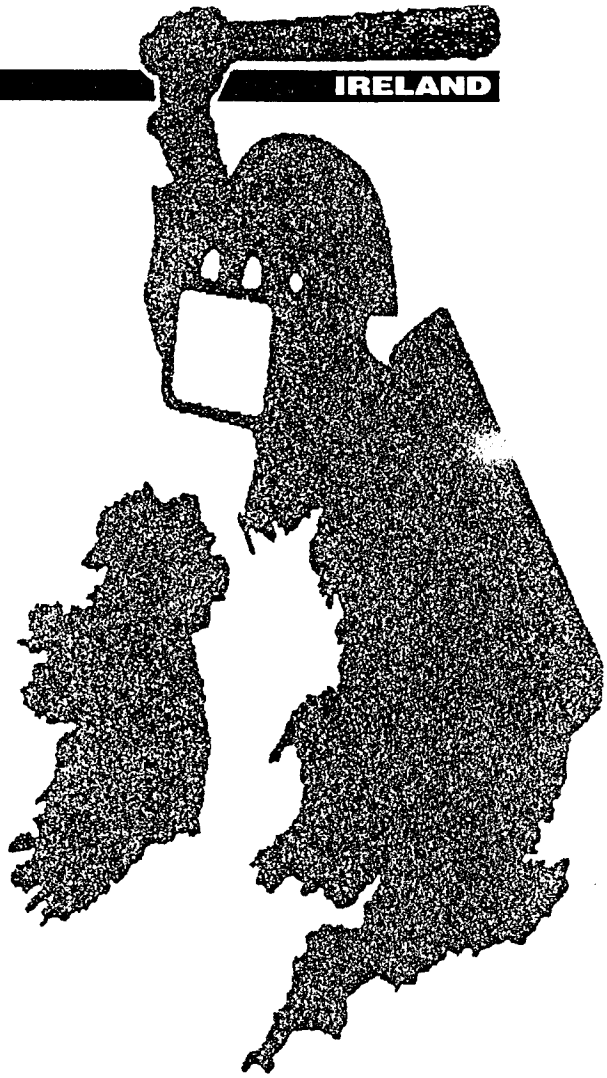
The gun and the bomb remain the fundamental defining point of Irish republican "strategy" which thus allows a considerable eclecticism in its social and political positions. All its assessments of other guerrilla struggles and nationalist insurrections around the world are principally concerned to emphasise that self-sacrifice in armed struggle is ultimately victorious, that victory belongs to those who are prepared to suffer the most.

Gradually, however, "victory" in the armed struggle has come to be re-defined not as forcing Britain to leave Ireland but . . . winning a place at the negotiating table! Negotiations are seen as a "victory" for armed struggle not only in Ireland but in El Salvador and South Africa.[9] After the killing in South Africa of Chris Hani and with the ANC still utterly opposed to organising democratic defence militias, Sinn Féin stridently supported the ANC's strategy of collaboration, now that the "victory" of negotiations had been won:

"Like Mandela and the other ANC leaders, [Hani] recognised the need for the combination of political agitation and armed struggle to force the Pretoria government to the negotiating table. Like all great revolutionary leaders, he recognised the value of military action but was not afraid to suspend the tactic of armed struggle to accept the new challenge presented by inclusive talks . . . Irish politicians . . . who this week called for the continuation of these talks, are hypocrites. It is these same politicians who have contributed to the continuation of the war in Ireland and the terrible suffering on all sides which this entails by refusing to agree to all-inclusive talks." [10]

For all its "revolutionary" intransigence and commitment to the "physical force" struggle, Sinn Féin and the IRA have no perspective whatever of smashing the oppressor-state of imperialist capitalism in the north of Ireland.

The minimum revolutionary democratic demands which any mass struggle must impose as pre-conditions for ending national oppression in the Six County state are the withdrawal of British forces and the disarming and disbanding of the sectarian police (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and army reserve (Royal Irish Regiment[11]). Sinn Féin, however, does



not raise these demands as preconditions for a solution, and certainly not as a focus for any kind of mass struggle. Their "strategy" is to extract from Britain a "declaration of intent to withdraw" and to win admission into all-party negotiations on future political arrangements.

Towards this end they now engage in a propagandistic "peace" offensive. Their 1992 Conference ratified the leadership's manifesto Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland which sets out in the most moderate terms all the well-rehearsed bourgeois arguments for "an Irish national democracy":

"Sinn Féin believes that such a scenario is achievable based on the following;

1) the recognition by the British government that the Irish people have the right to national self-determination.

2) That the British government change its current policy to one of ending participation and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish people.

3) That the future of the unionists lies in this context and that the British government has a responsibility to influence unionist attitudes.

4) The London and Dublin governments should consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of ending partition.

These four propositions, if enacted by the British and Irish governments, would secure for the peace process the maximum national, international, political and popular support."[12]

Failing acceptance of this by Britain, Sinn Féin calls on the "other nationalist parties", Fianna Fáil in the South the SDLP[13] in the North, to "forcefully and continuously represent the interests of the nationalist people", including appeals to the EC, the CSCE and the UN.

Even if Sinn Féin were admitted into political talks, what prospect is there of Britain ever "putting on the table" the question of Irish Unity? Is it conceivable that Britain might repudiate its guarantee to the Protestant Unionist population of continued British rule?

In the late seventeenth century it was the Protestant industrialists of the North East region who championed the fight for Irish freedom from Britain's stifling commercial restrictions. Britain and the Irish landlords combined to drown in blood the United Irishmen's bourgeois revolution in 1798 and force Ireland fully into the United Kingdom.

A century later industry had declined throughout the South where famine, landlordism and anti-Catholic discrimination gave rise to two new nationalist movements—the constitutional Catholic nationalists fighting in the UK parliament for Irish Home Rule, and the "physical-force" Fenians, precursors of the IRA. Only in the North East did industry not decline, rather it thrived as a supplier to the British Empire's shipping and military needs.

As the north-east developed industrially in the 19th century, the mushrooming urban proletariat was ghettoised along religious lines. The quasi-masonic Orange Order[14] united northern Irish Protestants across all classes in an alliance with a semi-racist attitude to the Catholic Irish. Pogroms against Catholic working class areas were a regular part of Orange triumphalism.

"Unionism" as the hegemonic political party developed within this reactionary class alliance of Protestants, determined to defend the Union with Britain against any concession to Home Rule for the nationalists.

The Home Rule Bill of 1912 was the signal for the Unionists to mobilise and arm the whole Protestant population in readiness to resist Irish independence. With the outbreak of war, Home Rule was shelved and the Unionists were promised a division of the island to allow for continued British sovereignty.

Historically the British nation-state, in its formation, failed to integrate the Irish people in either the South or the North-East, as it had done successfully with the Welsh and the Scots. Thus Irish Protestants in the North-East were given a separate Northern Ireland parliament in 1921 even though they had never demanded it nor argued for any form of "self-determination". They defined their identity as British, or more specifically as the Irish people within the Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

Despite this attempt to claim the same position as the Scots and the Welsh, they remained completely outside of British political and social life. So, for example, the mainland Labour, Conservative or Liberal parties never organised in Northern Ireland. Although it was formally only one of four national regions under London's rule, it was the only one with a parliament of its own. It was allowed to impose a permanent state of emergency, to mobilise an exclusively Protestant uniformed militia, and to apply draconian repressive legislation and formal discrimination against Catholics without any scrutiny by London.

Despite this failure of integration, some sections of the British ruling class (not least the aristocracy and monarchy) are still influenced by the historical connections with the north of Ireland. This burden of history, of course, weighs ever more lightly on the British state today but still gives force to Unionst demands on the British ruling class to maintain sovereignty over their Irish enclave.

Economically and strategically, however, it has been evident to the British ruling class at least since the 1960s that they had no interest in maintaining sovereignty over any part of Ireland. Indeed, Britain approved the opening-up of relations between North and South which was attempted in 1965 and which encouraged both the Civil Rights movement and the plebeian loyalist reaction which sparked the present prolonged conflict.

The present British Secretary for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, aroused loyalist indignation in April 1993 when he told the Hamburg newspaper Die Zeit:

"Many people believe that we would not want to release Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. To be entirely honest we would, with pleasure! — no, not with pleasure. I take that back. But we would not stand in the way of Northern Ireland, if that would be the will of the majority. . . The province costs us £3 billion per year. Three billion pounds for one-and-a-half million people! None of our strategic or economic interests are at stake there. But as long as the majority wishes to remain in the United Kingdom, we will pay £3 billion without complaining".

The public expenditure programme in Northern Ireland is £7.5 billion. Less than half of this comes from taxes levied in the province. In 1990 the subvention from Britain was at least £2bn. It may currently be £3bn as Mayhew states, though it is likely to be more. In fact Northern Ireland costs Britain far more. The "security" costs of the conflict amount to another £3bn annually, covering RUC, RIR, Army, political prisoners and compensation for damage.[15]

"Northern Ireland was financially unviable from the start. It was unable to pay the Imperial Contribution fixed by the British at partition. This was supposed to cover Northern Ireland's share of UK-wide expenditure on defence and maintaining a diplomatic service.

The severity of the unemployment crisis in the 1920s and early 1930s, coupled with the costs of criminal injuries and policing in the aftermath of partition, led to the waiving of the contribution and an acceptance that Northern Ireland could not pay its way. This was further institutionalised in the Social Services Agreement Act of 1949 under which Britain guaranteed to underwrite the costs of the British welfare state in Northern Ireland."[16]

Mayhew can scarcely conceal Britain's impatience with the Unionists. But he will be long dead and buried before the Unionists of Northern Ireland willingly consent to Irish unity! Another 20 years of the present political violence will be costly to the British state—though it has distinct advantages for the honing of Britain's repressive apparatus.

But it would be a small cost indeed compared to the political consequences of simply abandoning the Unionists—even with years of advance notice by Britain of its "intent to withdraw".

The only progressive basis on which Britain might unilaterally leave Ireland would require the disarming and disbanding of the local regiment and police. Otherwise bloody civil war would erupt within a heartland of imperialism, with no guarantee that it would not lead to the breakup of bourgeois order entirely within all of Ireland. Such a "neutralising" of armed loyalist reaction in Ireland, however, is a pipe-dream.

An alternative "solution" from above is actively discussed among constitutional nationalists. It is to work towards European sovereignty over Northern Ireland within the as yet unformed European Union. Such a perspective knits well with the general reactionary current within Europe for a "Europe of the regions". John Hume of the SDLP, himself a leading political figure within EC institutions, has often argued for such a solution. Though rejected by Unionists it is not as unpalatable as all-Ireland institutions. It is conceivable that by promising to remove British sovereignty as such, a European offer to implement such an arrangement might be sufficient to persuade Irish republicanism to suspend its armed campaign.

This swapping of sovereignty, if it were practicable, offers no more guarantee of dissolving the inequalities and sectarian character of the Northern Ireland state than any other solution from above. Its practical implementation would require some kind of federation within Ireland. This would leave intact much of the sectarian Protestant character of the northern state and the confessional Catholic character of the southern one—exactly as has been suggested by Fianna Fáil.

Decisive in the long-term for any such alternative must be the fate of European capitalism. Northern Ireland has suffered an industrial decline worse than any other region of the UK, leaving more than half its citizens dependent on UK social security or other forms of direct government aid. Unemployment is officially (i.e. at least) 14%. Average standards of living are among the lowest in the UK. And all of these indicators are far worse for the Catholic masses than for Protestants.

For example, unemployment is proportionately twice as high among the former. Without a major economic uplift, requiring massive inward investment, the material foundations for sectarianism and national oppression will continue to be reinforced.

Nationalism retains considerable force in the politics of the Republic, still drawing on historic traditions of struggle, but sustained also by the awareness of Irish society as "underdeveloped" and haemorrhaging through emigration and the draining of surplus value. Certainly the "aspiration for Irish unity" is almost universally shared in the South, but only at high points of the struggle in the North has it led to mass protest or attempts at solidarity in the South, as in 1969[17], 1972 and 1981.

Apart from rural areas along the border with Northern Ireland the Southern masses have experienced nothing of the social oppression of Northern Catholics on the basis of

their nationality. For fifty years, the southern bourgeoisie showed no more concern for the denial of the civil rights of Northern Catholics than their counterparts in London.

Fianna Fáil, always the largest bourgeois party with between 40% and 55% of the popular vote, has monopolised the limited force of southern nationalism and consistently neutralised any progressive potential in it for resistance to imperialism. The Republican Movement has helped it do this by preferring to appeal for "pan-nationalist unity" rather than struggle against the semi-colonial bourgeoisie.

But what of recent economic developments in the North and South? Have they given rise to a greater or lesser integration between the two halves of a divided island? In short, does the southern Irish bourgeoisie have an objective interest in a united Irleland to enlarge the sphere of its exploitation?

In economic terms, both states are faced with growing marginalisation within Europe. Once the Channel Tunnel is in operation, Ireland as a whole will be the only member country not connected by road or rail to the markets of the European Union. This is a growing disadvantage for exporters from Ireland and a disincentive to inward manufacturing investment. Most industrial exports from Ireland today are based on foreign capital attracted by the combination of EEC membership and relatively low costs. All that is under threat in the expanded and more integrated European Union.

The southern bourgeoisie likes to remind the Unionists that by remaining part of the UK the North is denied

Sinn Féin and the Ballot Box

The historical experience of Irish republicanism hardened its fundamental distrust of "politics". They believed that taking seats in constitutional bodies would quickly undermine the "real" struggle—with arms in hand. Their belief was well founded. As a radical petit-bourgeois movement they have never had a conception of class-struggle politics nor any social programme that fundamentally challenged bourgeois society.

Quite rightly, they could not trust themselves to consistently struggle against imperialism and the semi-colonial bourgeoisie in councils and parliaments. Hence they split fundamentally over this issue in 1926 (IRA versus Fianna Fáil) and again in 1970 (Provisionals versus Officials).

When Sinn Féin "moved left" after 1979 the new leaders around Gerry Adams openly argued that the IRA struggle could not be victorious on its own. Engagement in popular campaigns and economic struggles was proclaimed to be essential for the republican movement to win the mass support necessary to make victory possible. Without the slightest conception of an action programme of class struggle, however, this "left" orientation bore no fruit whatever for Sinn Féin. Electoralism was in practice what "winning mass support" came down to.

Under Adams' leadership the shallow reformist "socialism" of the late 1970s gave way to vigorous electoralism in the 1980s. The republican victory was now to be achieved "with an Armalite in one hand and a ballot-box in the other".

The turn to electoral politics as a necessary supplement to armed struggle evolved during the 1979-81 H-Block Campaign. Sinn Féin had often contested elections in the past but never taken their seats in parliaments or local councils. Hunger-striking prisoners contested general elections in Britain and the Republic from their prison cells. Bobby Sands was elected as a Westminster MP in April 1981 (until his death in May) and two more were elected to the Dáil in Dublin in June. Westminster hit back with the Sands Bill which made it impossible for a "convict" in future to stand for election. In the local council elections in the North in the same period Sinn Féin called for a boycott, only to see most of its own supporters vote for the SDLP.

Sinn Féin capitalised on the H-Block mobilisations and decided to take its seats in local councils in future. It adopted a vigorous electoral policy and in June 1985 won 40% of the nationalist vote in the North in local elections, a major propaganda victory for a movement dismissed as criminals and terrorists by the ruling class in both islands. Since then its elected councillors have certainly been tribunes of the the oppressed nationalists, suffering constant abuse and many of them assassinated by loyalist death squads—but in no sense socialist councillors.

The watershed for Sinn Féin's electoralism was when the party decided to end its abstentionism towards the parliament of the Republic, in November 1986, exactly a year after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and obviously under pressure of the new ruling class strategy. Abstentionism was the issue which had split the republican movement in 1970. This time the IRA was agreed on the "strategy" of combining "the armalite and the ballot-box", so the only fall-out was a minor breakaway of traditionalists from the political wing[1].

What was different in 1986 was that the republican movement was at a temporary peak of support among northern nationalists, in the wake of the H-Block struggles. And at the same time the guerrilla campaign had been sustained unbroken for 16 years. The IRA was confident that a turn to "political" struggle would supplement, not undermine, the armed struggle.

Since then, however, in none of four general elections in the Republic has Sinn Féin come remotely near winning a single seat. Indeed, their electoral support throughout the South has remained about 2%, over a period when the Irish Labour Party increased its vote from 10% to 25%.

In 1983 Gerry Adams was elected a Westminster MP but did not take his seat. This propaganda gain for Sinn Féin might have been far more significant had he attempted to use the House of Commons as a platform. Sinn Féin still applies its moralistic abstentionism to the London parliament, but Adams lost his seat to the SDLP in the 1992 General Election when Protestant loyalists mobilised to tactically to vote for the SDLP candidate to unseat Sinn Féin. ●

[1] Ruairi O Brádaigh's marginal Republican Sinn Féin.

access to the relatively huge European funds earmarked for the less developed countries. Thus the Republic is about to receive £8bn of European funds over five years, equal to a 4% increase in annual GNP.

Economic and political co-operation across the island is seen as an important factor in offsetting increased marginalisation of both economies. This strengthens the argument for a European solution to the partition of Ireland. The creation of a single "island economy" for Ireland within Europe has recently been advocated by a leading banker. It focuses on unifying the banking and capital investment sectors north and south to offset the migration of capital due to the dominance of London over the two separate capital markets within Ireland. It envisages the development of an "economic corridor" along the east coast linking the two capital cities. Of course, this would be at the further expense of severe regional inequality within Ireland, but for Irish capitalism as a whole it is an attractive possibility.[18]

Beyond perspectives for economic co-operation, however, the ruling class of the Republic has no compelling economic interest in Irish unity. It is far more concerned with the most thoroughgoing European unity as the only basis for its own continued rule.[19]

Like the British, the Republic's principal concern with Northern Ireland is the negative impact of the conflict on the economy, discouraging tourism and investment in Ireland and adding almost 1% of GNP to the annual security bill in the South. For 35 years the southern ruling class has modernised the Irish economy on the basis of attracting foreign capital and integrating into the EC.

Although this has produced a small number of indigenous monopolies which now export capital, and a strong indigenous commercial agriculture, the predominance of foreign capital and finance guarantees that the economy remains overall semi-colonial. The majority of indigenous capitalists have no perspective of developing in competition with international capital but survive increasingly through linkages with it.[20]

The ground for Irish unity is not being prepared by economic developments in Ireland as a whole. The Irish bourgeoisie has no economic or political interest in leading such a struggle. Nevertheless, this has not deterred Sinn Féin from placing the "pan-nationalist front" at the centre of their political strategy at least since 1979 and the mass campaign for political status for Republican H-Block. Gerry Adams turned that campaign into a humanitarian plea to the Catholic clergy, the SDLP and Fianna Fáil to save the lives of the prisoners when they went on hunger strike.

When Bobby Sands died on hunger strike in May 1981, the campaign leaders refused to call for working class action but told the mass demonstrations that they were "giving Fianna Fáil and the Catholic Church one more chance" to intervene to save the lives of the other hunger strikers. The prisoners were left to die, one after another, and the campaign went down to terrible defeat.

Still preferring the reactionary dream of "all nationalists together" over the fight for working class action, Sinn Féin repeated the same method in the fight against extradition of republicans caught in the South for alleged actions in the North and Britain. Far from winning any new friends among "constitutional" nationalists, however, the IRA gave an excuse to Fianna Fáil to support the Extradition Bill, which up till then Fianna Fáil had been obstructing, when they massacred Protestant civilians in the bombing of Enniskillen in November 1987.

Undeterred, Adams continued to argue that Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin nationalists have a historic common interest, that the 1926 split of Sinn Féin into constitutional Fianna Fáil and revolutionary IRA was tragic and unnecessary. They were "separated brethren", to repeat his ecclesiastical metaphor.

Coming at a moment when Fianna Fáil was inflicting savage austerity measures on the poor, the sick and the aged, such cant from a self-styled "socialist republican" leader did nothing to win support for Sinn Féin among the masses. Nor did it elicit an iota of response from the "separated brethren". On the contrary, it has served simply to make Sinn Féin itself increasingly vulnerable to ruling class diplomacy.

The SDLP's John Hume is now determined to exploit this fact, hoping to inveigle Sinn Féin into calling for an IRA ceasefire. John Hume, has broken ranks with all the establishment parties in both islands and engaged in talks with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams. Hume claims he is treating seriously the Sinn Féin propaganda for "peace". He hopes to create diplomatic conditions for them to eventually call a ceasefire.

Hume tried a similar tactic of public debate with Adams—without any result—in 1988 before the Unionists agreed to the recent round of talks. This time his manoeuvre has provoked much deeper outrage among the Unionists. For, the two leaders went so far as to issue a joint statement on 24 April, insisting that there could be no solution merely on the basis of internal arrangements in Northern Ireland.

In other words, new all-Ireland institutions in some form would have to be accepted by the Unionists. Especially, shocking to the governments in Dublin and London was Hume's agreement to what is usually regarded as a utopian republican principle:

"We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to self-determination".

On the other hand, they declared:

"As leaders of our respective parties, we have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge. We both recognise that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accomodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation."

At one level, Hume's tactic may have been geared to win his party more nationalist support in the May 1993 local council elections througout the province. But it has a deeper significance. This bourgeois nationalist leader has supported state repression of republicans for 25 years.

By letting it be seen that he is talking with Sinn Féin, he is subtly reminding Britain, Dublin and the Unionists of the alternative possibility of a "pan-nationalist front" of radical and constitutional nationalists. Hume himself has no intention of creating any such alliance with republicans; his purpose is to put pressure on the two governments to stick with the strategy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But Sinn Féin will foster the illusion that this latest pan-national alliance actually leads to meaningful negotiations with Sinn Féin, British withdrawal and a united Ireland.

The pleading, rationalist posture by Sinn Féin towards the Irish and British ruling classes invites ridicule. In practice, however, it is an argument made not with words but IRA bombs.

The political tragedy is thus twofold. First, terrible sacrifices are being exacted for an empty set of utopian shibboleths which could only conceivably be granted by the ruling classes in a reactionary form from above. Plainly, Sinn Féin is arguing not for the "socialist republic" which it mouths to its followers, but for an unrealisable bourgeois united Ireland, to be agreed by the ruling classes, as the key to "peace with justice".

Secondly, the mass of the Irish working class, especially the Protestant working class, and even Sinn Féin's own limited mass support, are systematically alienated and divided or at best rendered totally passive by the guerrilla campaign.

All socialists and class conscious workers recognise that the IRA are a product of a justified anti-imperialist resistance to an army of occupation; in any conflict with this army workers must desire the victory of the IRA. Likewise, their prisoners and activists must be defended unconditionally against the actions of the security forces. Our criticisms levelled here have nothing in common with the reactionary at-

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

In 1985 British Prime Minister Thatcher signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the Dublin government, guaranteeing to consult the Southern nationalist regime at regular conferences about the internal affairs of Northern Ireland.

The aim was to pressure northern nationalists and Unionists to agree some form of local power sharing. Why?

The British ruling class is far from making any concession to Irish national self-determination. But it does aim to restore stable rule in Northern Ireland. To this end it needs to create formal equal rights for both "communities" or "traditions" within its six Irish counties. Between 1973 and 1984 Britain created no less than three elected assemblies in Belfast, each with the mission to produce a form of power-sharing between the bourgeois-nationalist SDLP and the major Unionist parties. Within months, each attempt was shipwrecked on the rocks of Unionist (or more exactly plebeian Loyalist) intransigence.

That is why Thatcher was prepared to antagonise the Unionist leaders by setting up a permanent consultation with the Dublin Government in November 1985. This strengthened the bargaining position of the SDLP in future negotiations. Strengthening the position of the SDLP and promoting the interests of the Catholic middle class was also seen as a pre-condition for defeating the IRA. The Unionist parties would be denied any regional organ of government until such time as they made concessions.

It took five years for this manoeuvre to produce talks among the parties in Northern Ireland. An elaborate diplomatic formula for talks was worked out. There were to be separate discussions on three fronts, concerned with arrangements between the two governments, arrangements within Northern Ireland, and arrangements within Ireland as a whole. The latter, the "all-Ireland dimension" has always been fundamental to the SDLP and anathema to the Unionists even though it has never been intended as anything more than North-South consultation and practical co-operation (directed mostly against the IRA).

For republicans the decisive feature of the 1991-92 talks was that Sinn Féin was excluded! Throughout the period of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, therefore, the republican movement has, on the one hand, focussed its propaganda on the demand to be included in the negotiations, and on the other hand, stepped up its guerrilla campaign in the North and in Britain.

Talks were postponed during the 1992 UK General Election campaign. Attempts to revive them seem to have definitely failed by spring 1993 with the refusal of the Unionist parties to co-operate. The Unionists have turned the tables on Irish bourgeois nationalism in one respect by insisting that first, the Irish Republic must get rid of its claim to sovereignty over the Six Counties, from its 1937 Constitution. The Southern bourgeois parties, after all, have for 20 years insisted that Irish unity can be brought about only by consent of the Unionists. Why not, then, show "goodwill" by removing the formal legal claim to sovereignty over the North embodied in Articles Two and Three of the Constitution!

Within the nationalist Fianna Fáil party, in government in the South since 1987, such a demand is resented by "grass-roots" sections as a capitulation to the historic enemy of Irish national self-determination. Fianna Fáil may have no choice, however, but to alter the Republic's claim over the North, probably reducing it to a statement of "aspiration for peaceful unification by consent". For, it now depends on coalition with the Labour Party to stay in government. Labour leaders have explicitly committed themselves to compromise with the Unionists.

Sinn Féin is likely to benefit by any move to dissolve the 1937 territorial claim. Even among Northern nationalists who revile Sinn Féin, such a move is seen as fundamentally undermining their hope for Irish unity as the only guarantee against continued oppression within the Loyalist state. ●

tacks of the British establishment. We make them in the belief that the republican movement is squandering the spirit of resistance and have led the anti-unionist masses into a cul-de-sac.

It is impossible to predict whether the movement can possibly be persuaded into a ceasfire. It is difficult to imagine what the ruling classes can offer nationalists that would decisively break the core support among the most oppressed for the IRA. Equally, the IRA is unlikely to change its tactics now after rejecting for 20 years all the evidence of how counterproctive its armed campaign has been.

They simply do not share any notion of the self-organisation of the masses as the key to struggle against oppression. They blindly believe, what cannot be absolutely ruled out, that Britain may be forced to take a major initiative by an escalating campaign of bombing and disruption. It may be to bring down upon their own communities savage new attacks by the state forces, such as mass internment of activists. They may believe that, as in 1971, the reaction to internment will be to draw new sections of sympathisers into active support, but that is far less likely to be the case today.

It is certain, however, that any political solution of the Irish question which Britain might be forced to initiate by a further escalation of the bombing campaign, and which might be agreed with Irish constitutional nationalists, will not be a progressive one in terms of wiping out the sectarian divisions and inequalities that confound working class politics in Northern Ireland and bedevil the struggle for socialism in the island as a whole.

Outside a perspective of social revolution in Ireland as a whole a thoroughgoing solution of the unfinished national struggle is impossible. For the moment, however, Irish republicanism stands as a major obstacle to the fight for such a programme. ●

NOTES

1 Comprises the open party Sinn Féin and the secret guerrilla elite, IRA, the Irish Republican Army.
2 The general collapse of the Stalinist regimes provoked no official statements by Sinn Féin, or even editorials in its press. The fundamental issues raised are relegated to the letter columns of the weekly *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. (AP/RN)
3 It could be argued, therefore, that the collapse of Stalinism has had a indirect effect on Sinn Féin in that this collapse has deeply effected nationalist-guerrillaist movements in Central America (e.g. FMLN and FSLN) and the ANC in South Africa.
4 The British Army, arriving at the end of 1969, cleared away the remaining nationalist barricades by July 1972. British Army murders of 14 Catholics on Bloody Sunday on a peaceful demonstration in January 1972 raised a storm which forced London to dissolve the Northern parliament and to rule directly from March of that year.
5 Sinn Féin formulated it in *Eire Nua* (New Ireland) during its most consciously 'right-wing' period after the 1970 split and has overturned no essential element of this programme at any time since its 'left turn'!
6 AP/RN, 23 June 1979, cited in K Kelly, *The Longest War* , London, 1988, p303
7 ibid p304
8 Although this "stage-ist" conception of the relationship between the national and socialist struggle sounds as though it is taken from the arsenal of Stalinism, it in fact predates it. Sinn Féin take their socialist credentials from the ambiguous legacy of the indigenous Irish nationalist hero and revolutionary socialist James Connolly. Connolly's mistaken *identification* of national liberation with *socialism* was an exception which he believed to be specific to Irish conditions. It was never the kind of conscious class-collaboration advocated by Stalin to achieve a 'stage' of 'national freedom' which would postpone the fight for working class objectives to a later period. See "Connolly: A Marxist Analysis", A Johnston et al, Irish Workers Group, Dublin, 1990.
9 AP/RN 7 May 1992, p8.
10 AP/RN 22 April, 1992 p6. In the same light the IRA increasingly talks of the need for "disengagement" rather than British troops out.
11 Renamed for the second time. Previously the UDR, Ulster Defence Regiment.
12 "Towards A Lasting Peace", Sinn Féin, February 1992, p13.
13 Social Democratic and Labour Party, in fact a constitutional nationalist party with no base at all among Labour but which adopted this name to incorporate independent nationalist Labour figures in 1970.
14 In a twisted way it claimed to represent the tradition of William of Orange who liberated the North East from catholic King James in 1690.
15 How Britain spends its £3bn in the North. Mike Tomlinson (Queen's University of Belfast) in the *Irish Times*, 1 May 1993.
16 ibid.
17 It could be said that 1969 was the year when we witnessed the last anti-imperialist actions of the marginalised sectors of Fianna Fail *bourgeoisie*. But the few MPS responsible for overt help in providing funds for arms for the Catholics in the North were quickly purged. Anti-imperialist action has been the exclusive preserve of petit-bourgeois nationalists since and the working class.
18 George Quigley, chairman of Ulster Bank. Discussed in AP/RN 26/3/93.
19 Sinn Féin, instinctively fearful of European integration undermining its whole basis, opposes it with crass, utopian, nationalist arguments: "The impetus for the EC integration process is a hangover from the outdated politics of the Cold War. It is irrelevant and unsuited to the Europe of today. Is it not ironic that as centralised superstates are collapsing in eastern Europe through their own contradictions and bureaucracy, there is an unseemly rush to create just such a failed, multinational structure in western Europe?
The push for EC political and monetary union is not emanating from the people of Europe and it is not in their interests. It is seen rather to be in the interests of transnational capital for which the existence of sovereign independent states, especially small ones like Ireland, is a nuisance. Like Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the SDLP suffers from this inferiority complex and lack of faith in the Irish people's ability to manage their own affairs". APRN, 18 June, 1992
20 Attempts by some sections of the "left", based on conditions in the late 1970s, to characterise Ireland as a minor or 'sub-' imperialism have been exploded by the contradictions of the 1980s when a sharp rise in unemployment was accompanied by escalating emigration, profit repatriation and foreign debt (now about £15bn). Per capita national income has remained under 63% of the EC average over the 20 years of full membership (compared to the UK at about 100%). There is a persistent large net outflow of profits from the Irish economy, and a constant draining of both capital and surplus labour to US, Britain, Europe and other destinations. This is reflected in unemployment (at over 18%) growing throughout several years of improving trade surpluses and profits.

"Everything was possible"—May '68

A quarter of a century after France was rocked by the biggest general strike in European history, Emile Gallet recalls the events and examines the actions of the left

Grainy black and white film of Parisian students hurling rocks at the police; crowds choking on clouds of tear-gas. The passing of time lends romance to the media view of May '68; a student insurrection which came out of nowhere and was essentially libertarian in its politics. The romance is tinged with cynicism; the barricade fighters were rapidly incorporated into bourgeois society, becoming today's newspaper magnates, ministers and TV personalities.

But there is another May '68. One in which a student revolt against state repression lit the fuse of a massive explosion of workers' action, leading to a 10 million strong general strike, to President De Gaulle's panicky flight to Germany, to a situation in which, for a few days "everything was possible". Then the bourgeoisie was saved from disaster by the French Communist Party (PCF) which did all it could to ensure that the general strike did not lead to a revolution, nor even to a "left government", but rather to the temporary strengthening of De Gaulle.

At the start of 1968 France had 550,000 students, with well over a third of them in Paris. Their numbers had nearly tripled since 1960. This spectacular growth was a reflection of the changing needs of French capitalism which had undergone a feverish technological renewal in the ten years following de Gaulle's seizure of power in 1958.

But campus facilities had barely expanded to accommodate this rapid growth. The lecture theatres were crammed to bursting and even the new universities built in the early 1960's were already in a dreadful state. There was mass discontent with this as well as the petty restrictions imposed on the youth by the university authorities. Nanterre in the Paris suburbs was the centre of this disaffection.

Nanterre campus was built to house 7,000 students. Yet during 1967-68 there were 12,000 students, whilst the university cafeteria could only accommodate 100 people!

This explosion in student numbers occurred at the same time as unemployment began to take off. The long boom of the 1950s and 1960s had come to an end. There were 450,000 registered unemployed at the beginning of 1968, and the government's 5th economic plan was based on the figure rapidly rising to 600,000. There was a sudden loss of confidence in the future and young people felt society to be closed and unresponsive to their needs.

Youth under 21 did not have the right to vote and there was stifling governmental control over the media—especially the TV and radio. This led to a dull, old fashioned conformity which increasingly chafed all layers of youth in a period when other imperialist countries—notably Britain and the USA—were experiencing an explosion of "youth culture". France seemed embodied in its ageing President : anachronistic, authoritarian and austere.

Prime Minister Georges Pompidou had proposed an educational "reform" designed to get rid of "bad" students. A system of degrees by credits was to be replaced all at once by one based on years of study. This was part of the student time bomb. However, probably the most important factor responsible for the politicisation of this new layer of youth was the Vietnam war.

US imperialism's murderous attempt to regain control over South-East Asia, and the courageous struggle led by the Vietnamese people, radicalised hundreds of thousands of youth all over the world. In the USA, Germany and Britain mass protests had turned to street fighting. The effect in France was particularly strong, partly due to the political links between the PCF and the North Vietnamese government. Solidarity actions abounded, especially following the launching of the Têt offensive by the North at the beginning of 1968. In the month of February 1968 alone, there was a major Paris demonstration every week.

Just as the student movement had clear had clear and definite roots, so too the general strike of May-June was not a purely spontaneous event. From the spring of 1967 onwards, a series of strikes, occupations and violent confrontations with the police showed that the working class was becoming increasingly combative.

In 1966, wages and conditions of French workers were low as compared with those of other EEC countries. Their wages were the lowest, their hours the longest (up to 52 hours a week in some industries) and their tax levels the highest. As the post-war boom began to fizzle out, the Pompidou government prepared a wave of austerity attacks.

In March 1967, the government began to issue decrees—without going through parliament—attacking the social security system and letting unemployment rip. The government needed to use the big stick to ensure that its policies were imposed upon a working class that was restless.

Probably the most significant of the pre-May strikes took place in Caen, in January. There, 4800 workers in the SAVIEM industrial vehicles plant went on strike over a long-running wage dispute. The work-force was predominantly young (average age 25), was largely rural in origin and had a very low level of unionisation (6%). And yet these workers, who the bosses no doubt thought would be easy meat, turned out to be extremely combative.

The unions' reaction to Pomibdou's attacks was to try and channel workers' anger into easily controllable campaigns. On the 13 December 1967, millions of workers participated in a day of action against the attacks on the social security and health system. Yet despite the obvious willingness of the workers to fight, the unions merely set the date for another demonstration. The date was May 1968!

The final sign of what was to come can be found in the declining influence of the PCF, especially amongst the young. The PCF had no real voice amongst school and college students It quaintly insisted on maintaining separate youth organisations for each sex! The Jeunesses Communistes de France was for the boys and the Union des Jeunes Filles De France was for the girls. They did have a joint newspaper, with the exciting title "Nous les garcons et les filles"—"We boys and girls". But the prudish Stalinist bureaucrats were utterly unable to attract a generation which was beginning to experience the pleasures of the "sexual revolution".

But even if we can trace the origins of May in the molecular processes which was taking place amongst workers and the youth, no one at the time foresaw the momentous, joyous, explosion of rebellion which was to come.

The far left and

During May the Trotskyist groups played an important role in the early, student-dominated phase of the struggle.

They all argued for links between students and the working class and influenced tens of thousands of radicalised youth—students and workers. The massive wave of class struggle constituted a major test of their politics.

Since the beginning of the 1960s, the Parisian student milieu had been the focus of a series of thorough-going political struggles between different far left tendencies.

The main result of these debates was the weakening of the traditional student organisations, especially the Union National des Etudiants de France (UNEF, the students' union) and the Union des Etudiants Communistes (UEC), which organised the many student members of the PCF.

The victors in these struggles were mainly the small Trotskyist and Maoist groups. In 1966 major splits in the UEC led to the creation of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (JCR—Revolutionary Communist Youth, around 400 members, linked to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) and the Union des Jeunesses Communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJC-ml, a Maoist group of around 200 members).

Meanwhile the Fédération des Etudiants Révolutionnaires (FER—Federation of Revolutionary Students; around 500 militants linked to the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste of Pierre Lambert) occupied the "unionist" ground increasingly vacated by the UNEF.

The most conservative of the centrist groups in May was the FER. During the "night of the barricades" on 10 May 1000 students of the FER came out of their meeting around midnight and marched in serried ranks to the barricades. But not to fight! Denouncing the "petit-bourgeois" nature of the attempt to take the Sorbonne, they called instead for "500,000 workers in the Latin Quarter on Monday 13 May" They then calmly marched away from the barricades, away from the burgeoning pitched battle, leaving tens thousands of students to fight the police to a dawn standstill.

A week later, Charles Berg, a leader of the OCI and of the FER, defended their political cowardice:

"20 or 30,000 students could not beat the thousands of riot police. I have no hesitation in saying that we were correct, having gone in orderly ranks to the barricades, to call on the students to break up their demonstration which was necessarily going to be transformed into a bloodbath."[1]

Berg and the Lambertists were wrong. Firstly, there was no "bloodbath" that night. Whilst the students did not retake the Sorbonne, they were not beaten. Fights with the police are not an end in themselves, and wherever revolutionaries are decisively outnumbered, they would do best to avoid them. But that was clearly not the case on 10 May. The students were already well-experienced in fighting the police, and there was no good reason not to participate.

This very unrevolutionary reflex by the Lambertists is explained by their position of always orienting to the "official" organisations—UNEF and the trade unions, especially the anti-communist Force Ouvrière union. The Lambertists have a visceral distrust of organisations which are not under their control or that of the unions. Centering all their activity on their campaign for "3500 youth to our central Paris meeting in June", the FER and the OCI did not feel the need to participate in a battle involving 30,000 students!

As could have been expected, the FER's refusal to participate in the night of the barricades did not impress the bulk of the students and youth. Despite their long-term work amongst students, they

The bourgeoisie was indifferent to the malaise. In March Georges Pompidou complacently addressed the Gaullist youth: "Today, it is difficult to revolt, because there is nothing to revolt against."

Indeed, up until May, the French antiwar movement was nowhere near as radical as the German SDS or the Italian movement. The anti-war demonstrations in Paris were not as militant as those in Berlin, Berkeley or London.

It is thus hardly surprising that in April 1968 Ernest Mandel, leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) polemicised against the catastrophism of the OCI and their Healyite British comrades in ringing terms:

"if we ignore the opinion of madmen, we quite clearly do not have, in the near future, the possibility of a revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie in France or Britain. There is not a pre-revolutionary situation in these countries."(La Quatrième Internationale, April 1968, p8)

Paris was to be the centre of the May maelstrom: it had the largest concentration of students in the country. Of the 550,000 students, around 200,000 studied in the Paris region. On the Nanterre campus, the Trotskyists of the JCR and various semi-anarchist tendencies had organised protests against the university reforms (10,000 students had gone on strike in December 1967), against the Vietnam war and for the freedom to display political posters on the campus. These campaigns had regularly led to verbal confrontation with the University authorities and to several pitched battles with the police.

On 20 March a few hundred students protesting against the war attacked the American Express office in Paris. A JCR member was arrested, and two days later 142 students founded the "Mouvement 22 mars" (22 March Movement) to fight to get him out of prison.

This group was to rapidly become the focus of a series of student struggles.

For example, the University authorities had forbidden students in the Halls of Residence to have overnight visitors of the opposite sex. The students quite rightly demanded to be treated like adults—which according to the law most of them were not! Focusing their mobilisation on the repressive nature of the University authorities, the "22 mars" began to organise hundreds of students in regular discussion circles.

An anti-imperialist day of action, planned by the "22 mars" for Friday 3 May was threatened by fascists. Fearing a

the students

were rapidly left to one side by the JCR, the Maoists and VO.

For their part, the JCR had played a key role in setting up the "22 mars". Daniel Bensaïd, still today a leader of the USFI, was one of the founders of the movement. The JCR's project was to try and repeat the success of the German SDS in mobilising school and college students and in setting up a kind of "youth party".

This marked an important break with the politics of its parent organisation, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, which had been carrying out "deep entry" into the PCF since 1953.

Even at its foundation, in 1966, the JCR had agreed with the PCI's perspective:

"We are not trying to create a new party—the political weight of the PCF and the CGT makes that an illusion for the moment. The building of the revolutionary party will have to go through the traditional organisations of the working class (PCF and CGT). The revolutionary party will only be created through the building of a left tendency in the PCF."[2]

The JCR youth had, in practice, broken with this schema, but in the first two weeks of May their policy was essentially empirical and reactive, following the initiatives of the anarchist leader of the "22 mars", Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Although they pointed out the necessity of links between workers and students, this remained essentially a paper position: the real battles, according to the JCR, were to be fought on the streets of the Latin Quarter.

In a similar way, the third "Trotskyist" organisation, Voix Ouvrière, had also made a "turn" towards students. Having traditionally emphasised its highly propagandistic work-place orientation, VO was initially extremely disdainful of "petty bourgeois" student struggles.

When the first protests against the University reform took place in Autumn 1967, VO explained that they had no chance of winning their demands and called on "the best of the university youth to break with their social milieu and put themselves at the service of the workers and of socialism."[3]

This truly petit-bourgeois moralism only attracted the most guilt-ridden middle-class students. The best of the youth carried on fighting as best they knew how.

After the foundation of the "22 mars", VO woke up to the fact that something important was happening. Their factory bulletins covered European student struggles regularly, and they began to realise that the best "service" students could give to the working class was to fightback against the bosses government!

Although all three organisations called on the students to orient to the working class, none of them made any concrete proposals for how this could be done.

There was no consistent campaign for links with particular factories or for the speakers from the various union branches to come and speak to the students, and vice versa.

Even more surprisingly, demands centred on the students immediate struggles were largely absent.

The movement's spontaneity tended to hypnotise all the "revolutionary" groups, sweeping them along through the rapids of the general strike. Despite this fantastic opportunity, their "revolutionary politics" remained fundamentally abstract.

Above all they were unable to give to the young revolutionary workers or the students clear tactics to combat and defeat the reformist leadership of the labour movement, either because they ignored it (VO, JCR), or adapted to it (OCI). ●

1 Combat, 17.5.68
2 JCR leaflet, Caen 1966
3 VO, 29.11.67, p4

large-scale confrontation, the Vice-Chancellor of Nanterre declared that the University would be closed until the exams, at the end of June. Faced with this arbitrary and anti-democratic decision, the "22 mars" called a protest demonstration in the Sorbonne University, in the heart of the Latin Quarter.

As the demonstration assembled, the atmosphere was extremely tense. The police were everywhere and the students were expecting an attack by fascists. Some 400 stewards controlled access to the Sorbonne and the university authorities threatened to close the University if the students did not leave.

The students had no time to consider their reply, because almost straight away the riot police waded in with their batons. In the streets outside, groups of students started lifting paving stones and hurling them at the police. In a short

The far left and the workers

The "Trotskyist" forces entered the May events very weak in numbers and with a weak implantation in the working class. They wanted but were unable to play a more important role in the factories and in the strikes. As two JCR leaders put it a short while later:

"The PCF refused, under any circumstances, to try and contest power, and the revolutionary current which was forming on the left was not yet ready to take it. Those who could take the power would not; those who wanted to could not yet do so."[1]

The JCR in fact strengthened itself amongst the students winning thousands over the next few years to subjectively revolutionary politics. A correct policy towards the mass workers' organisations could in addition have greatly strengthened the revolutionary nucleus in the working class.

For this it was necessary to combine immediate economic, democratic and transitional demands that pointed the vanguard in the direction of taking power. It was necessary to place demands on the reformist leaders, to offer the united front in a principled but non-sectarian way. The three major groupings were unable to do this, tied as they were to inherited wrong political methods and strategic conceptions.

For the Lambertists of the OCI-FER, the key questions were those of the attacks on Social Security, the 40 hour week, guaranteed jobs, a generalised wage increase and for the abrogation of the university reform and the government's economic Plan.[2]

This reformist programme was in fact that of the trade union leaderships. It failed to raise the key question of workers' control. It was a mere repetition of what was being said by local union leaders in thousands of factories up and down the country.

By putting its main emphasis on the fight for "the weapon of victory: a national strike committee"[3] without focusing on the key question of rank and file control of the strike, the OCI-FER showed it was obsessed with maintaining at all costs its links with the established trade union bureaucracy, especially with Force Ouvrière, even where the bureaucrats were sabotaging the movement by opening negotiations with the government.

Voix Ouvrière was also heavily affected by tailism. Although at the height of the strike it declared "Long live the general strike! Down with the reactionary Gaullist police state!"[4], VO had no idea of how to connect their maximum programme with the immediate struggles of the workers. For VO, the real objectives of the strike were very different :

"the occupiers will not go home, work will not begin again until the workers have at least obtained full satisfaction on the following demands:

1. No salary below 1000f
2. Return to the 40 hour week (or less, where possible) without loss of pay, with the work divided up between all workers
3. Payment of all strike days, without which the right to strike means nothing.
4. Full union and political rights in the enterprises: for the right to circulate newspapers and ideas, for the right to assembly in the enterprises.".[5]

This series of demands, put forward at a time when 10 million workers were on strike, was repeated over and over again by VO. Yet again, these are nothing else than the demands the workers were already raising, with a bit of "orthodoxy" thrown in (sliding scale of hours). The incredible experience gained by workers through occupying their plants is ignored here. No attempts were made to make the fight for workers' control—the key issue raised by the strike—conscious and central.

Even if VO had had a better implantation, had been "the" revolutionary party, it would merely have formed the left wing of the spontaneous workers' movement.

The JCR, which was clearly undergoing a left centrist evolution, understood better than the other two organisations the importance of raising slogans which went beyond the current consciousness of the workers and students. They called for the nationalisation of occupied factories under workers' control based on factory committees. They also called for the opening of the books and warned workers against the trap of "co-management".[6]

There are, however, two yawning gaps in the programme of all three organisations. Firstly, none of them warned clearly that the reformists—and especially the trade union leaders—would try to sell out the strike, nor armed the workers politically and organisationally for how to prevent this.

After the sellout the PCF was an easy target, and all groups attacked its bailing out of the Gaullist regime. But the key question of fighting for elected strike committees as a way of preventing the union leaders from betraying was never raised.

Secondly, and even more surprisingly, the question of attacking the Vth republic and all its anti-democratic structures was not raised as a real alternative to parliamentary and antiparliamentary cretinism. ●

1 Bensaïd and Weber, p164
2 Informations Ouvrières 387, May 1968
3 Information Ouvrières 388, 23.5.68
4 Voix Ouvrière 20.5.68, p1
5 ibid
6 Avant-garde jeunesse 14, 27.5.68, p5

space of time a mini-riot broke out as running battles between youth and students took place.

By the end of the battle the Sorbonne was occupied by the police, the night air was full of the acrid smell of tear gas and more than 600 students had been arrested.

One of the lecturer's unions, the SNESup, called for a solidarity strike on Monday 6 May refusing to follow the legally obligatory "cooling-off period" The UNEF student union at last roused itself from its stupor enough to call on workers to join a solidarity demonstration in Paris on Monday 6 May.

Around 100,000 leaflets were given out at factory gates by mainly by Trotskyists and Maoists. Later, 30,000 demonstrators—still largely students, but also including worker youth—marched through Paris beating off two police charges.

Every day of the week, 6-10 May, witnessed a major demonstration. On most nights there were fierce confrontations with the police. The number regularly involved grew to 50-60,000. On Wednesday 8 May the PCF, which had initially denounced the demonstrators as "petit-bourgeois troublemakers", tried to march at the head of the demonstration. The students stewards put the self appointed "vanguard" firmly in their place.

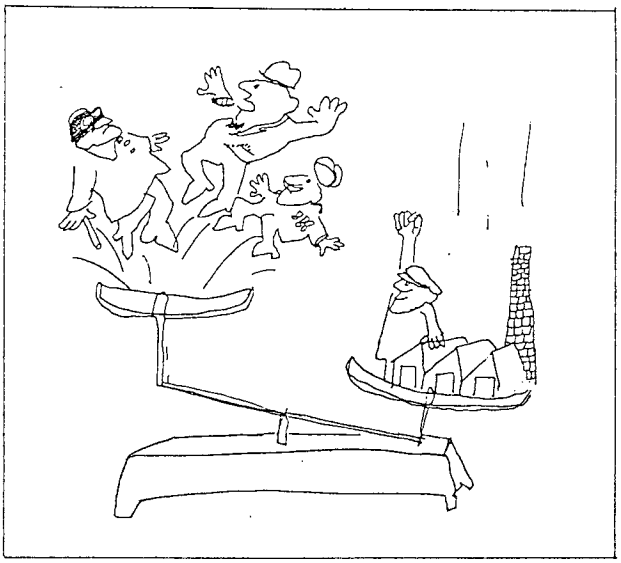
10 May proved to be the key day—or rather night. Provoked by the refusal of the Minister of Education to reopen the Sorbonne and Nanterre, 30,000 students decided to try and take back the Sorbonne. They surrounded the university and faced repeated baton charges, tear gas grenades and brutal beatings. The students fought back with everything to hand. The streets were denuded of paving stones, trees were cut down and cars were pushed into the road to form barricades.

After this "night of the barricades", it was obvious that the government was going to have to give in. Shocked by the police violence, the public was clearly on the side of the students, and there was no guarantee that the police could hold their own. Quite the opposite, as more and more youth flooded into the Latin Quarter, it was certain that the police would eventually be beaten.

Pompidou, who had been on an official visit to Afghanistan, returned on Saturday 11 May. He immediately took stock of the situation and, like any sensible politician, caved in. All the Universities would be reopened and the reform would be shelved.

On Monday 13 May a massive victory celebration took place with between 600,000 and 1 million demonstrators thronging the streets. All over the country, millions of workers went on strike to express their solidarity with the students and to protest against police violence.

Both the government and the union leaders hoped that that was the end of the matter. But the movement, which until then had been limited to students, became transformed into a national and working class movement. At the Sud-Aviation aero plant in Nantes, the workers had been fighting for higher wages for some time. Inspired by the students victory, on 14 May they occupied the factory, locked the manager in his office and called for solidarity from other workers in the town.



The next day, the Renault plant at Cléon went on strike. Finally, on Thursday 16 May, the Renault Billancourt plant, the symbol of the French industrial working class, and a fortress of the PCF and the CGT trade union, went on strike. Significantly, it was young workers who began the movement, against the advice of the local union leaders.

Within a few days, and without a call from any union leaders, the vast majority of French workers were out on strike. Out of France's 15 million workers, around two thirds took action. More than four million remained on strike for more than two weeks. Two million were on strike for more than a month. The demands raised by the strikers were many and varied: pay increases, the removal of authoritarian managers, ending the attacks on the social security system.

Every sector of French society was affected. The industrial working class took action on a scale never before seen. Companies like Peugeot, which had never known a major strike, were paralysed. The mines, the docks and public transport were all on strike. The media workers—especially the state-controlled ORTF radio and TV station—fought for workers' control over what was said and shown.

Other sectors, less used to the class struggle, also went on strike or occupied their enterprises. Opera singers, actors, footballers, taxi drivers, all took action. The movement, without being called for or coordinated by any party or union bureaucracy had become the largest and longest general strike in European history. And like every general strike, May 1968 posed point blank the question, "who rules"?

As the general strike grew, the trade unions—and especially the PCF-controlled CGT—did all they could to limit its scope and to turn its revolutionary force into the small change of ephemeral or petty reforms. The Stalinists' desperately struggled to limit the influence of the revolutionary groups on the workers.

L'Humanité, the PCF's daily paper, attacked the youth who had participated in the "Night of the Barricades" as "provocateurs" and "scum".

Following the occupation of Billancourt, demonstrations went from Paris to the huge Renault plant virtually every night. The CGT kept the factory gates firmly shut and put up posters warning the workers against "people from outside the labour movement" who "serve the ruling class".

A revolutionary situation?

France did not experience a fully developed revolutionary situation in May 1968. But important elements of one erupted and almost as rapidly disappeared in a sharp reassertion of bourgeois power.

The general strike of May created a duality of power in certain factories. Managers and owners had been locked out, elements of workers' control over production were established in several centres.

This posed a real challenge to the rule of the bosses in these areas. They showed, however briefly, the power of the mobilised proletariat. Nevertheless, most factories did not even possess a strike committee, and those that did exist were not elected by the workers.

Dual power in society as a whole certainly did not exist even though the Nantes Strike Committee, exceptionally, took control of public transport, controlled the roads leading to the town and even issued food coupons to strikers which were honoured by the local traders.

More typically, the committees of action that the far left tried to establish amounted to little more than united front bodies embracing students and workers. They were mainly discussion forums rather than united front bodies for deciding action and they probably existed in fewer than a quarter of the workplaces on strike.

But the general strike by its amplitude and its duration certainly posed the question—"which class rules?"—even if the armed insurrection and the seizure of power by the working class never became the task of the day. The problem was that the parties and union federations of the working class, the PCF and the SFIO leaders, the CGT, CFDT and FO bureaucracies answered this question unambiguously; the bosses!

The immediate tasks during the second half of May were to elect and generalise truly democratic strike committees and build local and citywide councils of action which could link up all the exploited and oppressed and effectively challenge the legislative and executive powers of the government.

In this way the workers and their student allies could have prevented the political initiative from slipping away from them and back to De Gaulle. Instead the strike and the student mobilisations reached a dead end. The reformist leaders made it clear, not only to the working class but to the terrified reactionary petit-bourgeoisie, that they had no intention of leading the millions of mobilised workers and hundreds of thousands of mobilised youth into a direct struggle for power. The students and the far left had no solution to this crisis of leadership in the workers' movement.

Waldeck-Rochet, the Secretary-General of the PCF, justified his party's support for the Grenelle agreements which gave workers a few hundred francs pay increase by the following classical reformist logic:

"In reality, there were the following alternatives in May. Take steps to ensure that the key demands were satisfied, whilst at the same time pursuing a policy of democratic changes by constitutional means—this was our Party's position. Or else provoke a trial of strength, in other words move towards an insurrection, including the use of armed struggle aimed at overthrowing the regime by force. This was the adventurist position of certain ultra-left groups."

What breathtaking cynicism and dishonesty! If all the workers wanted was a pay increase why did they launch a wave of factory occupations? Why did the workers of Nantes begin to take control of their city? Why did the Vitry workers try to set up direct trade relations with the local farmers? Why? Because the working class was spontaneously moving in the direction of taking control of its whole way of life.

The PCF claim that a revolution was not possible because a majority were not in favour of it, because the repressive apparatus remained intact. This conceals the fact that they did nothing to develop these conditions. They sought to reduce everything that was revolutionary in the situation back to the level of normal union negotiations and a normal election campaign.

The result was that the economic gains which were made proved ephemeral and the reformist parties suffered a serious parliamentary setback. The Stalinists hated the idea of revolution like the plague. They were totally reconciled to the Fifth Republic and its institutions. Worse, they even sought to preserve De Gaulle because of his anti-American, relatively pro-Soviet stance.

The real task in those weeks was to bridge the gap between the workers' legitimate desire for immediate improvements in wages and conditions, for more democracy, and the desire for a different class government, a different class power.

This bridge could have been built through a fight for transitional demands to strengthen the movement for workers' control in the factories and through repeated calls for a workers' government, exposing time and again the reformist leaders refusal to fight for power. The hold of these leaders had to be weakened and broken and this could not be done simply by denunciations.

These demands should have been linked to a massive unionisation drive; extending control over the determination of wage levels and hours of work, rather than just allowing the CGT bureaucracy to do it for the workers; defence of the workplace occupations from the CRS by workers' self-defence.

In addition, it was vital to broaden the mass movement to other layers beyond the industrial working class. This could only have been done by agitation and propaganda, first of all directed at the mass of poorer farmers and, secondly, at the lower levels of the police and army.

The sizeable proportion of the French population which still lived in the countryside was largely untouched by May although peasant organisations in the west declared support for the struggles of the workers and students. Even more striking, the army—despite its 180,000 conscripts—remained solid. There was an appeal from the 15th Infantry Regiment calling for soldiers' committees to be set up and pledging not to fire on strikers, but this appears to have been unique.

The police (not the CRS) had suffered a blow to their morale by being blamed for the repression and felt increasingly alienated and disowned by the government. In the confusion in mid-May the Interfederal Police Union threatened a strike itself. All this was fertile ground for revolutionary agitation.

Last but not least there was an important place for far reaching democratic demands. Not only should De Gaulle have gone but so should the whole Bonapartist paraphernalia of the Fifth Republic too. Instead of parliamentary elections there should have been agitation for a constituent assembly, to be elected by universal suffrage of all over the age of 16.

Such a programme, combining immediate, democratic and transitional demands would have provided the French working class and radicalised youth with a platform for settling their accounts with the Gaullist "strong state" and with the whole of French capitalism. ●

Where occupations had been launched, the unions systematically tried to weaken the independent organisation of the workers, sending them home and preventing the occupation becoming a living centre of political education. Where strike committees existed they were generally composed of local union leaders.

The CGT also did its best to keep the labour movement separate from the students. For example, on 24 May, two separate enormous demonstrations took place in Paris, one called by the CGT, the other by UNEF. In the provincial towns, this kind of tactic was more difficult, and the two movements tended to mix together, threatening the bureaucrats' influence and showing the possibility of forging a united attack on the government.

Deeply shaken by the demonstrations and by the abject failure of De Gaulle to restore order, Pompidou began a marathon set of negotiations with the union leaders who were nearly as frightened of the movement as he was. The agreement they reached—7% increase in wages, shelving of certain attacks on social security, increase in the minimum wage—were a few stale crumbs from the capitalists' table.

As soon as they tried to sell this miserable deal to the workers, it became obvious that it was not enough. When Seguy, leader of the CGT went to Billancourt to explain the agreement on 27 May, he was booed and shouted down in the PCF's industrial stronghold! Throughout the country, it was the same story. The strikers would not go back to work, they would not accept the agreement. The sense of expectation of the need for some fundamental change had taken hold of the entire working class. Reeling from the shock of rejection, the PCF and the CGT tried had to raise their sights, to turn the movement into pressure for a change of government.

They called another demonstration, on 29 May. Again 600,000 people marched, this time under the slogan "for a people's government". The smell of 1936 and the Front Populaire was in the air. De Gaulle flew to Germany to a cabal of his closest military aides, whilst ministers began to burn their secret archives.

And yet, the next day, the tide began to turn. De Gaulle returned from Germany, having decided against the "last and fatal choice" of using the army against the strikers. Instead, knowing the electoralist cretins who led the workers he called a general election and mobilised his supporters in a massive reactionary demonstration on the Champs-Elysées.

The PCF was only too willing to divert the flood into the parliamentary watermill. It called on workers to return to work and to settle matters at the ballot-box. Pointing to the electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936, the Stalinists assured the masses that the "people's government" demanded on 29 May could be produced without bloodshed and suffering by the upcoming elections.

At first there was considerable resistance. But without any alternative objective, disappointed but not defeated, the workers slowly returned to work. But woe to those who abort a revolution. When the elections took place at the end of the month, the PCF's hopes were dashed.

To their astonishment the Gaullists won 55% of the vote and were swept back into office, whilst the Stalinists



PCF ELECTION POSTER:

"Of all the opposition parties, only the Communist party, which has fought the Gaullist government for 10 years, denounced FROM THE VERY BEGINNING the intrigues, the provocations and the violence of the ultra-left, anarchist, Maoist and Trotskyist groups, all of whom play into the hands of reaction. Vote Communist!"

lost over half their seats, falling from 73 to 34 deputies. Even more staggering was the vote in the constituencies around the major factories. For example, around Flins, the PCF lost 25% of its votes as compared to a year before.

How could it end like this? First, it must be remembered that the electoral system was profoundly undemocratic. Youth under 21 did not have the right to vote, and an estimated 300,000 youth of voting age were not on the electoral roll because of the government's refusal to update it. Secondly, although the rump of the old SFIO stood, together with the tiny left reformist PSU, the PCF was really the only workers' party. And it had just dramatically betrayed the May general strike. Young workers and students were hardly inclined to vote for it—or even to vote at all. "Elections, piège à cons" (roughly translated—"Only fools vote") was a popular slogan in June and afterwards.

Despite this sad finalé, May 68 played a fundamental role in shaping today's French class struggle. De Gaulle lost the mystique of invincibility. In little more than a year he lost a referendum and resigned, returning to his village in Lorraine in a huff, there to live out his embittered old age. The Gaullist "strong state" was scaled down and reformed by Pompidou.

The PCF began the decline which has continued unabated ever since. At the same time, a political space had been opened up on the left which the social-democratic reformists (Mitterrand and the new Socialist Party) occupied for two decades. To the left of the PCF a number of relatively large centrist groups were created.

Far from being an event which is only of interest to nostalgic "forty-something", the great explosion of May '68 continues to reverberate in today's class struggle. Even more importantly, it carries a series of lessons which are of fundamental importance to a new generation of youth. For us the task is not to repeat May 68, but to surpass it. ●

The criminal core of Italian capitalism

By late May 700 politicians, bureaucrats and bosses were being investigated in the bribes for contracts scandal that has rocked Italian capitalism. Marco Zucci makes sense of this controlled purging of the Italian state

One dramatic revelation follows another. Italians have been astounded by the uncovering of a half century of scandals, corruption, clientelism, and embezzlement. A new word has entered the language—"tangentopoli" to describe the system of corruption that embraces their political leaders together with major employers.

Those in the dock include the leaders of the major parties; Craxi, the leader of the Socialist Party (PSI), Forlani, ex-president of the Christian Democrats (DC), and the Republican, La Malfa the self-styled spokesman for "ordinary decent people".

But the fall which has caused the biggest reverberrations is without doubt that of Giulio Andreotti the boss of the DC and six times Prime Minister. According to the testimony of several mafia supergrasses, in between meetings of the G7 and his Cabinet Andreotti called in on the godfathers of the Sicilian mafia to negotiate the elimination of his political rivals.

The Italian bourgeoisie is forced to reach for drastic solutions—a clearout of a generation of leaders and restructuring its entire constitutional framework—because a system that once served it so well has become destabilising.

But in stirring the muck of ages past they are obliged to reveal that their democracy disguised a real dictatorship of money and patronage. The revelations have unleashed a process whose outcome is unforeseeable. In this present phase of instability and extreme fragility a danger emerges for the Italian working class; the danger of authoritarianism feeding off regional populism. But there is also a possibility that workers' combativity and class consciousness could give the entire system such a blow that it could shatter into fragments.

Dishonesty in the state is not an Italian prerogative even if they add style to it. Political power represents the interests of the economically dominant class, and it is natural that the convergence of interests between them should be consumated through a series of reciprocal favours. In the Democratic Republic, wrote Engels,

"wealth exercises its power in an indirect manner, but sure nevertheless. On the one side, through the form of direct corruption of the state functionaries, of which America furnishes a classic example; on the other side, in the form of an alliance between the government and the Stock Exchange."

That one form should be explicitly punished in the Italian penal code as a crime, and the other should, on the contrary, be showered in praise changes nothing. The two represent a continuity and in practice they overlap. Italy, for specific historical reasons, has turned this process into an art.

The reason for the apparently abnormal scale of the corruption scandals and the pressing need for change is to be found in the character of state intervention in the Italian economy.

Such intervention is not an Italian peculiarity. In the imperialist epoch the role of the state as a crutch of monopoly capital has not declined but, on the contrary, grown enormously. In the face of sharpened inter-imperialist competition, crises of overproduction, and falling profitablity, it is the state which aids the industrialists in their search for capital, raw materials and markets. Internally, this aid takes the form of erecting customs barriers, providing an efficient industrial infrastructure (transport and energy) and mediating class conflict to the advantage of the bosses.

The Italian state developed this interventionist role well before the other European countries because, as Gramsci's posed it, during the period of national re-unification the problem was not so much to liberate already developed capitalist forces from their old, juridical and political fetters, as to create the general conditions for these forces to be born and to develop along the lines of other countries.

However, it was only during the Fascist dictatorship that this intervention took on present proportions. Mussolini's state first and foremost straightjacketed the workers, securing a very low level of strikes, social conflict, and wage levels. But it also began a policy of large scale public works, offered advantageous contracts to the industrialists and acted to save the big banks and the large scale enterprises from collapse. The bosses thus discovered the advantage of the nationalisation of losses.

The bourgeois politicians discovered a new hunting

ground for lucrative posts in the "councils of administration" (PDGs) and a great increase in their power. This was the birth of the nationalised sector of the economy and also of the fusion between the political party, the state and a sector of industry, a situation which was deepened under the DC governments.

The state holding company, IRI, was created in 1933, a giant conglomerate which controlled 21.5% of total shareholding capital. It owned three banks, a majority stake in the telecommunications network and the navigation system. It also held a strong stake in steel and mechanical engineering. Today, IRI still maintains its collosal power, through a system of one hundred and forty companies, with a workforce of over 500,000.

After the Second World War the Italian bourgeoise found itself in a weak position, that has parallels with today. Having abandoned the fascists on the eve of their fall it was necessary to create a new basis for governing and to rearrange the political furniture in the house of state.

They found forces ready to hand; politicians not too compromised with the fascists, though all of them had been part of the People's Party (Partito Popolare), the catholic party that supported the first, "legal" governments of Mussolini. The new party would have to be based on the petit-bourgeoisie, the functionaries of the enormous bureaucratic machine of the fascist state (1.1 million people in 1941). To stick together all these social forces and to bind large sections of the peasantry and even of the working class to the project, an essential cement was furnished by the church. The depth of its implantation via its parishes, its educational and "cultural" organisations provided an enormous ideological weapon for the state. Catholic Action with its 2.6 million adherents in 1954, its network of co-operatives, private schools, hospitals, rest homes and its social assistance, was its core.

Out of this crucible was born Christian Democracy, the political force that was to dominate the political scene for four decades. Yet despite its electoral strength (48.5% in 1948) this formation embodied deep contradictions that would in the long run prove destructive. It acted as a veritable "popular front" of differing class forces; it was at once a *mass* party at the service of the big capitalists, an openly *confessional* party directing a secular capitalism.

There were, however, two factors which stabilised this political formation for a long time. On one side, there was a very strong Communist Party, which forced the bourgeoisie to put up with this party of backward looking clericalism, as the price for keeping the 'Red danger" at bay. On the other hand, the DC had no scruples in using the state apparatus to cement its links with all the social forces within its electoral bloc.

In order to maintain itself in power in a country where the electoral system was one of proportional representation the DC assembled behind it a powerful bloc of heterogenous social forces. All of them shared in the redistribution of the fiscal revenue operated by the state but in different proportions; to the bosses went the public works, the grants to industry, the tax benefits. To the popular classes went the crumbs from this feast.

The DC carried on a policy of more or less direct payoffs from the state to the commanding heights of industry and commerce. As an example, among the scandals coming to light today is the sale in 1987 of Alfa Romeo to Fiat for 1,000 billion lire of which only 400 billion were effectively paid. Alfa Romeo had estimated its value of 5,000-6,000 billion!

Other examples include thousands of billions of lire paid out for new factories in the impoverished south, generous orders for military material, millions of hours of fake unemployment benefit paid for by the state.

Under DC rule the role of the state in the basic industries sector was reenforced. In 1953 ENI was created, a state holding company for petroleum, which developed very rapidly under the leadership of Enrico Mattei. His origins lay in the strata of high state functionaries, who taken together today find themselves at the centre of the judges' attentions.

In 1962 the policy of nationalisation led to the creation of ENEL. Despite appearences and despite the presence in the government of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) this was not a reform of the left but a simple service rendered to the big industrialists, who afterwards received the privilege of paying only one fifth the price per kilowat for electricity as working class consumers.

Small scale industry was not neglected either. They prospered through state contracts in construction and public works (motorways, hospitals). The public tendering procedure was reduced in practice to choosing from a list of favoured companies linked to local DC clients. In return kickbacks went into funding the party and its election campaigns.

But the loyalty of the real mass base could only be assured by efforts aimed at the peasants. Organised in the association of small proprietors (Coldiretti), which reached a record membership of 1.6 million families, these peasants were bought off with cheap credit, farming equipment, wholesale purchase of crops and the protection of the ministry of agriculture. In addition, their vote corresponded to 50 deputies, a considerable weight within the DC parliamentary bloc.

Another maintstay of DC policy, once again taken over from the fascists, was the policy of swelling the ranks of the state bureaucracy. Clients of the DC expected many of their "own" to be elevated into permanent posts; they were rarely disappointed. One way of doing this was the creation of incredible numbers of "Enti". These were public organisations which stretched from large-scale mutual benefit societies, directed by the state to to hundreds of minuscule organisations useless for any purpose beyond clientelege.

If you missed out on that layer of easy money then there were "invalidity" pensions and grants for the handicapped awarded on the basis of fidelity to local party notables. In this way the great masses of the people—whom above all in the south and in the rural areas lived in a situation of poverty, unemployment and chronic underdevelopment—constituted a great resevoir of guaranteed votes which could be garnered through an extensive network of patronage.

The incoveniences of this system for the big bourgeoisie are evident. The state machine has become elephantine and its upkeep is extremely costly. Ineffi-

Italy and proportional representation

Proportional representation (PR) was introduced in Italy after the war along with the Republic itself. For twenty years the bosses had not had to think for itself allowing fascism to rule on its behalf. Released from this, the weak and uncertain bourgeoisie, faced with a strong Communist Party opted for PR to try to incorporate the widest possible range of forces from the ruling class.

This system eventually threatened to discredit bourgeois politics entirely, inextricably linked as it was to the system of corruption. The advantages of a first-past-the-post system were clear; first, multi-party coalitions with huge pay-offs to all the smaller parties will no longer be necessary. Corruption will no more be absent than in Britain or France but it will, they hope be kept within limits and below the surface.

Secondly, with a first-past-the-post system one can control the country with a reduced number of votes. The example of the right in France with its 40% of votes and 80% of deputies and of the Thatcher governments in Britain indicate what can be achieved. Like there this system will enable the bosses to carry through their chosen policies—erosion of welfarism, lower wages, financial rigour—all with the backing of a minority of the better-off.

Here then we have the reasons for the highly charged campaign, one hammered home by the major papers. All these are controlled by big money and sang in unison the praises of the method of majority voting: 'freedom to each citizen, a direct relationship between the citizen and the elected, clarity of choice, stability of governments, transparency of all political life . . . '.

Those clamouring for change eventually found a politician to give expression to all this, Mario Segni. After decades mired in the corruption of the DC Segni was struck with a vision of his future at the head of a new conservative party. In order to get it he launched a campaign for ten referendums of which nine were just so much window dressing, the only important one being the method of voting in elections.

Segni's campaign found a receptive audience in the population, increasingly sick of corruption scandals and the endless kaleidoscope of cosmetic cabinet changes.

Under intense pressure 82% of Italians approved this constitutional reform on 18 April.

Of the major parties only the *Rifondazione comunista* and the fascists called for a no vote on the issue of reforming the electoral system; both rightly fear that their chances of being represented in the Senate would be much reduced if PR was abandoned.

Despite the discrediting of the institutions of the state *Rifondazione* chose to do its bit to restore their supporters' illusions in it. *Rifondazione* played the key role in last autumn's demonstrations but allowed the mobilisations to be derailed by the referendum campaign *Rifondazione* then complained about bias in the media for a "Yes" vote. They even petitioned the President: "Honourable President, there was overt propaganda for the "Yes" vote on public television on at least two instances . . . We ask for your intervention which can guarantee institutional correctness." We can only hope for the sake of *Rifondazione* that this President at least does not find himself at the centre of the judiciary's corruption enquiries!

Revolutionaries should have argued for a "No" vote in the referendum. Not because the current system is good but because the first past the post system will guarantee power to a minority administration, an elected dictatorship capable of savage measures while drawing on the active electoral support of the privileged minority. Furthermore, the current system, with all its defects, does allow the real spectrum of political opinion to find its way into parliament including the minority voice of the far left. This can and should be used as a tribune from which to denounce the system, expose its rotten secrets, and call the workers to action. ●

ciencies in the public service (post, transport), delays due to bureaucratic procedures, institutionalised bribery (a sort of informal tax paid by business), all these risked becoming unbearable.

In the 1980s the benefits of this system to the bosses was outweighed by the costs. More and more money was demanded by the parties of business before lucrative public contracts were awarded. In May the head of Olivetti, Carlo De Benedetti, volunteered the information that his company had paid out around$12mn in bribes to politicians since the early 1980s. Until then they had been put on the "black books of the state railways." De Benedetti said that soon the pressure on Olivetti "reached an impressive crescendo . . . of menaces and extortion to become in the last few years nothing short of racketeering . . . The demands from the representatives of the parties were systematic and unavoidable on everything they controlled without exception."

According to unofficial estimates, the number of people who live more or less directly thanks to party politics is close to one million. It is clear that even if the capitalists could participate in the share out of the state budget, the weight of all these parasitic social layers weighs heavily on the costs of production.

One study has concluded that since 1980 the system of kick-backs has cost betwen $10-$20 bn. In 1992 alone it amounted to around 23% of total industrial profits. Direct payments to political parties by business has been estimated at running around $5bn a year, or around 1% of GNP!

The bosses have taken stock of the situation and several times tried to change it. Way back in 1976 the existence of bribery broke to the surface thanks to the revelations of the US press. Lockheed's bosses had oiled the wheels of

The Mafia, the state and capitalism

In the popular imagination, corruption means the Mafia. In fact, the two only partially overlap. The Mafia is also involved in legal business while respectable business is up to its elbows in corruption.

The Mafia originated in the south of Italy during the last century when rich landowners were pitted against poor peasants. The former took advantage of a weakly developed state structure and organised their own "bodies of armed men" to act as police, defend their land and cattle against land occupations and cattle rustling. The armed gangs took their new members from the poor peasants. This both divided the peasants against each other and provided an illusion of social mobility for the peasants.

Twentieth century industrialisation witnessed the strengthening of the town over the countryside and mass emigration also weakened the ferociousness of the class struggle in the rural areas. For decades the Mafia was a weakened force.

But in post-war Italy as investment seeped into the south, the Mafia forged a new role for itself. Using their traditional links with the politicians they controlled the running of public works and later credit distribution and access to employment in local councils.

The fusion between organised crime and local government was at its strongest in Sicily. In Palermo, the capital, between 1957 and 1963 80% of building permits were granted to five people, front men for the Mafia cartel which employed 50,000 people in Palermo alone.

In return for these kickbacks, the Mafia can deliver up to 15% of the vote in certain regions for these politicians.

Italian capitalists have been quick to recognise the efficiency of the Mafia and have made lasting links. The big companies are happy to extend the prestige and security that is associated with their own business, allowing the Mafia to escape legal controls. In return the Mafia provide competitive sub-contracting services.

Why are the judges only now showing determination against the Mafia? In part it helps to break up the hegemony of the DC to which it is fused.

Sectors of big business accept that huge parts of the criminal economy (drugs, prostitution, gambling) are outside of their immediate control.

But this empire avoids tax, social security payments and legal controls. Meanwhile, the legal business sector has to pay towards the upkeep of the state As the Mafia spreads its branches too much into the world of "normal capitalism", the Mafia becomes an unfair competitor. That is why the Italian state has decided to prune back the creeping vine of criminal capitalism. ●

the bureaucracy, beginning with government ministers themselves, so as to assure the purchase of their planes for the Italian armed forces. The President of the Republic, Giaovanni Leoni, was obliged to hand in his resignation. But the scandal was contained.

That same year Agnelli, Pirelli and Carli launched an operation to transform the miniscule Republican Party (3% of the votes) into a new modern secular party. But the time had not yet come, for social conflicts where then at a high point and the PCI too was enjoying its highest ever electoral support. Also the bureaucrats in the DC and in the state were difficult to eliminate for "in the course of time they had consolidated themselves and had become transformed into institutional granite."

Today the situation is more favourable. The USSR is no more and with it has evaporated all the dangers of a Cold War let alone any "sovietisation" of Italy. Even the PCI is only a shadow of its former self, dominated by a new generation of cadres and functionaries who aspire only to get into government. Pushed to do so quickly by the frittering away of its electoral strength, the PCI burned its bridges to its anti-capitalist past in order to become a good social democratic party. It has changed its name, becoming the PDS, and evinces no desire except to slavishly follow the orders of the capitalists.

A second factor pushing the capitalists on is the risk of the public debt getting out of control. The whole inflationary budget served as a way of financing the state expenditure; now it has now reached collosal proportions. The total public debt in 1991 represented 102% of the Gross National Product and the printing necessary to finance even the interest servicing on this debt was 11% of GNP.

This scale of debt crowds out the private sector from the capital markets, boosts inflation, destabilises the lira and, above all, is absolutely incompatible with the criteria of European integration as laid down by the Maastricht Treaty. Not to be part of a future unified EC monetary system would be a grave blow to the Italian bourgeoisie for 60% of its trade is carried out with other countries of the Community.

In this context it is clear that the Italian judiciary is not acting as a power above society but rather as a ruling class tool to carry out serious running repairs on the machinery of state.

The current investigations began in the heart of modern Italy itself, in Milan, the banking and finance capital. The investigation rapidly spread to engulf all the big cities. Soon the entire system was in the dock. Heads of huge companies have spoken out, probably in order to reduce their jail sentences. The bosses know, moreover, that the next government will issue an amnesty and absolve them of all guilt; they have nothing to fear in revealing what they have done.

It is a dangerous game, however. It reveals all the dirty business in which the bosses and politicians were accomplices. There are now 164 Deputies and 78 Senators whose parliamentary immunity from prosecution is under threat. Aside from the bosses of the state industries—the President of the FS (Italian Railways), the President of the ENI and even the chief of IRI itself—the handcuffs are ready for Gardini, ex-boss of Ferruzzi and the top dog of the Italian

PDGs. Also at Fiat three top directors are implicated in major corruption.

Once the new government, armed with a new constitution, stabilises it will try and put this painful business behind it and move, with more relish onto the offensive against the workers. A strong executive would seek to continue the work of the Amato government, reaffirming the end to wage indexation, raising the age of retirement from 60 to 65, increasing taxes for the workers and organising a bargain basement sale of state assets.

In reality, there will be no end to corruption or increased power to the citizen. Rather, the neo-liberal politics of Thatcher will reign down on Italy. The workers will be asked to pay for the china broken by the bosses and, through new taxes, replenish the coffers of the state.

There is still some difficulties ahead for the bourgeosie. The machinery for realising all this is not yet ready: the Great Secular Conservative Party is a beautiful project with its name in place—"Alliance For Progress"—but nothing more. In this transition phase, as long as the old DC bureaucrats are still able to hang onto some of their power and are able to try to counter-attack, it is necessary to seek the active support of the ex-PCI, called upon once again to come to the help of the bourgeoisie as in 1943.

Apart from the slender contribution of the bosses of Confindustria the biggest backing for the project of the ten referendums was from the PDS, who collected a large number of the 500,000 signatures necessary to get the referendum on the ballot form. The PDS were ecstatic once again to be in an alliance with the "progressive" sector of the bosses.

Traditionally, the ideological justification for this bloc lay in the supposed need for workers to approach the goal of socialism cautiously and with many detours (stages). Indispensable for the education of workers was an intermediate phase consisting of a democratisation of all society, in the first place of the Christian Democracy. In the words of one of the masters of ideological frippary, Asor Rosa;

"The working class and capitalism still find that there is quite a long period in which they share common interests. Ranged against them will be both privileged and non-privileged parastic layers, the latter not going beyond the sterile and desperate defence of their own interests."

In place of the "working class" one should read: "bureaucrats of the PC.", yesterday and today ready to come to power. Thus they do not hesitate to form coalitions even with the Leagues in several local adminstrations in Lombardy. PDS Senator Vincenzo Visco recently pledged himself and his party to do "everything possible to avoid economic collapse" and that this meant backing the privatisation programme for the state owned electricty and insurance companies, more austerity measures and reaffirming the end of wage indexation.

The great wave of strikes that followed last September's decree against wage indexation and the hostile attack on wage levels met with strong resistance and showed the vitality of the working class. The Italian workers, although betrayed by their trade union leaders, revealed themselves to be the only force in the country capable of stopping the reactionary advance and defending their gains together with all the oppressed layers, the youth, unemployed, the aged, women.

Their reponse was clear: they said "no" to Amato, and they registered a violent protest, on occasion even a physical one, against some trade union bureaucrats. In February 300,000 demonstrated again in Rome, showing unity and the workers' capacity to fight.

However, despite the sign of revival, the forces opposed to the leaders of the big central trade unions are fragmented as well as politcally and organisationally weak. On one side, Essere Sindicato (ES), an opposition current within the CGIL, shows a great fear in taking coherent and clear positions. It may even split away from the CGIL and form a new union. In addition, there also other small minorities in favour of building a new union from scratch, sometimes with sectarian positions.

There is a serious danger of the wholesale regionalisation and even localisation of the trade unions. These unions may be long on left rhetoric but impotent in fight the new found centralised power of the bosses and their government.

Worse, the wave of industrial unrest was highjacked by the referendum campaign. And the CIGL leadership, influenced by the PDS, were happy for this to happen. The same was essentially true of Refoundation, the so-called left remnant of the ex-PCI. These reformists proposed to make use of the referendum in order to restore the indexation of wages, to guarantee democracy in the unions, and modify the labour code.

It is a dangerous path because it places the destiny of the workers in the hands of a "nation" that produces an atomised vote, one conducted under the influence of a mass media controlled by the bosses. This nourishes crippling illusions in parliamentary institutions, at a time when these institutions stand exposed as maleable putty in the hands of a corrupt bourgeoisie.

At the same time it demobilises the workers in the face of growing unemployment and renewed factory closures. In today's conditions, dominated by the fragility of the bourgeoisie and its parties, there is only one weapon that the Italian proletariat has to hand and which should be used without any concession: the indefinite general strike, occupation of the factories, workers' control over production.

Only along this path is it possible to develop the degree of independent organisation that could root out corruption by subjecting it to the scrutiny of workers' tribunals. Workers should sit in judgement on the polticians and the bosses who have exploited and oppressed them while subjecting them to endless moralising sermons on the virtues and self-sacrifices of civic duty.

If this power were to develop workers could stop the installation of a bonapartist republic in Italy, organise the working class in councils of action and strike out on the road to its own, a workers', government. ●

Sectarians abandon the gains of October

How much of a watershed was the attempted coup of August 1991 in the USSR? Did it lead to the overthrow of the workers' state? Keith Harvey replies to some ultra-lefts

The August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow continues to throw a long shadow over the Stalinophile wing of degenerate Trotskyism. This event and Yeltsin's subsequent seizure of power from Gorbachev, his dissolution of the CPSU and then the USSR itself plunged these sects[1] into the deepest gloom imaginable.

They proved utterly unable to analyse what had actually happened. After a longer or shorter period of bewilderment they all decided to cut the Gordian knot and proclaim that the gains of the Russian revolution had finally been liquidated. Their confusion and ideological collapse was provoked by their inability to develop either a programme or operative tactics for the Russian proletariat during the long death agony and final spasm of the Stalinist dictatorship.

Those claiming to be Trotskyist were obliged to do more than sit on their principles. They had to advance tactical solutions in the face of a clash between the Stalinist conservatives and those mass, nationalist, democratic and proletarian forces that were the express target of the Emergency Committee (SCSE). How could the planned property relations of the workers' state be defended from the assault of the open capitalist restorationists while at the same time championing the political rights of the working class and national movements?

The Stalinophile sectarians claimed that it was necessary either to back the coup plotters' bid for power or else abstain on this clash. When the Stalinists proved their impotence, when the "Red Army" sided with Yeltsin, when the workers failed to rise in revolt against the "Yeltsin dictatorship"; that is, when their illusory perspectives proved utterly bankrupt, these groups decided that either as a direct result of the "Yeltsin coup" or during the following months the workers' state finally perished. For these groups a capitalist state of one form or another is now in existence in Russia.

There is an underlying unity between the positions advanced by these Stalinophiles in the course of the coup days and their analysis of the end of the workers' state. In the first case they grossly overestimated the anti-capitalist character of the forces grouped within the SCSE. Then in the aftermath of their defeat, they underestimated the difficulties that still lay ahead of Yeltsin in using his newly-won political power to overthrow the post-capitalist property relations.

And the reason for this underlying unity is clear. All these forces evinced a tendency to identify the Stalinist bureaucracy with the workers' state itself, and to see its defeat as synonymous with the end of post-capitalist property relations.

These sects have one and all decided to direct their rage and disillusionment at the LRCI, the only tendency to produce a programme and operative revolutionary tactics during the August coup and since. Our sectarian opponents, clearly believing that if you repeat a bare faced lie often enough it will gain currency, pepper their polemics with assertions that we *supported* Yeltsin during the days of the abortive coup in Moscow.

We did nothing of the sort. We gave not one iota of political support to Yeltsin, and nor did we in any way support his grab for power.[2]

It cannot be denied for a single minute that the defeat of the coup *objectively* aided Yeltsin's grab for power, just as the defeat of the Kornilov coup in September 1917 stabilised Kerensky's regime for another month or so. But there the analogy unfortunately ends. The Bolsheviks, without giving a shred of political support to Kerensky, fought arms in hand to defend the dissolution of his government by Kornilov, all the better to go on to overthrow Kerensky themselves, at the head of the armed workers, in October. Alas, there were no modern Bolshevik forces in Russia in 1991.

Political opposition to Yeltsin does not itself, therefore, answer the question: what response should Trotskyists have made to the coup itself? If it was necessary and principled to defend the democratic rights of the workers and the

oppressed nations, then it had to be done—alongside the Yeltsin-led forces. If, on the other hand, the objective strengthening of Yeltsin was indeed a greater evil than a Yannaev-Pugo dictatorship then it would have been necessary to help the latter to come to power. Abstention out of fear of political contamination by ones opponents was an untenable and cowardly position.

We were unequivocally in favour of action to defeat the coup makers. It was in the interests of the workers to thwart them in their aims. In the aftermath of the coup's collapse we were equally opposed to Yeltsin's assault on state power.

In the event, we make no apology for outlining a series of tactics designed to fulfil all these objectives. What were they? First of all we called on the working class to stop the coup and smash the plotters by class action, a general strike, obstructing the army and KGB's manoeuvres. This meant trying to win over the soldiers and arm the workers. The LRCI called on the Soviet workers to form soviet-type bodies—agitationally linking this to the defeat of the coup and the defence of all those democratic rights the masses had won or wanted to win.

Linked to this was the need to put demands on Yeltsin, Popov, Sobchak and their military and KGB supporters to open the arsenals, use all the media to spread the call for a general strike, for workers' militia. Yeltsin made a timid call for a general strike and backed off as soon as it became clear that he had the support of a large section of the army and even the KGB. Sobchak actually disarmed workers in Leningrad who had armed themselves.

A revolutionary organisation in the USSR in 1991 would have offered and called for such a limited united front against the coup. The fact that the leaders such as Yeltsin and the so-called Democrats would almost certainly have rejected it is no argument against addressing them with the call for a united front. It would have created the best possible conditions for forming the united front at the base, amongst those who had huge illusions in Yeltsin.

The nature of Yeltsin's politics in no way precluded Trotskyists from seeking a united front with Yeltsin and his supporters against the coup. A *principled* united front never involves political support for ones temporary allies or a stifling of political criticism. For this reason, as Trotsky put it, it is possible to make a united front with "the devil and his grandmother", on one condition: not to bind one's hands.

This is why, at one and the same time as we called for a united front against the coup, we warned that the democratic restorationists would be the main danger if the bureaucratic conservatives were defeated and if the working class proved neither conscious of the need nor strongly organised enough to take power into its own hands. We opposed any working class political support for, or confidence in Yeltsin and his gang and as far as was possible (given the workers' illusions or apathy) we advocated mobilising opposition to their "seizure" of power. The moment the coup collapsed and the Yeltsinites began their grab for power we called for breaking the united front and urged the workers to strike out independently to seize power from the bureaucrats and the restorationists.

Nevertheless, up to the point of the failure of the coup the immediate main danger was a victory for Pugo and his coterie. Since the democratic restorationists were obliged to resist the coup in order to survive themselves, it was possible—and given the relationship of forces, *necessary*—to form a common front of resistance with those forces led by them.

This was doubly true since almost the entire politically conscious minority of the proletariat (the independent unions, especially the Miners' Federation) were led by Yeltsinites. These workers constituted a sort of labour aristocracy, have adopted pro-market positions and were therefore prone to AFL-CIO influence. But their organisations were then the only unions with a record of struggle and with any sort of internal democracy.

One of our more vigorous detractors, the Revolutionary Trotskyist League (RTL-USA) state that "the LRCI even went so far as to send a representative to the "White House" to defend the counter-coup of Yeltsin and imperialism."[3] It is completely untrue to say that we went with the aim of defending the counter-coup and imperialism. Moreover, we were not there in defence of "bourgeois democracy" in general, nor was it in defence of the parliamentary institutions *as institutions*.

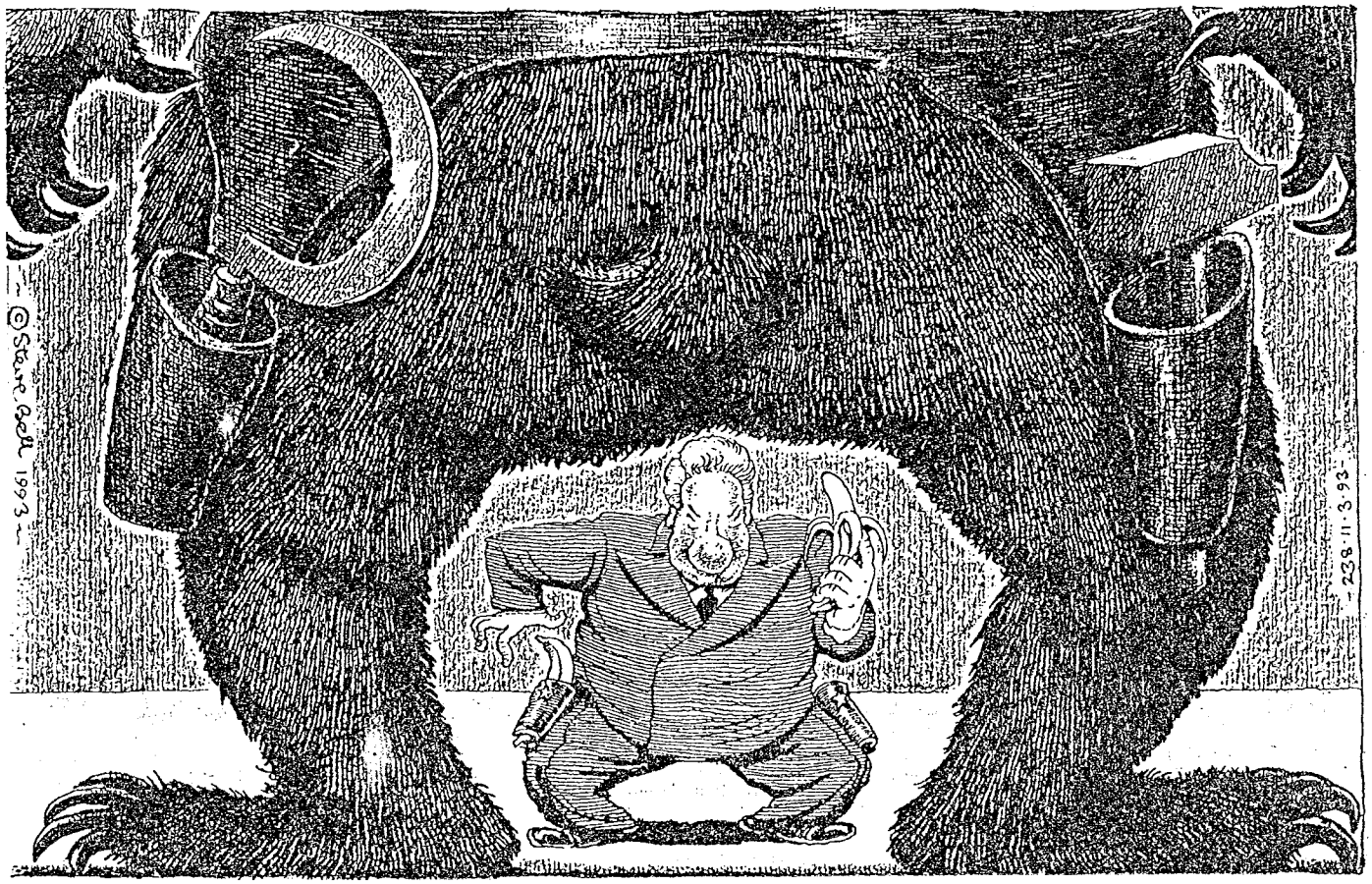
But it *did* include a common defence of these parliaments and city soviets against dissolution or arrest by the coup-makers because this was a *key element in the crushing of centrally organised resistance.*

As in the case of the control of the media and communications system, these common measures of defence were simultaneously and inseparably measures of defence for the workers' organisations and workers' liberties. No-one who was serious about defending the latter could stand aside from defending the former.

The coup-makers' attack and Yeltsin's defiance of them made the Russian parliament building the focus of resistance to the coup. Had Yeltsin's general staff been arrested or killed then the army and the KGB would have rallied decisively to Pugo, Kryuchkov, Yanaev and co. They would thereafter have mopped up all resistance piecemeal, including the resistance of the miners, and the other independent unions.

Last but not least the "socialist" and "Trotskyist" groups would have been taken apart. These facts were for us a hundred times more important than the fact that Bush and Major were jamming the airwaves with messages of support. As Trotsky once said, politics would be a simple business if one simply had to put a minus wherever the bourgeoisie put a plus.

In the absence of any alternative centre for organising proletarian resistance separate from the Yeltsinite and "democratic" forces, it would have been doctrinaire, abstract and sectarian to counterpose a non-existent workers' democracy or soviets to existent democratic rights and to institutions created by their exercise. Our task was to use the institutions to hand, to defeat the immediate greater danger whilst at the same time fighting to develop class organs which could become weapons against the "devil and his grandmother" that circumstances forced us to bloc with during August 18-20.



The International Bolshevik Tendency sought the victory of the coup plotters. Its central justification for supporting the SCSE in August 1991 is that it would have held up the social counter-revolution. In their special supplement in September 1991 they wrote;

"The August coup attempt was a confrontation in which the working class had a side. A victory for the coup leaders would not have rescued the USSR from the economic impasse that Stalinism has led to, nor would it have removed the threat of capitalist restoration. It could, however, have slowed the restorationist momentum at least temporarily, and bought precious time for the Soviet working class."[4]

What can this possibly mean? If the Stalinists are incapable of solving the problem of the stagnating soviet economy, of overhauling the planning mechanisms and of reversing the tendency towards restoration, then the question arises; who can? The only answer must be the working class. But this answer begs another question in turn; namely, what are the best *political* conditions in which the working class could obstruct the restorationist measures in the here and now, strengthening its self-organisation and class consciousness in the process, and advancing towards the overthrow of a social layer that prevents society going forward?

In truth, the rest of the left received their answer to these questions many years before—in Poland. There, the 1981 imposition of martial law by General Jaruzelski was supported by the IBT (then members of the iSt). They supported the crushing of Solidarnosc because the workers' demands for "free elections" to the fake-parliamentary body Sejm) and "free trade unions" were "the transitional slogans of imperialist counter-revolution". The iSt refused to grapple with the contradiction presented by a 10 million-strong mass movement. Solidarnosc was at that time a working class movement for better wages and conditions and for political reform.

In general, its leadership used the mass movement to wrench concessions from the bureaucracy, including market reforms in the operation of the economy. Part of the highest leadership of Solidarnosc was consciously pro-capitalist and wanted to use Solidarnosc to promote its aims. Faced with this the task of Trotskyists consisted of seeking to split the masses from their leadership, who in the last analysis had more in common with the bureaucracy than with the objective interests of the workers massed in Solidarnosc.

The IBT did not learn any of this from Poland. On the contrary, they endorsed their mistake. They argued;

"While we defend democratic rights, we regard collectivised property in the means of production as a much more valuable conquest for the working class, and private property, not political dictatorship, as the greater evil . . . If the Emergency Committee had had reliable military units in the capital, and triumphed solely by force of arms, it might well have attacked the freedoms granted under Gorbachev sooner than Yeltsin. Many union leaders could have been jailed, union publications suppressed and meetings broken up . . . This was the choice we faced in Poland in 1981."[5]

Did the martial law "breathing space" in Poland improve the prospects of political revolution, halt the restoration process, split the masses from the leaders of Solidarnosc? Not at all. The first years of the coup were used by the regime to break up working class organisations that were free from Stalinist control and thereby remove the threat to its privileges—which was what inspired the Stalinists to move in the first place. But within two years, and on this basis,

they were able to accommodate with the old leaders of Solidarnosc and move towards the restoration of capitalism.

Meanwhile, the hatred for Stalinism was intensified and the idea that Stalinist bureaucracy and planned property relations were synonymous was entrenched. Moreover, any opportunity for a revolutionary, Trotskyist, alternative to be built was temporarily prevented by the coup. As a result the pro-capitalist consciousness of the Polish workers was *deepened* immeasurably by the experience of repression.[6]

For Trotskyists the central strategic task of the political revolution is to so develop class consciousness that the workers become convinced *themselves* of the need to defend the collectivised property relations. In the USSR the biggest obstacle to this task was the existence of the Stalinist bureaucracy; it was at one and the same time the architect and enforcer of political and national oppression, the disorganiser of the planned economy, and the chief source of pro-capitalist ideas.

It is simply absurd for the IBT to suggest we are "petit-bourgeois democrats" or view "democratic rights as the holy of holies".[7] We judge the question of democratic rights from one standpoint only: which rights will assist the working class in attaining class consciousness? The working class can *only* become conscious of its historic goal—political revolution—through the experience of organising, discovering voluntary bonds of solidarity, testing out proclaimed saviours and misleaders in open struggle.

For all these reasons to side with the bureaucracy against the working class and its democratic restorationist misleaders is criminal folly. It is in fact to drag the banner of Trotsky's name in the filth of Stalinism. It is the worst possible disservice to the cause of defending the planned property relations.

Our Stalinophile opponents see an unbroken continuum between the existence of democratic rights and the overthrow of capitalism. We reject this. The chief obstacle the restorationists have to overcome is not the totalitarian bureaucracy but the *working class*. Destruction of the workers' state does not just mean ousting Stalinist administrators. It means tearing up the established social and economic relations that the working class experience as part of the legacy of October: relatively full employment; welfare and food provision tied to the factories and state farms. It means imposing drastic price increases which the working class can still resist with all its might. By doing all it can to defeat the Stalinist-revanchist coup, the working class confronts the enemy Yeltsin with the decisive contest still ahead.

This then is the lesson of history. The IBT by contrast steer clear of any attempt to examine the balance sheet of Poland after 1981. Rather, when the IBT search for an argument to justify the claim that the "borrowed time" could have been used to strengthen the cause of political revolution, they set aside the record of history and reach instead for fantastic speculation.

They say that *if* the SCSE had mobilised popular support for their action against Yeltsin then it "would have remained partially dependent on a popular base for the consolidation of their rule. This would have opened the door for continued and expanded working class political action."[8]

In place of this nonsensical fantasy the IBT should ponder *why* the SCSE did *not* call on the working class. Could it have been that the coup plotters were in dread fear of losing their power and privileges over this working class? Is this not why they did not call for the defeat of Yeltsin in the name of socialism, collectivised property, October 1917 and the working class? Is it not because the SCSE wanted to resolve the conflict by keeping the struggle within the bureaucracy, to strengthen their hand and set the terms of a new style of capitalist restoration? The IBT should have followed a policy guided by the answers to these questions, rather than by their Stalinophile delusions.

In the same way that the IBT retrospectively bemoaned the heavy-handed repression meted out by Jaruzelski as unnecessary to the task of crushing Solidarnosc, in Russia they hoped the Stalinists would act more decently, if firmly. But when the time came the "hardliners" only acted less professionally—thankfully. But if they had succeeded we can see what the situation would have been. Their decrees banned strikes, and clamped down on the press. Moreover, and here we see a difference even with Poland, the success of the SCSE would have seen a huge repression of the national movements in the republics, quite possibly a bloody suppression. This would have certainly solidified the ideological ties between nationalist restorationists and the masses.[9] In short, any time bought would only have been used up effectively by the forces of political and social counter-revolution. How could it be otherwise given that the left wing would have been defeated and, as the IBT admit, the Stalinists could not improve the situation?

Having rested the first argument on the shifting sands of speculation about what did *not* happen, the IBT rest the other half of their case on more dependable foundations: *dogmatism*. Their argument is straightforward enough.

"The Emergency Committee represented the wing of the bureaucracy most dependent upon the survival of the central state apparatus, and thus saw its threatened break up as a mortal danger. The Soviet working class, for entirely different reasons, also had a stake in the preservation of the institutions of the degenerated workers' state, which were an obstacle to capitalist restoration. There was therefore a temporary convergence of interest between the Emergency Committee and the historic interests of the working class. . . "[10]

Let us look at it closely. The weight of the argument rests on the nature of the "central state apparatus" and "institutions of the degenerated workers' state" that both sides are held to have a common interest in preserving. The working class have every interest in preventing the break up of central planning agencies, distribution agencies, statistical agencies, wholesale system, departments that administer the monopoly of foreign trade and so on; preserve them from dissolution by restorationists and try to take them out of the hands of the bureaucracy.

Revolutionaries and workers should be prepared to block with anyone prepared to help in this. All those prepared to keep the books closed to the agents of the IMF, a those prepared to boycott directives to allow individual enter-

prises to trade directly with multinationals and bypass the state, all these should be appealed to from above and below with the aim of united front activity. Moreover, revolutionaries place demands on the Stalinist bureaucracy to this effect. Naturally, not for one minute do we renounce the struggle to take these institutions out of the hands of the Stalinists.

Was that what the SCSE was defending on the night of 18 August? No. The "central state apparatus" that they put Gorbachev on sick leave for undermining with his Union Treaty for was quite different. In the first place, the SCSE acted to defend the all-Union apparatus of *repression and political administration*. This was most immediately threatened by the proposal to turn the USSR into a real federation with major powers for the republics. Sections of the Army High Command and the KGB saw that the break-up of the centralised state would drastically reduce the scope of their plunder and privilege, which for the bureaucracy is based on power rather than property.

Even then, in the event, major sections of the High Command and the all-Union apparatus failed to stand up and be counted. Sections of the CPSU also saw themselves at risk, but the CPSU as a whole was hopelessly split and had to be by-passed by the plotters in the decisive days.

The IBT should think carefully what the most immediate effect of tightening and "rescuing" the all-Union structures would have been. They were understood and felt by the masses to be agencies of Russian and Moscow oppression in place to prevent their self-determination. The Soviet workers of whom the IBT likes to speak are not an abstraction simply fighting for economic demands in the factories. They were mobilised in many places around legitimate demands for national self-determination or self-management. And the fact remains that a correct strategy for political revolution inside the USSR in those months depended crucially on a correct policy towards the national question. Had the coup succeeded the SCSE would have crushed these struggles and thereby strengthened nationalism and its pro-capitalist wing.

The whole self-justification of the IBT and all those who backed the SCSE rests not on a serious analysis of the political dynamic of the day but on rigid adherence to a dogma. All dogmas contain an important element of truth. But dogma begins when the truth becomes modified in central and crucial aspects by the passage of time; in taking this into account the dogmatists see only "revisionism" or "capitulation to liberal and social democratic opinion".

On this question the dogma starts from Trotsky's correct observation that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a parasite feeding off the healthy body of the USSR; it provided no useful function but it had every interest in the self-preservation of the body without which it would perish. Hence, all Trotskyists "know" that the Stalinist bureaucracy would have to defend the post-capitalist property relations in order to defend its privileges; workers could bloc with them not to defend their privileges but to defend the foundation of future political and economic conquests.

But this truth of Trotsky's was historically grounded and therefore relative. Trotsky placed alongside the first analogy, another. What if the parasite was harmful, life-threatening even? What if the contradiction was such that the parasite brought to death's door the body on which it depended?

By the mid 1980s the Stalinist caste in the USSR was utterly incapable of developing the body off which it fed; *nothing* it could do, no action it could take, could improve the situation. The IBT admit that the SCSE could have found no solution to their crisis. They could have only made matters worse. So they exclude even that a renewed period of economic growth could have provided the conditions under which the working class could have grown and prospered and spontaneously regained some allegience to the idea that planned property was an advance over capitalism.

When the SCSE acted they had no other policy to that of Gorbachev. They even believed they were acting to preserve his original strategy against his new concessions. Having repressed the democratic and national movements and restricted, at the very least, the operation of working class organisations, the bureaucracy would have adopted the policies of the market and set out on a more authoritarian capitalist road, one that left the working class less room for intervention to halt the process.

Had the coup succeeded, then instead of the essentially *political and ideological* ties that today bind the ex-Soviet masses to the pro-capitalist Yeltsin despite 18 months of misery, the masses would face a form of repression that would deny them the right or the possibility even to consider which political forces are worthy of their support.

The harsh fact for the "hardliners" was that their level of power and privilege could no longer be extracted upon the basis of a *degenerate*—indeed, *moribund workers'* state economy; their privileges and the continued existence of these relations had come into an absolute rather than a relative contradiction with each other. For the hardliners, privileges could be negotiated and transferred into wealth and property, but on one condition: that they kept the USSR together in the process of an authoritarian transition to capitalism.

In their recent publication and attack on the LRCI the Revolutionary Trotskyist League (RTL) state that the LCC(I)[11], like the RTL, "stood clearly for independent mobilisation of the working class against the coup plotters and Yeltsin. The LCC(I) clearly understood that neither the open bourgeois forces (Yeltsinites), nor the Stalinist bureaucracy . . . was supportable."[12]

We have already dealt above with the arguments as to why the defeat of the SCSE was preferable. But the point to note about the RTL is their cowardice. Originally, the RTL argued that:

"The Stalinist bureaucracy was the main danger only for *three days*. During those three days it was necessary to focus working class resistance against the coup."[13] Given this correct estimation we argued that they should have overcome their subjectively sectarian fear of opportunist contamination and have united with the democratic restorationists—the devil's grandmother—to stop this "main danger". But they refused.

In fact the RTL rapidly shifted position and adopted a line in complete contradiction to the first: "For the RTL . . . the Yeltsinites were not even temporarily the lesser evil, since



they were the chosen agents of imperialism to oversee capitalist restoration."[14]

This is the position they have now settled on with their partners in the LCC(I). Naturally, they have never accounted for the change. But even so, if Yeltsin was at least an *equal* danger they should have refrained from acting against the coup altogether, and have advised the workers to stay at home. But they did not do this either.

If the LCC(I)insist that the triumph of Yeltsin was synonomous with the end of the workers' state then they have a duty to retrospectively argue that they should have supported the SCSE since they would have delayed this outcome at the very least. In short, between the IBT and the LRCI there is no coherent middle ground on the question of the 1991 coup.

The Spartacists (ICL) top the list of political cowards. Everything in their previous arsenal of positions on Stalinism dictated that they should support Pugo et al. But they did not. They say that the reason they did not support the coup was that the SCSE did not call upon the working class to smash the Yeltsinites at the barricades. This position flies in the face of their support for the crushing of Solidarnosc. Jaruselski did not seek to mobilise the Polish workers against their leaders. He crushed them nonetheless, and the Spartacists supported it. Despite this inconsistency, they retained their false Stalinophile premise. The question of leadership of the fight against restoration and Yeltsin is left to the Stalinists.

The Spartacists' chronic sectarian logic then led them into a further quandry. Because the SCSE did not do exactly what the ICL wanted, they refused them their support.

The ICL's position then became even more absurd. They now say that the August Coup and its aftermath "appear to have been decisive in the direction of development of the SU, but only those who are under the sway of capitalist ideology would have been hasty to draw this conclusion at the time"[15]

This is a breathtaking confession of bankruptcy. The ICL maintain that the August Coup was decisive, and yet insist that it would have been wrong to recognise it at the time! To have recognised this "truth" at the time would have been a result not of the application of Marxism, but of bourgeois ideology! Everything is turned upside down: those who recognise a truth are declared wrong, and bourgeois ideology becomes the font of human understanding. Marxism is thus transformed from a science to a squalid exercise in self-justification.

If the August Coup was "decisive" than the Spartacists should be critical of themselves for sitting on the fence at the time, not denouncing those who "correctly" estimated its significance.

But what were the consequences of the coup? How decisive was it for the Marxist understanding of the class character of the Russian state?

In the day and weeks following the August coup the Stalinophiles queued up to announce the end of the workers' state. In September 1991 the IBT argued:

"All available evidence leads us to conclude that the defeat of the coup and the ascension to power of the elements committed to reconstructing the economy on a capitalist basis constituted a qualitative turning point."[16]

For the IBT the crucial question is whether or not the Stalinist bureaucracy is still holding state power. This a total break with Marxism. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all defined the class character of a state *as a whole*, that is, a bourgeois state or a workers' state, by the property relations and forms upon which the state superstructure is erected.

As Trotsky said,

" . . . we base our politics first and foremost upon our analysis of property forms and class relationships. A more detailed and concrete analysis of the factors in the 'superstructure' is possible for us only on this theoretical basis." [17]

Trotsky speaking of the still healthy Bolshevik state noted its:

"dual character; socialistic in so far as it defends social property in the means of production, bourgeois in so far as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom."

Trotsky correctly saw the degeneration of the workers' state as the quantitative and qualitative growth of the latter tendency as against the former, indeed the erection by a "series of minor civil wars" of a dictatorship that blocked the advance to socialism.

Of course, it will be objected there are periods, necessarily short ones, where the economic base of society, the property forms, belong to one class whilst political power has passed into the hands of another. The IBT appeal to this to support their argument:

"If the character of states were defined by property relations alone, then the Bolsheviks, who did not conduct extensive nationalisations until the summer of 1918, stood for eight months at the head of a bourgeois state."[18]

But here we have a situation where the workers' government and the workers' soviets are in the process of expropriating the bourgeoisie and smashing the bureaucratic military machine of the capitalist state, replacing it with the economic and political forms of the workers' state. In any transition period shorthand definitions, which suffice for "normal" periods, are inadequate and we have to elaborate them. Between October 1917 and July 1918, the dictatorship of the proletariat was in conflict with a capitalist economy. As defined by the character of the state machine, without a doubt this was a workers' state. This was what had to be defended against counter-revolution.

But at the same time that the capitalist mode of production was being uprooted in the USSR a bourgeois counter-revolution was beginning in the state machine.

The rise to political power of a totalitarian bureaucracy was a partial, (i.e. not an economic but a political) restoration. The class character of this dictatorial state *machine*, the military-bureaucratic superstructure which Trotsky insisted was an instrument of economic parasitism and political oppression against the working class, was far from proletarian. Indeed, Trotsky insisted that it was *bourgeois* in type, even approximating to fascism in its political form. Can a state in which such a regime can still exist be a workers' state? Yes: but its proletarian character stems not at all from the bureaucratic dictatorship let alone the Stalinists' supposed subjective commitment to preserving the planned property relations. It stems solely and exclusively from the survival of the planned and statified property relations.

Thus there exists a contradiction between the political and social regimes. In support of their position the IBT quote Trotsky on this contradiction:

"But what does such a type of conflict between the economy and the state mean? It means a revolution or a counter-revolution. The victory of one class over another signifies that it will reconstruct the economy in the interests of the victors"[19]

This is correct and there are numerous historical examples of the political nature of state power changing and then going on to effect changes in the property relations. But did Trotsky say that this change in the state superstructure would alter the character of the property relations *immediately*? In the same article he clearly says no:

"Only the intrusion of a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary force in property relations can change the class nature of the state"[20]

The task is to identify the exact qualitative turning point in *this* "intrusion". A change of leading personnel within the already bourgeois-type state machine—from objective to subjective restorationists—is not the qualitative moment of transition from a workers' to a bourgeois state.

Only a tendency that had in all essentials abandoned Trotsky's analysis could identify the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorship with the collapse of the workers' state itself. Any Marxist, let alone a self-proclaimed Trotskyist would have to show when and how the return to capitalist social relations had taken place. Not our ultra-orthodox dogmatists! No sooner had the Stalinist party's hold on power been broken, no sooner had the pathetic August putsch shattered all their fond hopes for the preservation of this dictatorship than our dogmatists proclaimed the restoration of capitalism and abandoned the defence of the planned and statified property relations, the only real gains of October.

Where does this anti-Trotskyist method come from? To discover this you have to trace the IBT's method to the Spartacist League of the 1960s. In attempting to analyse the Cuban Revolution the leaders of the Spartacists developed the idea that the Castro bonapartist regime in 1959 and 1960 did not defend either capitalism or any other set of property relations. Rather, it was a petit-bourgeois government that was uncommitted to the defence of either. This situation was said to have existed until Castro finally jumped into the camp of Stalinism under the hostile pressure of the USA and turned Cuba into a deformed workers' state.

This was an unnecessary innovation. It is well within the marxist understanding of Bonapartism to recognise that a petit-bourgeois regime can oscillate under the pressure of more fundamental forces between defending first one and later a different set of property relations. It does not mean that the governmental regime becomes detached from the state which it administers. The class character of the state is defined as always by whatever social form of property exists and is actually being defended by bodies of armed men and women. Nor is it difficult to understand that a government, providing it has the requisite bodies of armed men at its disposal, can act to overthrow the property relations. But if its does so, *as a government*, as a regime, it does not have a neutral class character but is either a bourgeois or a workers' government. It can either be a revolutionary Bolshevik government based on organs of working class power, or a degenerate Stalinist workers' government which opposes all self-activity of the masses and blocks the road to socialism.

The IBT entered the period of the death agony of Stalinism, like the ICL, saddled with this utter confusion on the character and the role of the state in revolution and counter-revolution. Hence, they attribute the class character of the state to the subjective intentions of the office holders. This would be shallow enough if it were not for another unpleasant fact; namely, *which* office holders, *which* elements of the superstructural state machine is considered to be decisive?

The main group within the LCC(I)—Voce Operaia—inherited this methodology from their flirtation with the iSt. The RTL had to abandon their position to embrace the LCC(I). Writing about the nature of the state that exists in Russia, in January 1992, they state that following the success of Yeltsin:

"The USSR was no longer a workers' state of any kind. The political power was passed into the hands of the bourgeois forces. The state was no longer a weapon to defend the collective property and the planned economy. . . . restoration is a process and not a sudden event. But the class nature of the state depends also on the process which it vouches for . . . the Russian state is today an instrument of the capitalist restoration and not of guardianship of the collectivised economy."[21]

So the class character of the state is derived in much the same way as for the IBT; they reduce the question of the nature of the state to the project of its government. Since joining the LCC(I) the RTL have endorsed this view:

"Which classes the state serves . . . is the most important criterion for the definition of the state." The RTL fail to account for the important differences that this analysis has with their own developed in their earlier press on the restoration of the capitalist state in Poland where they argued that "four requirements for reaching a qualatitive transformation . . . from a deformed workers' state to a capitalist state" were needed. One of these included abolition of the planned econmomy (as defined by the introduction of currency convertibility). For Voce Operaia (VO) this is not relevant; yet the LCC(I) endorsed the RTL position on Poland at their last gathering! [22]

VO are not content with sharing the position of the IBT. They try to enrich marxism with the following gem.

"If Comrade Mandel looks for a ruling Russian capitalist class, he wouldn't be able to find it yet. But if he digs much deeper he would discover that, thanks to Gorbachev first and Yeltsin then, there is today a ruling class. It is the Western imperialist bourgeoisie, of which the former Soviet State is only an Euro-Asian offshoot."[23]

Following this trend of thought, which dissolves the part (Russia) into the whole (global imperialism) we could argue with just as much "logic" that since the Stalinist bureaucracy too was an agent of world imperialism within the old workers' state, then the old workers' state was in reality a capitalist state . . . without capitalists!

The Spartacists (ICL) themselves at first showed a greater degree of caution and native pragmatism than the IBT, but eventually they arrived at a similar conclusion. A resolution of their International Conference in November 1992 states:

"Given the linear extension of recent developments, the International Conference is compelled to note and draw conclusions from the position that the degenerated workers' state of Stalin and his heirs has been destroyed."[24]

As the originators of the methodology employed by the IBT on the question of the state, it was to be expected that they would see the point of qualitative transition in the same way, straightforward, transparent and wrong. But they managed to make a hash of it.

It was developments during the course of 1992 which they saw as crucial: the dissolution of the USSR, the introduction of price rises, the crushing of the air traffic controllers strike and, finally, the dissolution of the Red Army. Here it is hard not to agree with the criticisms made by the IBT of their former teachers; none of this rings true. It is an eclectic mish-mash and amounts to disappointed hopes in the Red Army they had been hailing for over a decade as the core of the gains of October. For the IBT the workers' state stood or fell with the CPSU. For the ICL it was the Soviet Armed Forces.

Those who claim the Russian workers' state is no more have a difficulty in explaining the significance of the events of the last 18 months in Russia. A perpetual and still unresolved battle has taken place between the fast track restorationists around Yeltsin and a broad coalition of chauvinists, conservatives and state capitalists. Many of the latter supported Yeltsin in August 1991 but have resisted him ever since.

Assessing the failure of the coup attempt and Yeltsin's victory we stated presciently as early as 30 August 1991 when Yeltsin seemed unstoppable:

"The 'conservative' faction is under fierce attack from the Yeltsinites and even from Gorbachev. But it still has redoubts and pockets of resistance. It still has large numbers of deputies in the Supreme and republican soviets. In Azerbaijan and some central Asian republics its still holds power. There the duality of power has a territorial aspect. Unless they are removed in the next months they could launch a limited counter-attack as the restorationists themselves hit a crisis provoked by resistance to their programme."[25]

In November 1991 we published the following statement of our differences with the RTL which included:

". . . . the LRCI differs with the RTL in that the latter believe that the pre-existing dual power between the two major factions of the bureaucracy has been decisively resolved.The LRCI believes that whilst Yeltsin has established a restorationist *government* with executive power over the USSR and RSFSR state apparatus, and thus has shifted the balance of the dual power qualitatively in his favour, *it has not yet resolved it."*

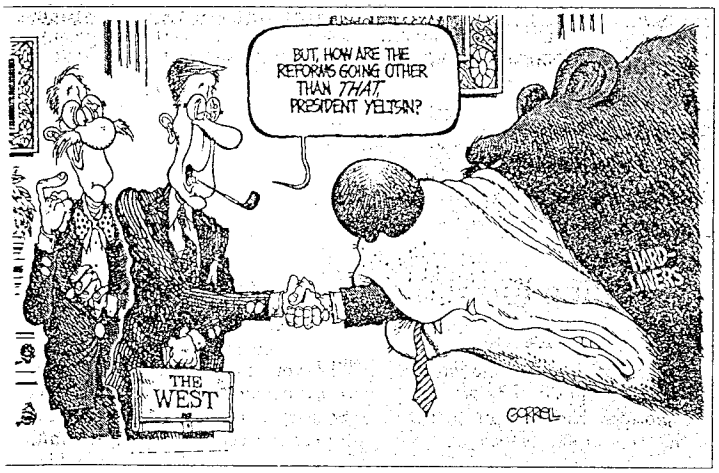
Everything since then has proven us correct. This conflict is not just a squabble within the government; it takes the form of a split throughout society and divides the state machine itself. The social-restorationist forces are gathered around Yeltsin.

The powers given by the constitution to the Presidential executive is the source of their claim to sovereignty. On the other side, the Congress of Peoples' Deputies and to a lesser extent the Supreme Soviet claim equal authority for vetoing measures against Yeltsin. This split runs through the country and effects the armed forces on whom neither side has been able to count completely and which so far have declared their neutrality in all decisive conflicts.

In short, we have had an uninterrupted situation of dual power or dual powerlessness[26].Clearly this situation is unstable and must be resolved.

The IBT and the RTL/LCC(I) are blind to its existence and prefer not to consider the question at all in their analysis of the last 18 months. This is natural enough since their whole analysis cannot accommodate the social facts of the last period.

It is only necessary to give a precise content, to evaluate the present stage of the intrusion of the restorationist state machine into Russia's property relations to arrive at an understanding of the nature of the dual power in Russia today. The object of the struggle, the prize for the victorious camp, is indeed an economic one. As we have argued ever since 1990 the dismantling of the central state mechanisms for administering the plan was a necessary but insufficient step on the road to overthrowing post-capitalist property. Contrary to the claims of the IBT and LCC(I) we have *never*



identified a high degree of nationalised property on its own as signifying the existence of a workers' state.[27] Therefore, we do not associate a given level of privatisation with the restoration of capitalism. Rather, we have taken the reality of advanced "market socialist" degenerate workers' states as our starting point for analysing the moments of qualitative transition from a highly decentralised planned economy (e.g Yugoslavia in the 1980s) to a weak capitalist market economy.

In Eastern Europe the central state co-ordinating agencies that set physical targets and co-ordinated material resource allocation were greatly weakened in the 1980s. Thereafter, the decisive mechanism for ensuring the existence of some form of planned economy was the state central banking system. It distributed credits to enterprises, guaranteed the wages fund and mediated inter-enterprise debts. Through these financial mechanisms money retained its passive role and was prevented from acting as capital. Enterprises were thus prevented from acting according to commercial criteria. In short, the law of value of capitalism (production for profit) did not direct the accumulation process.

It has been our contention that in a highly centralised planning system like Russia the effect of the August coup on the economy has in many ways served to place Russia in a similar situation to that faced by countries such as Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

The IBT and ultra-lefts, on the other hand, centre all their attention on the abolition of the central administrative planning mechanisms that co-ordinated the allocation of physical goods. They fail to see the significance of the role played by the Central Bank in reproducing the essentials of the planning system.

It is for that reason that the economic goal of the contending forces in Russia today is control of the Central Bank and its allocation of credits to enterprises.[28] Each side—Yeltsin and Khasbulatov—have their own parallel administrations that check and control each other within these economic agencies. Only by resolving the political struggle over which body has sovereignty in Russia will Yeltsin be able to claim the prize and set about forcing the Central Bank to act as a weapon *for* the restoration of capitalism instead of subverting that process.

This is why the IBT analysis is so shallow. First, they hold subjective intentions to be paramount and neglect the fact that there is in Russia a gulf between the wish and the deed; moreover, even if they were right they still come up against the problem that there are competing forces who have yet to stamp their rule decisively on the direction of the economy.

None of this is to deny that enormously damaging pro-capitalist measures have been taken with huge effects on the working class. But they remain as yet preparatory, and secondary to the question of fundamental property transformation. Moreover, the imperialist bourgeoisie, who know a thing or two about property, have no doubt that the fundamental crossing of the Rubicon is yet to come.

The failure of the IBT to comprehend the nature of the transition process underway and their theoretical impatience also flow from another misunderstanding, this time concerning the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy itself. In seeking to justify their support for political dictatorship they advance the following argument:

"The need for political dictatorship is in inverse proportion to the strength of the ruling group. Private property in the means of production is a powerful social institution with deep roots in society, independent of any political regime . . . . Precisely because the Stalinist bureaucracy was a usurper caste, with no historical claim to legitimacy and no independent social moorings, it was forced to rely on a strict monopoly of political power. The Stalinists' use of dictatorial methods was an indication of their weakness, not their strength. The overthrow of the Stalinst bureaucracy by the workers would involve only a change in the forms of political rule, leaving the economic foundations intact."[29]

This is saying no more than that the roots of bourgeois property and a capitalist class are much more solidly planted than the Stalinist caste in a workers' state. Thus, the argument goes, we should support the maintaining of the caste dictatorship since it is an easier target to dislodge than a ruling bourgeois class.

This is a hopeless conflation of two arguments. The first, which is undoubtedly true, is that the caste is historically illegitimate, that it serves no necessary function to the system of accumulation and that its elimination would immeasurably improve the functioning of the economy. This is very unlike the capitalist class in its mode of production. But this idea is then mixed up with another, altogether wrong one: that the bureaucracy simply sits on top of some essentially undisturbed economic foundations as a political parasite and thus it can be removed by minor surgery.

It is not the Stalinist bureaucracy's roots but the IBT's understanding that is shallow. The bureaucracy does not simply function at the level of political administration and distribution. The caste is differentiated and functions down deep into the minutest layer of the functioning of economy—in the factories, within the trade unions, within all pores of society. Yeltsin and the IBT have found to their cost that simply removing the tops of the nomenklatura, and dissolving the national apparatus of the CPSU has not destroyed

the bureaucratic caste. The political revolution will have to deal with a mighty social formation which will not pass from the scene as easily as the IBT imagine.

And we are seeing negative proof of this now in the process of social counter-revolution. The enterprise managers, the backbone of the Industrial Union, are a mainstay of Civic Union and are tied closely to bureaucrats from the Central Banking administration. The old trade union apparatchiks from the bureaucracy still form the most important leaders of the largest trade unions. The roots of the Stalinist caste go further down than the IBT imagine. They have proved capable of considerable resistance to capitalist restoration, not out of a collective consciousness but out of individual self-interest. They are united in their desire to negotiate a highly statised transition that allows the bulk of them to survive the transition intact.

The tendencies that have already abandoned the defence of the planned property relations also all demonstrated how shallow their grasp of Trotskyism was. They identified the workers' state with the caste rule of the bureaucracy itself. Their cursing of this same bureaucracy was based on an epiphenomenal assessment of their policies. When push came to shove they had no adequately developed programme for defending these gains and no tactics for winning the proletariat itself to this defence.

Now they have nothing to say, nothing to offer the Russian workers as the decisive period of restoration approaches. Their Stalinophile sectarianism is a pathetic alibi for abstention.

No wonder that they can only write dyspeptic and slanderous polemics against the one tendency that not only understood and analysed this historic crisis but elaborated a transitional action programme to address it. Russia's workers will learn nothing from these pseudo-Trotskyist wailers at the funeral of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Let the dead bury their dead. ●

NOTES

1 We deal in this article with the following groups: the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT); the Liaison Committee of Communists (LCC(I)), including the recently affiliated Revolutionary Trotskyist League (RTL-USA); the International Communist League—Spartacists—formerly iSt.

2 We said at the time: "It was natural and necessary to bloc with all and anyone who by deeds was prepared to resist the closure of parties (except fascist ones), publications and democratically elected forums (e.g. republican parliaments) that the workers have expressed themselves through."

All blocs to stop the SCSE "had to be carried out within the context of no political support for Yeltsin at all . ". *Trotskyist International* No7, p6

3 See *International Trotskyist* no7 Spring 1993, p9. The RTL, then RTT, were at the time of the August coup , a fraternal group of the LRCI, but not within its democratic centralism. We broke this relationship over the differing positions adopted around these events.

4 *1917*, Supplement, September 1991, p2.

5 *1917* No12, p6

6 The trajectory of figures like Jacek Kuron is symptomatic. Once a leading Solidarnosc activist he became Minister for Labor quelling the workers' demands in the restoration process.

7 *1917*, No12 p6

8 ibid

9 The IBT should dwell upon the lesson of the relatively "peaceful" separation of Lithuania from Moscow and the relatively swift process of disillusionment that occurred with Saujudis as a result, a process leading to the free election of the old (now ex-) Stalinist chief as President!

10 *1917*, No12, p6

11 The LCC(I) formed in 1991 consists of Voce Operaia (Italy), RWP (Sri Lanka), RKL (Austria), Spartakbsund (Germany), CCP (France); RTL

12 *International Trotskyist* No7 ibid

13 *International Trotskyist* No4, p3

14 *Workers Power*, November 1991

15 *Spartacist*, Winter 1992-3, p17

16 *1917* Supplement September 1991. p3

17 Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, New York, 1973, p 123

18 *1917*, No12, p5

19 "Not a workers and not a bourgeois state", L Trotsky, November 1937, in *Writings, 1937-38* p64. Quoted by the IBT in *1917* Supplement, September 1991

20 ibid, p63

21 *Voce Operaia*, No 21

22 Perhaps there is an underlying tension in the respective positions because after "a rich discussion" the LCC(I) decided that Serbia was still a workers' state, despite that all were agreed that the Stalinist bureaucracy are seeking to introduce capitalism! We are told that because of the war in Bosnia they have not taken "the final measures"(!?) to make it a capitalist state. What these are and why they are necessary when the state is run by people committed to capitalism we are not told. But the RTL tell us that for them when "the bureaucracy in Belgrade reaches an agreement with imperialism on the borders of a new Serbian capitalist state (it has already happened —LRCI) the workers' state cannot prevail without an immediate political revolution." Now a diplomatic agreement is the Rubicon, ("the final measures") where once it was "currency convertibility"! Such flexible thinkers!

23 *Voce Operaia*, No 21

24 *Sparticist* Winter 1992-3 p17

25 *Trotskyist International* 7 p7

26 The IBT construct one whole argument based on a complete misreading of what we wrote early in 1992. In January 1992 *Workers Power* wrote, "The Soviet Union is dead." This only registered the fact that the *political* framework of the USSR was abolished and replaced by the CIS. This did not mean the end of the property relations of the workers' state. The IBT were trying to prove too much because they believed that the LRCI only later hit upon the idea that Russia was still a workers' state so as to minimise the importance of Yeltsin's counter-coup, so "distraught" was the LRCI about the consequences of Yeltsin's victory.

27 See "Poland's transition to capitalism", in *Permanent Revolution* 9 and "Understanding the restoration process" in *Trotskyist International* 7

28 As Deputy Prime Minster for the economy—Fydor—said in spring 1993, alluding to the Bolsheviks sending in sailors to disperse the Constituent Assembly in 1918; "Yeltsin should send in a detachment of sailors to occupy the Central Bank." *Financial Times* 22 March 1993

29 *1917*, No12, pp6-7

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