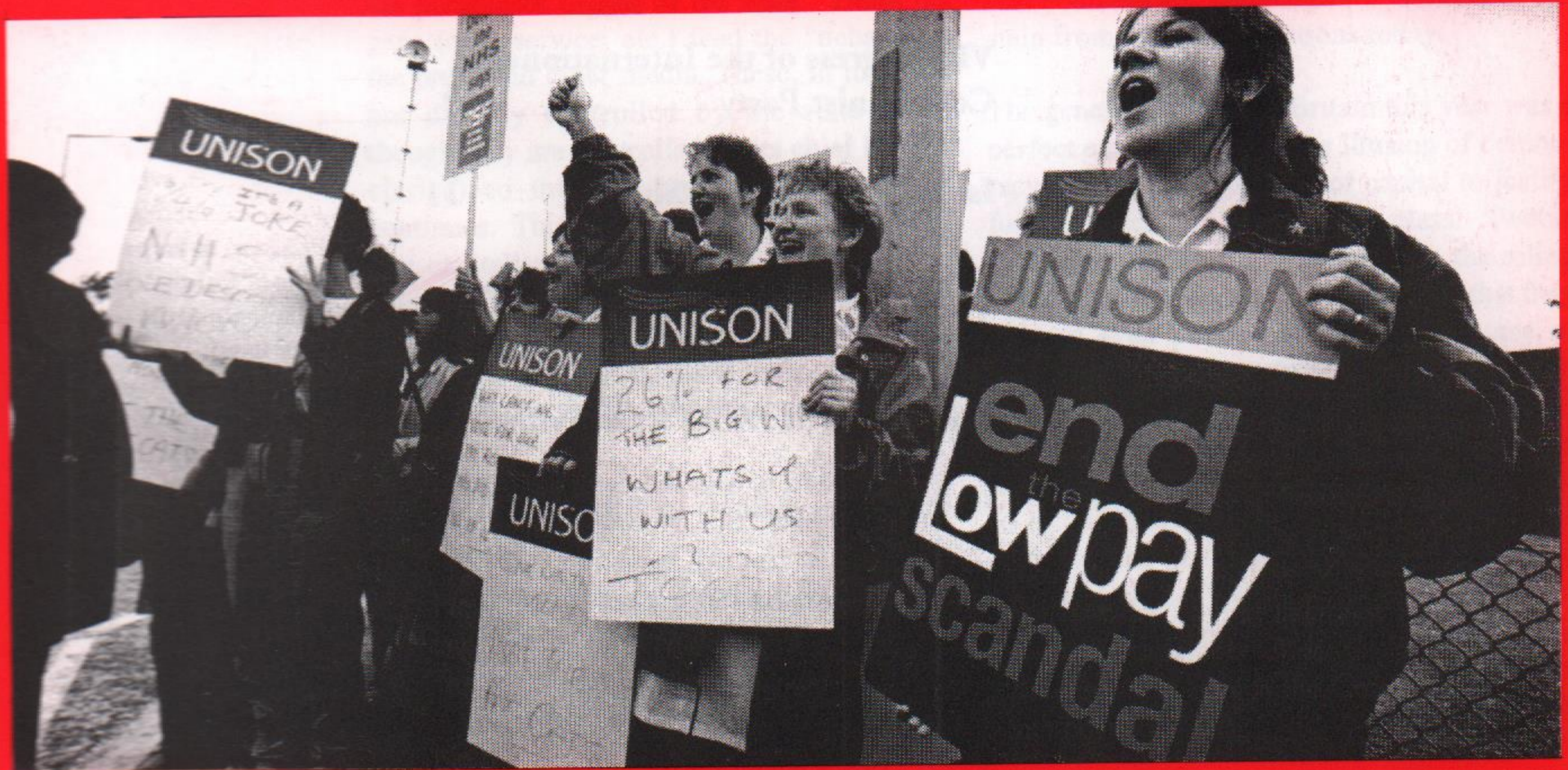


Revolutionary Perspectives 7

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation



New Labour - Same Old Capitalist Attacks

Sheffield Council Workers Strikes
CWO Theses on Organisation
The VIth Congress of *Battaglia Comunista*
USA Welfare Cuts (LAWV)
US Imperialism in Central Asia
The Palestinian National Question
Italian Imperialism in Albania
Against Work or Against Wage Labour?

**Revolutionary Perspectives
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Labour Victory

A Victory for Capitalism

It is a central truth of Marxist analysis that parliament is not the real centre of power of the capitalist state. It no longer even acts as “the executive committee of the ruling class” in any real sense. The decisions that are most vital to the capitalist class are taken elsewhere — by the permanent organs of the state. These organs (civil service, etc.) feed the “debate” in the press and other media. These, in turn, are not directly controlled by the state (even though they are controlled by its chief beneficiaries) so that the myth of a free press continues. This is the nature of the democracy that capitalism has developed. It is a perfect framework for giving the illusion that ultimately ‘the people’ have chosen how they want to be ruled whilst at the same time stepping up attacks on our working and living conditions.

The illusion that we are free to choose “who misgoverns us” once in five years (to paraphrase Lenin) is one of the central myths of democratic capitalism. And yet there are those who claim to be revolutionaries who continue to nourish the illusion that workers can use their vote to win improvements in their daily lives. They argue that as workers fought for the vote in the past then we should use it today. Even this is nonsense. In Britain, for example, the Chartist movement had been smashed by 1850. The ruling class did not give some male workers the vote until 1867. Yet workers managed to achieve higher living standards in the second half of the nineteenth century. Full adult suffrage did not arrive until 1928, i.e. when the ruling class had already prepared itself by creating the instruments to control the press etc. and when it was clear — after the 1st World War — that Labour and the unions were no threat to the system. Economic prosperity is always attributed to ‘democracy’ but really it is the other way round. The fact is that capitalism can only afford to have the trappings of democracy when it is booming economically. That is why today — after more than twenty years of worldwide economic crisis — the veneer of democracy is wearing a bit thin throughout the so-called democratic West. Elections or no elections, capitalism is out to pare down costs and squeeze as much as it can from the workers who actually produce the wealth the ‘fat cats’ are extorting. There is no possibility of changing this system through the ballot box. Elections take place to legitimate the rule of the rich and they are conducted to protect private property not undermine it. They further undermine the working class be-

cause they are based on the notion that society is made up of individual ‘citizens’ (or rather ‘subjects’ in monarchical Britain), all freely and equally expressing their opinion. The ballot box is the perfect way to isolate workers from solidarity with each other. This is why real communists campaign for workers to abstain from capitalist elections today.

The general election in Britain this year was a perfect example of how the illusion of democracy is used by all shades of capital to justify further attacks on the working class. Twelve years after the defeat of the miners, the ruling class in Britain were so self-confident that they did not even pretend to present a choice of programmes to the voters. We had two main parties but only one programme. In the face of a situation where the number of people living in “official poverty” has risen from 5 millions to 17 millions in the last 18 years what did the Labour Party promise? They promised **not** to change anything substantially. After only a matter of days in office even this was revealed as a lie. “New Labour” has come up with some very old capitalist policies. No more taxes for the rich but one of the very democratic measures Gordon Brown is thinking of having in his budget is to “widen the threshold” of taxpayers in general. In other words, milk some more out of those who earn less, as usual. Appointing Frank Field as ‘Minister for Welfare Reform’ is another gem. Field thinks that the problem with the Jobseekers Allowance and Project Work schemes is that they are not effective enough. Of course he doesn’t mean that the unemployed deserve to have the means to live a better life or that the government’s training schemes generally lead nowhere except back to the dole queue, he simply wants to cut more benefits and ensure that nobody is “better off” (!) on the dole than working for the most flexible (i.e. lowest) wage. Meanwhile Smiley Blair goes down to an East End housing estate and assures the inhabitants **he** is not going to forget the poorest in our society who are usually ignored by governments. So look out single mothers, here’s another chance for Field to have his day. You’re going to be kindly invited down to the Job Centre and asked why you’re not being more flexible and working for a pittance. No wonder over 50% of the bosses in the Confederation of British Industry wanted Labour to win the election (as we reported in *Workers Voice* 6). For the rest of us though, it’s the mixture as before: In Education Blunkett is working out not only how he can

abolish student grants completely but how much of the tuition fees they will also have to pay. The promise of future smaller class sizes (in any case only for infant classes) is already wearing thin as against the more substantial prospect of yet more teachers facing redundancy. (Or, better still, the sack. Why not get the Woodenhead man in charge of education 'standards' to declare as many teachers as he can to be inefficient and sack them? That's an easy way to cut costs!) Sounds familiar, doesn't it. And if anyone thinks the new government really has forgotten them, think again. We're all going to feel the squeeze: higher mortgages (great idea letting the Bank of England decide when and how much, as if it was nothing to do with the government, but it has everything to do with the fact that the ruling class manages the state together in its own interest, not ours); further erosion in the value of the state pension with more people obliged to cough up to the £650bn pension funds for the really fat cat finance capitalists of anonymous companies like 'Mercury Asset Management' to gamble on the stock exchange with. Very democratic that! This is apart from the further cuts in the health service that are certainly on the cards. (And possibly a reduction in prescription charges (yes, 'reduction') — but wait a minute — paid for by making those who are currently exempt pay as well! That's clearly democratic.)

Going through the motions of political democracy is one thing. What capitalism can't do when it is in desperate economic crisis is pretend that there can be such a thing as economic democracy. Labour has ditched any idea of social equality and since this was anyway only another myth fostered by the post-war boom workers can at least say that they now know where they stand. (Unless they are still being taken in by the Eighties Thatcher myth of everyone for themselves.)

Labour's Pimps - The Left

Some leftist groups like the Socialist Labour Party and the old Militant group (renamed The Socialist Party) stood in the election. The fact that they are not real socialists is not important here. They had few candidates and not many more votes. Their inevitable failure paid due tribute to the myth of the capitalist democratic system.

Other Trotskyists who have supported Labour for years continued to call for a vote for Labour. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) used the slogan "Kick the Tories Out but Don't Trust Blair". *Workers Power* simply said "Vote Labour". They argued that a large Labour majority would give the working class "the confidence to fight back". The common thread to all these kinds of position is the bottom line of supporting Labour. For these groups Labour is "a bourgeois workers party", bourgeois in its programme but dignified as

"worker" because it has a core of working class voters. Using such arguments the Front National in France becomes one of the most "bourgeois workers parties" in Europe! It is a pathetic distinction. Today, more than ever it should be clear that every electoral campaign is a festival for capitalism. It renews the ruling class mandate and the only communist and revolutionary position is abstentionism. Many of the working class think so too. In the most impoverished constituencies in Britain's city centres (e.g. Manchester Central, Liverpool Riverside, Sheffield Central) the turnout hardly passed 50%. Labour got fewer votes here than in 1992. The actual national turnout was the lowest since the 1930s. Official abstention was 29% (i.e. 3 millions more than in 1992) but given that another two millions are not on the register the real abstention rate was much higher.

Class Struggle is the Answer

However abstentionism is not enough. The working class can only develop its consciousness, its self-awareness by struggling against the misery that capitalism inflicts upon us. Despite all the setbacks of recent years concerted class struggle is still the factor the ruling class fears the most. Just before the election we saw a small example of this. When Ford threatened to pull out of Halewood in Liverpool the workers threatened to go on strike. Suddenly the Tories, the executioners of a millions of full-time jobs, the apostles of the free market, stepped forward and gave Ford £30 million to stay at Halewood. Why did they reverse a policy they had maintained since 1980? The answer is that they did not want the Ford workers to link up with the Liverpool dockers. It would have broken the isolation of the Liverpool dockers and possibly opened up a solidarity action which might have spread. The ruling class are so aware of this from past experience that the price of £30 million (which would have gone to some Korean firm to bring in more low wage work anyway) was worth paying. For us it also shows what the real battle terrain is. It is here that revolutionaries work. Not with the economic perspective of winning immediate gains but in the long term to show that workers have to unite against capitalism and that the only ultimate victory is the overthrow of the profits system.

Now that the Labour landslide has happened and that attacks have already begun (see the following article on Sheffield) we can at least say we campaigned against it. But who can take any of the Trotskyist groups who called for a Labour vote seriously now? Their political games around the fringes of the Labour Party only serve to bolster its anti-working class activities. The working class will have to build up an independent political organisation which is neither social democrat nor Stalinist but based on its own revolutionary traditions.

Labour attacks council workers

On Friday 25th May at 4.30 pm Sheffield's Labour council showed what a Labour landslide victory means for the working class. It issued a compulsory redundancy notice to one of its school administrators. This date and time is significant. It is at the last breath of a working week and just before both a bank holiday and school half-term (which for the Sheffield primary school sector lasts two weeks). Thus the council was calculating that the response from the workers would be subdued to say the least. It should also be noted that it comes as the latest in a series of actions by the council employers

- it follows the, by now, annual strategy of threatening 1600 redundancies only to back down and then threaten 800 redundancies
- it also follows on from Blair instructing Labour council leaders to ensure that all redundancies were in the pipeline before the election so that the previous Tory government could be blamed. The Council have also
- reduced the workforce wherever possible, recently they got rid of all part-time contract workers from the Education department
- run down services. Last year they shut down 6 libraries in outlying areas amongst other things
- raised council tax and rents, sometimes sometimes twice a year in recent years.

The response

The loudest argument was for an immediate walkout. The council workers were due back at work on the following Wednesday, a meeting was called for 10.30 am. Prior to this the SWP, who control Unison the largest council workers' union, had formed a caucus and agreed a strategy. Their proposal was for an immediate walkout, 24 hours strike and a ballot (to be held in 4-5 weeks time) for indefinite strike. At the 10.30 meeting this was opposed by *Workers Power*, feeling that they had to be more 'radical', who called for an immediate indefinite strike. The Unison Regional Officer (a highly paid official) made it known that the ballot was not on. The meeting was attended by 2000 out of a workforce of 19000 (the schools were on holiday at the time). A call was made for an immediate demonstration - between 600-700 marched. In addition it was agreed at the meeting that there would be an immediate walkout when any other redundancy notice is issued - the next stage is likely to be 6 or 7 notices and then around 150 later, with the council always attempting to force

redeployment on the workers concerned - redeployment to worse paid jobs. On the Thursday various offices were picketed. By Friday all offices were open again.

The Left

This event gave the SWP the opportunity to have their face-saving strike against a Labour council. They badly needed this to provide some sort of evidence that their call at the election of not trusting Blair but getting the Tories out had some sort coherence and clarity. In their leaflet (fairly similar to the Unison leaflet - hardly surprising) what is emphasised is the fact that the Anne's Grove school budget has a surplus of £12000 - which implies that it would be OK to sack someone if the accounts were in deficit - hardly a socialist notion! Beyond this they could call only for the usual lobbying of MP's, letters to the council and to David Blunkett who would have more teachers sacked, and worse various bits of action - one, two and three day strikes as an alternative to asking Education workers to come out on their return to work the following week. Since then SWP members in the union have been trying to get each section of the council workers to strike individually. The fact that this would lead to a damaging loss of wages and morale, as well as dividing the workforce, has not occurred to these childish leftists who simply reply that such strikes would be "legal". *Workers Power* could do nothing more than make a more 'radical' sounding motion - for immediate and indefinite strike - but we should all remember that this is the group who campaigned loudest and longest for a Labour landslide - more redundancies are the fruits of that landslide. The union could do nothing but emphasise the 'illegality' of the strike and push for talks with the council. It was fairly obvious that the council and Unison had come to an agreement in their earlier 'talks', that they would not rock the boat while the council either rids itself of 'expensive' workers or redeploys them to lesser paid posts.

The communist response

A CWO sympathiser within the council proposed that rather than take hasty action workers should contact as many others as possible, waiting until education workers could be brought in to the fray. The call should have been made for a demonstration and then a delay to bring out all council workers and

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Revolutionary Perspectives 3

Communist Workers Organisation

Theses on Organisation

The Theses below were presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Communist Workers' Organisation in Sheffield in December 1996. Due to the fact that the subsequent discussion led to requests for a large number of amendments we have not been able to present the definitive version earlier. As always we invite comments and clarifications which we will carry in future editions of *Revolutionary Perspectives*.

1 The indispensable instruments for the liberation of the working class are both its class wide organisations and its revolutionary minority or party.

2 The class wide organisations are the foundations of the new communist society, and in its initial stages, its state. These organs will emerge from the struggle against capitalism. Strike committees will unite to become wider co-ordinators of action (and will include geographical elements such as local neighbourhood committees). Ultimately they will form class wide bodies (such as or similar to the councils formed in the revolutionary wave after World War One) opposed to all the existing organs of the capitalist state. They will oppose the capitalist principle of parliamentary representation (where an MP can be elected but can then ignore those who elected her/him for 5 years). Parliament is in any case a mere fig leaf to disguise the rule of the capitalist class which is exercised through other state organs. Instead of bourgeois fake democracy we will have a genuine participation of the working class through the proletarian principle of delegation (where the delegates are mandated i.e. merely express the will of those who vote for them and can be recalled instantly if they fail). The class struggle in the revolutionary period will involve a confrontation between these two sets of principles and bodies. If the working class prevails its bodies will take on the functions of both expressing the will of the working class and, at the same time, the suppression of the existing bourgeois class. This is the prime task of the proletarian semi-state. As long as the bourgeoisie operate we cannot talk about the "withering away of the state".

3 Although the very creation of these class-wide bodies signifies a crisis of the bourgeois order it does not automatically mean that the working class has recognised what steps it has to take in order to arrive at communism. Unlike the bourgeoisie who had merely to fight against feudalism and seigneurialism for a legal framework for their new mode of production, their new system of property rights, the proletariat has no property to defend. This is why the proletariat is a truly radical class. Its emancipation must bring about the end of all property relations. The problem here is that this can only be realised by a proletariat which is aware of its historic task. This self-consciousness is expressed by the communist programme. The programme is the product of the history of the working class' struggles against capitalism. The task of elaborating this programme falls to those elements of the working class who already recognise that it is not enough to demand better conditions from capitalism but that we need to destroy it both in our own class interests and in the interests of humanity. These communist minorities are the precursors of the world proletarian party.

The legacy of the counter-revolution after World War One in Europe (and particularly in the Soviet Union) has been to try to discredit the whole idea of a

4 proletarian vanguard. The capitalist Right began the calumny that the Bolshevik Revolution was a *coup d'état* carried out by an elite of middle class revolutionaries who despised the workers. They soon came to be supported by anarchist and other libertarians whose critique intensified with the decline of the revolution after 1921. According to this view the Russian Revolution was all the work of one man, Lenin. A moment's reflection is enough to dispel this caricature. The fact that the revolution broke out in response to the attempt by the Provisional Government to seize the Liteiny Bridge over the River Neva to prevent workers demonstrating in the centre of Petrograd, that Lenin was still urging the Bolsheviks to act after the situation had already forced them to act and that the overthrow of the Provisional Government took place with hardly any bloodshed all undermine this picture of a purely passive working class manipulated like putty in the hands of the crafty Bolsheviks. The fact that 80% of workers in Petrograd and Moscow had voted for Bolshevik delegates to the Soviets further undermines the capitalist attempt to discredit the proletarian nature of October 1917.

5 The October Revolution was a proletarian revolution. The whole premise of that revolution was that it was the first step on the road to world revolution. It arose out of the imperialist war and it is no coincidence that the only significant communist party which held a revolutionary defeatist position on the war was in Russia. The Bolshevik Party was the only working class party which was clear about the need to transform the imperialist war into a civil war. The Revolution was a product of both class wide organs (the soviets) and a class party deeply rooted inside the revolutionary working class. The soviets themselves were not initially revolutionary, let alone communist, but as the crisis developed the Bolsheviks, because they were already rooted inside the working class gradually came to win more delegate places. The question was not just of "All Power to the Soviets!" but also which political programme would come to dominate the soviets. The bearer of the revolutionary class programme was the Bolshevik Party and its membership included the most class conscious workers.

6 This does not mean that the Russian working class did not make mistakes. After all they had gone where no workers had ever gone before. There was no manual to inform them how to operate the proletarian dictatorship or what the relationships of its constituent parts were. In 1917 and 1918 few asked about these errors for the very reason that the revolution was going forward, world revolution seemed to be in the offing. Today's communist programme includes the lessons of that experience. In the first place the relationship between the party and the class had not been clarified. Under Social Democracy the view had been prevalent that workers would vote for the Socialist Party and then once elected the Party would take the necessary measures to create socialism. In *The State and Revolution* Lenin recognised that this was inadequate. He began to exhort the working class to make sure that they controlled the state. In every speech in the winter of 1917-18 he called on workers to make sure that they participated in all the class-wide organs. He made it clear that they alone could build socialism. However the Bolsheviks themselves had taken steps which undermined the drawing in of more and more workers to the process of transformation. In the first place they placed the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets under a new government body (called the Council of Peoples' Commissars which sounds revolutionary but in fact it was a cabinet of ministers as in a parliamentary system). This already undermined the delegate principle of soviet democracy. It also raises a number of issues about future relations between the working class in general and the political party. Let us examine each of these.

7

The first is the legacy of Stalinism and Trotskyism. Both these currents are a consequence of the defeat of the revolution, a defeat brought about by the isolation of the Russian workers and the deaths of 3 millions of the cream of the working class in the so-called Civil War (which was in reality a class war against fourteen imperialist powers) spelled the defeat of the revolution. NEP, the Kronstadt tragedy, the resumption of trade and foreign relations all paved the way for the ultimate victory of "socialism in one country". This in turn was paralleled by the decline of the Communist International. From being the first body ever to enunciate that its sole aim was the destruction of capitalism it became a pliant tool of a Soviet state seeking to regain its place in the "concert of nations". Those who supported either Trotsky and Stalin essentially supported state capitalism. Whilst the Stalinists could state that the USSR was "really existing socialism" the Trotskyists could never decide and opted for the "degenerate workers state" formula. This allowed them to argue that the basic mode of production in the USSR was socialist whilst criticising the political horrors of Stalinism. Both Stalin and Trotsky, in their struggle for power reinforced the bourgeois idea that the October Revolution had been a cleverly planned coup and all down to the genius of Lenin and themselves. Thus they have played their part in wiping out the revolutionary nature of the October Revolution. Their view of the Party as a general staff guiding a blind class is hideous distortion of its real relations with the proletarian revolution.

8

This view of the role of the party was also accepted by the councilists. They had their roots largely in the German Left, initially around Otto Ruhle. Ruhle rejected the proletarian nature of the October Revolution even before 1920. In his view the problem was that the revolution had been maturing but that the Bolsheviks had usurped the role of the working class and substituted themselves for it. In some ways the councilist view is a mirror image of the Stalinist view. They both say that the Party was in total control of everything but whereas the Stalinists say this was a good thing the councilists said it was the real cause of the counter-revolution. In so doing they also unintentionally express the view that the proletariat is not really capable of arriving at communist revolution at all. If the workers were simply Bolshevik dupes and the October Revolution was another bourgeois revolution we have no example of a successful proletarian revolution in history. This is a very convenient conclusion for the bourgeoisie too. It also shows that the councilists and "libertarians" have no idea of the process by which the proletariat comes to consciousness. The mass of the proletariat will become communist in "a practical movement", i.e. in the process of the revolution itself. But before the revolution only a minority of the class will be communist and they will be the ones agitating for the overthrow of capitalism. It cannot happen any other way. The minority of the class will give political direction to the rest of the proletariat until the actual revolution is taking place. The only alternative is the comforting ideology of spontaneism which would reduce the role of revolutionaries to nothing - another reassuring development for the bourgeoisie.

9

The Party has to be part of the class. It does not drop in from Mars nor does it act as a religious order which carries around the correct precepts which will be revealed if workers are very good. The Party is forged inside the class by sharing in all its day-to-day struggles. In the present period the communist movement is made up of wage workers. We have no professional revolutionaries or intellectuals in the style of Social Democracy. But this does not ensure us a widespread base inside the working class. That can only be established under two conditions. One is that the class itself is collectively moving from demoralisation to increasingly

conscious anger. The second is that members of the Party work wherever they find themselves to fight against all capitalist influences (including the Left and the trades unions). This means acting in both word and deed to demonstrate that there is a communist alternative to the current impasse facing humanity. After every partial struggle of the class the party always seeks to find a means to maintain the consciousness that developed and extend it so that it becomes a deeper political understanding. Normally this will involve only a minority of workers as the struggle dies down but developing and maintaining the class consciousness of individual militants is a crucial aspect of the Party's task to bring political organisation to the class struggle. Drawing individual militants to the party does not mean they are thereby lost to the wider class struggle. On the contrary, this is the principle means for the party to develop a direct influence in the daily struggle and become an active participant in the growth of class consciousness. No other body can undertake this work. Communists and not confusionists (those who wallow in the present weakness of the working class and put their faith in spontaneous combustion) will make communism. Unless the party (i.e. the collective expression of the communist consciousness of the working class) grows to be a significant minority before any revolutionary situation breaks out it is unlikely that the outbreak will have sufficient clarity to overthrow capitalism. The party is not the product of the last minute nor is it a mass party in the old Social Democratic sense. It is above all a cadre party of those committed to the main task which is to carry the historic lesson of the proletariat's previous struggles into the present class confrontations. It is not a place for careerists nor does it have a vast self-perpetuating bureaucracy. Although it remains a minority of the class its influence in the struggles against capitalism will go way beyond its existing numerical strength.

10

In the revolution itself the relationship of the party to the class-wide organs of struggle is maintained by its rank and file members in any area attempting to become delegates in the committees, councils, etc. which the workers choose to set up. They are responsible to both the workers who elect them and to the Party. This means that they cannot accept delegation other than under the party's programme. This has to be made clear to the working class. The party has to win power through the class wide bodies. In these council-type bodies the delegates seek to win over other workers and wavering delegates to the party's programme. In this sense the party exercises its influence through the councils. We cannot see how it can be otherwise since if the working class is to achieve communism it will do it under the leadership of already committed communists. What we will not do is repeat the mistakes of the past and identify the party with the state, The Chair of the Party does not become the President of the Soviets. We recognise that there are no formal organisational guarantees that we can give against the degeneration of the revolution. The revolution will only move forward under the increasing consciousness and participation of the mass of the class.

11

However the future world Party is a centralised and international body. It has to be in order to reflect the lessons of the proletariat's history and to represent the essence of the working class revolution — internationalism. Its leading members sit on the highest bodies of the Party. They do not stand for election to the Councils in any one area. The Party does not itself take over the reins of state at any given territorial level. This preserves the independence of the World Party of the Proletariat from any temporising with the situation of any given territorial council. Thus if the number of the Party's delegates decline in any given area it does not

mean that the Party has to opportunistically adapt to that situation in order to maintain its base. The defence of the communist programme on a global level in all circumstances remains the task of the Party whatever the objective situation.

12

The policies of the Party are decided by its members. The principle of the operation of the Party is democratic centralism. Since this has been distorted in meaning by the Stalinists to mean just plain centralism let us restore it to its original form. It means that all members can take part in open elections to all positions in the Party from local to international level. As in the councils, the mandated delegate takes the views of individual members to higher bodies. All higher bodies are elected by lower bodies. The decisions of higher bodies are then binding on all members. The right of dissent is inviolable so long as it does not disrupt the unity of any decided action. Dissent can be expressed in all internal meetings and publications of the Party. On any issue it is inevitable that differences will emerge. These will often lead to the formation of factions which are a natural part of the development of the organisation. Factions which are based on differences over a single issue are part of the lifeblood of communist organisation. Where differences arise over a number of different issues then we have entered the situation of a separate tendency. This is a situation which the Party has to resolve either through the dissolution of the tendency (possibly as the situation changes) or through the departure of the tendency to form a separate organisation. Clearly however the last step would also imply a weakening of the organisation and the struggle for communism.

13

The internal discipline of the Party cannot be maintained simply by statute or artificial police measures. It is the responsibility of every individual communist to try to maintain the political unity and coherence of the organisation. Communists do not split with each other lightly over (for example) tactical issues. Wherever comrades feel the organisation is pursuing a mistaken tactic the question is not one of separation but of continuing the fight to resolve issues to achieve greater clarity for the communist programme.

14

The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party is not the Party. It seeks to play an important role in the formation of the World Party of the Proletariat but this cannot come about merely through proclamation. Although we see ourselves as the product of the succession of organisations which the proletariat gave itself from the Communist League onwards right down to the Third International our specific origins are in the fight of the Italian Left against the degeneration of the Third International. The subsequent expulsion of the Italian Left in the late 1920s led to a period of theoretical development. At the end of the Second World War despite the murderous attentions of both fascists and Stalinists our predecessors founded, in Italy, the Internationalist Communist Party which is the main animator of the International Bureau. In opposition to all the fake marxists of the Trotskyist Stalinist and Maoist types we defend what we consider to be the revolutionary essence of marxism — internationalism and the abolition of a society based on wage labour.

At present the forces of internationalism are too weak for the creation of the centralised international body which the proletarian revolution demands. Our tasks at present are fundamentally threefold. Wherever possible we must seek to involve ourselves in the life of the working class as a whole. This means more than simply issuing correct political declarations but also actively trying to influence

struggles through direct involvement with positive propaganda. It means also establishing militant nuclei in every locality and in as many workplaces as possible so as to demonstrate in practice the validity of the communist critique of capitalism. Second we must attempt to widen the readership of the communist left press amongst workers throughout the world. Third we must encourage workers in the same regions to discuss and debate with each other with the long-term perspective that we are helping them to unite their forces into something more significant than that which exists today. The proletarian revolution may not be round the next corner but its prospects for success will not be any more certain if we do not seriously begin to address these tasks. In this process we would also hope to unite all those who belong to the proletarian political camp whatever the historic differences that currently separate us. What we aim at is fraternal relations until the changing historical circumstances of the working class make the old differences irrelevant and open up the way for a unity of forces.

CWO December 1996

The VIth Congress of the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista)

Italian affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Congress Report

On the 25th, 26th and 27th April the Internationalist Communist Party held only the sixth congress in its fifty-four year history.¹ Unlike the Annual General Meetings of the Party Congresses are called for particular purposes to mark a new stage in the development of the organisation.

The current Congress was called largely to consolidate a new and younger membership in the organisation. To this end new *Theses on the Current Situation of Capitalism and Reformism*, on globalisation and imperialism, on trades unions and on the tactics of communists in capitalism's periphery were presented and debated. These will all be published in full in the next issue of *Prometeo*, the theoretical magazine of the Party. They will also be translated into English for a special issue of *Internationalist Communist*, central review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.

The CWO also sent a delegation to the congress which not only conveyed the greetings of the comrades in the UK but also of those comrades who are in discussion with the Bureau in North America (particularly *Los Angeles Workers Voice* and *The Internationalist*), Scandinavia and France.

The Congress began with a presentation of the theses on the current situation of capitalism. The main plank of the argument was that capitalism has been in an acute economic crisis for over twenty years. This crisis has been unleashed by the operation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Capitalism, despite adopting all kinds of different strategies has been unable to escape from this crisis which offers only a progressive worsening of the living standards of the working class. Every country today has a national debt which exceeds 50% of the

Gross Domestic Product. The number of very poor has reached 42 millions out of 250 millions in the United States whilst in Europe the same figure is 50 millions. In this situation the working class response has been at one of the lowest levels in its history, partly on account of the unprecedented restructuring of capitalist industry, partly due to the fact that workers had been inoculated against revolution by seventy years of Stalinist and Social Democratic mystifications. Our point of departure as a communist vanguard is to start again from ABC so that the working class re-acquires its own class identity and ultimately its own class party.

The theses on globalisation took into account the difference between the current technological revolution of the microprocessor and earlier technological revolutions under capitalism. Whilst all previous technological innovations have led to an immediate reduction in the workforce they have also led to an extension of production into new sectors to sustain the development of that new technology. Today this is not happening since the microprocessor revolution leads only to a reduction of the workforce without an expansion of new forms of production.

The *Theses on the Tactics of Communists in the Periphery* were an update to the draft published in *Internationalist Communist No.3* amended to take account of the collapse of the Stalinist bloc. The few minor changes that were made was testimony to the validity of the method used in drawing them up twelve years ago.

The Theses on the unions focussed on the question of the fragmentation of the great industrial concentrations of the past and noted that the factory was not the only area of action of the working class under modern capitalist totalitarian conditions. Factory groups may still be formed but there was also a need to take into account the fact that the class struggle will also articulate itself on a territorial basis, a factor which communists have to take into account.

The Congress was animated by a lively debate, in which the youngest members were highly visible. Generally the debates focussed on practical problems such as the role of communists in demand struggles. This culminated in the adoption of new statutes designed to secure the effective operation of the party as a party of cadres (i.e. committed and active members) in the future.

Finally the *Bureau Platform* was amended. For the last three or so years both the P.C.Int and the CWO have abandoned their own individual platforms and

have used only the Bureau Platform. However this only exposed the need to make some aspects of the Platform clearer. The CWO Annual General Meeting of December 1996 had already suggested some amendments and passed a resolution mandating the delegates to present and discuss them at the VIth Congress. This they duly did. Fundamentally there were three areas of alteration: The Platform was made more precise in certain areas by inserting some historical dates; criticisms of Trotskyism and Stalinism (which were criticised obliquely in the original version) were stated more clearly, and the section on democracy was expanded to include our views on parliamentarism and electoral campaigns. Here the debate from the floor exactly mirrored that held within the CWO itself which was further evidence of the fundamental unity of our two organisations not only on matters of basic positions but also on methodology. The comrades of the PCInt adopted a resolution on the revised Platform which stated that

The Platform of the Bureau drawn up on the basis of Marxist methods and principles and in the political line of the internationalist movement of the present time, represents thus the common basis which is complete and general enough to be adopted as the political Platform of both the current members of the International Bureau.

This Platform is now ready and will be published as a separate pamphlet soon. Those interested in receiving it in document form as it was presented to the Congress should send an A4 sae.

Whilst in Milan our comrades helped prepare a trilingual leaflet on May Day (for the usual demonstration in Rome) which concentrated on the theme of racism and immigration. By publishing it in French, Italian and English we not only expressed our internationalist commitment but also hoped to reach workers from places other than Italy. The English version of the leaflet is reproduced on the next page.

Footnote

1. We have published articles on the early history of the PCInt in *Workers Voice*. These are still available: *50 Years of Clandestine Prometeo* WV70
The PCInt in 1944
Part One in WV73
Part Two in WV74
The End of World War Two in Italy WV78

Leaflet

1st May: A Balance Sheet

For years the working class has had to submit to frantic attacks from all directions.

Throughout the world wages are lower and working conditions are worse. This is true both for the metropolises and the periphery of this global capitalist system. Those socialist and communist parties which once talked about the working class were in reality linked to soviet imperialism - wrongly called socialist - which has now collapsed. They used to say that this was communism and now that the monstrosity has failed they declare that communism has failed. Traitors and liars, these parties now come along saying that the working class is also finished. Now they tell us we can all be citizens together.

On 1st May, the traditional day of struggle for the world proletariat, we repeat that: class society will continue so long as capitalism exists.

It's true that the capitalist mode of production has changed over two hundred years of uncontested domination but its fundamental character as a system based on the exploitation of wage labour hasn't changed. Capitalism is now globalised - in the sense that it operates on a global scale both in the productive and financial spheres - and the antagonism between classes as such has become global.

From Korea to Mexico, from Italy to the USA, the grip on workers is being tightened. More and more of the surplus value which nourishes international finance and productive capital is being extorted.

Yet capitalism is still in crisis - a crisis which began in the Seventies but which it cannot resolve. This is the reason for its savage attacks on the working class. Never before has there been a society capable of producing so much whilst creating so much misery. In the US 40 million exist in poverty; 3 million in Italy. On the periphery millions are dying of hunger. And this is what they call progress?!

A mode of production which has the capacity to produce and distribute so much but which finds that it is 'forced' to reduce the wages of those who do the producing, to make them redundant, to cut their pensions and their welfare schemes, which forces millions of human beings to seek food and shelter far from their place of birth - such a system of production deserves to be put to an end.

The Right wants to tighten the vice on the working class and says it wants to throw out immigrants. In reality, however, immigrant workers are a convenient means for capitalist exploitation and to use as blackmail against workers 'at home'.

The Left would like to find a reformist 'solution' to these problems within the terms of the existing system.

Internationalists say there can be no salvation, no wellbeing for workers in this system which will only bring further attacks. It is up to the international proletariat to abolish this mode of production and the social and political structure which stems from it and to construct a society fitted to meet humanity's needs.

Not reform of wage labour. Abolition of wage labour.

Not reform of the capitalist state. Destruction of the capitalist state.

Down with reactionary racism. Solidarity with the struggle of the world proletariat and workers everywhere whatever the colour of their skin.

GROWING POVERTY IN THE USA

The intervention of American Internationalist Comrades

From Battaglia Comunista 4 April 1997

Opposition is beginning to grow to the law of Welfare "Reform" passed by the President of the USA, Bill Clinton, last August, which up to the present affects the most impoverished and insecure layers of the proletariat. So awful is the law that Peter Edelman, Undersecretary of the Clinton Administration for Social and Sanitary Services, has resigned. As the occupant of a government post of the current Democratic Administration he was so angry that he wrote in the March issue of the magazine *Atlantic Monthly* an article of denunciation significantly entitled, *The worst thing that Bill Clinton has ever done*, from which we quote the important facts of the situation. Mr Edelman, who it would be difficult to suspect of being a communist sympathiser, actually said:

The extent of the consequences (of the law) is startling. It has been estimated by the Urban Institute, whose study has shown that it will cast two million six hundred thousand people into poverty, one million one hundred thousand of which are children.

The article goes on to warn of some deadly effects

the new study has shown that a total of 11 million families - 10% of American families, will see their incomes reduced because of the law.

Amongst these are more than 8 million families with children, many of which are deprived of food benefits by the cuts, who will lose on average \$1 300 each.

Many working families with incomes little more than what we call the poverty line (currently established at \$12 128 for a family of three people) will lose incomes which will officially reduce them to poverty, and many poor families will become poorer.

And Edelman believes that this evaluation by the Urban Institute is still optimistic. He shows that almost 800 000 immigrants will lose their Supplemental Security Income - SSI and food benefits to the tune of \$24 million in

six years. Also, between 100 and 200 million disabled children, many of which have multiple handicaps will lose their SSI.

Therefore it is hard to call this a "Welfare Law" - says Edelman. In fact the reductions of the budget touches wider strata of welfare (traditionally given to the unemployed and marginalised strata) and many concern the families of workers - these are brutal cuts.

Clinton's ex-Undersecretary also quotes the study of the Kaiser Foundation which shows that thirty percent of all those hit by the law are women with a disabled child to support or are disabled themselves.

Edelman then shows that many recipients of long term assistance are marginalised and trapped by poverty. These lose health benefits because of the law, and they will no longer be in a position to bring up children even if they succeed in finding an underpaid job.

In other words, the ex-Undersecretary shows that the strata 'covered' by so-called welfare are not the idle who refuse work as the Administration maintains to ideologically justify the attack (according to social-Darwinist theory).

Confirming this, Edelman cites the experience of Kansas City. Here, influenced by the above-mentioned ideology, according to which the poor can raise themselves from their dependent position with adequate programmes of re-education and further qualifications, which have been "well planned and well applied" - according to Edelman - these programmes have put to work 1409 welfare recipients - out of 15 562. From these, only 730 are now in work in Kansas City.

That is the America which Blair and his ultrareactionary New Labour love so much.

It is in this framework, of which we have only given the essential details, which the Internationalist comrades in the United States are intervening. Opposite we are publishing the leaflet on this subject distributed by the comrades of *Los Angeles Workers Voice*.

The Class Struggle Battle Line

Welfare Cuts — Who Loses? Who Wins?

The bi-partisan blitz of welfare and human services slashing is moving ahead full steam. Under the rule of Democrats/Republicans close to \$60 billion will be cut from the ex-AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) alone as well as other programs over the next 6 years. (*LA Times*, Part 1, 2.8.96). Most of these 'savings' will be handed over to the rich, their corporations and banks in the form of the bi-partisan Welfare for the Rich policy in the form of tax cuts, euphemistically called "incentives for business". With these cuts over 2 million adults and possibly 1.8 million children will be hungrier and/or dumped in the streets. For bribed Democratic and Republican honchos, welfare for the poor is not to be tolerated, but welfare of the rich is maintained at all costs!

California workers are heavily hit by the savage cuts. According to the *LA Times Metro Section B*, 30.12.96, over 6,000 people here who had been getting SSI payments for disabilities related to alcohol and drug abuse are completely cut off the SSI effective in January, 1997. The change from AFDC "entitlement" to yearly federal block grant to states means those on AFDC will see their benefits slashed even more, probably by 5% to 12% a year for the next 5 years. In addition:

- 100,000 legal immigrants are to lose Supplemental Security Income benefits and SP benefits which average only \$625/mo. per recipient which is used for rent, clothing and food.
- 150,000 immigrants will soon lose food stamps for working class mothers and children averaging \$244/mo. per family. (*LA Times* 10.12.96)

Tens of thousands driven off SSI, etc. will apply for county General Relief (GR) of \$211/mo (slave labour workfare) and the rulers have already demanded their courts and politicians cut the rate of GR payments again!

The shady corporate TV/radio/newspaper media has shifted to high gear to get the people to

meekly accept these cuts and more handouts to the rich as being in the "public interest" — read capitalist interests.

What the workers lose, the rich bosses gain. The bosses want these cuts badly and the "Workfare" semi-slavery too. This is because in the capitalist labor market, commodity production predominates, including selling/buying human labor power as commodities, bought and sold on their "free labor market". As hundreds of thousands are cut off benefits and human services (a small fraction of the value the working class alone collectively produces), many will be forced into the labor market where the capitalists will salivate with a bigger supply of workers to pick from to exploit and rob as well as driving down further the wage/benefit levels of those already on the job.

We can fight to defeat this inhumane blitz, but we must take up organizing for struggle amongst our working class friends and fellow workers on the job and off. On the day to day level, we already have the gut feeling to assist those workers and poor who are abused and kicked around by bullies. Thus we can build our own new groups of political and industrial struggle which the rich cannot control and corrupt. Then we can better unite all our forces together and turn back those cold-blooded Democratic/Republican attacks from Clinton to Gingrich. In the course of the fight back we also need our own Revolutionary Internationalist Party to strengthen the overall movement and win victories.

March 8th 1997
For contact write to:

LA Workers' Voice, Box 57483, Los Angeles, CA 90057

Internet:

Last Exit from Lima

The Murder of the Tupac Amaru Guerrillas

The growing barbarism of most of the capitalist periphery takes its most violent forms in Latin America. This has led some potentially proletarian elements to see in guerrilla warfare a valid method of resistance. But nothing could be further from the truth. The guerrillas are the sons and daughters of the of the existing ruling class elites in both a biological and social sense. Their programme whilst embellished with the words "Marxist" and "socialist" are simply nationalist and social democratic i.e. anti-working class. The Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru (MRTA) is no exception as the following article from *Battaglia Comunista 5* makes clear.

LIMA - THE TRAGIC OUTCOME OF AN ERROR

The dramatic demise of the Tupac Amaru guerrillas, several of them killed in cold blood after surrendering, once again demonstrates the burning necessity for the communist programme to spread beyond small revolutionary groups, mainly found in the capitalist metropolises. We have to start circulating the communist programme in the periphery, so that the foundations of the future world revolutionary party can be built there as well. If this has always been necessary, it is more so than ever today. Faced with a globalisation of capital more intense than in Lenin's day - and therefore a globalisation of the labour force, the proletariat and the oppressed of the world do not know how to practically fight it. Either they succumb to a bewildered passivity or, when they do move, they take actions inevitably doomed to a sterile defeat from the point of view of the development of the class struggle. This is because these actions are led by organisations which are "Marxist" in word but reformist in practice, and/or openly national-democratic, having nothing in common with communism.

Sadly, the history of Latin America for the last few decades is nothing but the dismal scenario of desperate actions, of lives generously thrown to the wind, in a useless attempt to

break out of a vicious cycle consisting of the deepest poverty, which leads to outbursts of rebellion and then extremely ferocious repression from the native bourgeoisie, supported by the Yankee international butchers. Why are such efforts useless? Because the main slogans behind it are of a bourgeois - democratic, reformist type (even if radically presented). They do not threaten the bourgeois nature of exploitation and oppression, because in their class collaboration they do not identify the proletariat, whether employed, underemployed or unemployed as the only real driving force of revolutionary change: one cannot and should not die "for Peru and Latin America" as the commander of the guerrilla group proclaimed, but if at all, only for the exploited and dispossessed of that continent and the whole world.

Are our objections just a cold and cynical play on words? Not at all, since one of the objectives of the Tupac Amaru leadership was to force the Peruvian government to give them legal recognition. When have proletarian revolutionaries asked to be legally accepted by their mortal enemy, in other words, the bourgeois state? This is the situation in Latin America because Stalinism has practically wiped out Marxism leaving a vacuum for radi-

cal - reformist ideologies of the Guevarist, Zapatista or Maoist type, all equally class collaborationist. In the case of 'Sendero Luminoso', these have all contributed to all its aberrations.

Who remembers Mariategui, the communist from Peru, who 70 years ago warned against petty-bourgeois anti-imperialist illusions, (the same as today's MRTA struggle and similar to neo-liberalism) convinced that they could stop, or better still, control the flow of foreign capital, especially that of the USA, with cross-class politics?

How could the most demagogic petty - bourgeois oppose capitalist penetration. It could not, except for words (or vain sacrifice - ed.) Nothing except a temporary nationalist intoxication. The assault on power by anti - imperialism as a demagogic popular movement - even if it is possible, would never signify a proletarian victory, a socialist conquest. The socialist revolution finds its most dogged and dangerous enemy - dangerous for its confusionism, for its demagogy - in the petty - bourgeoisie installed in power gained through its domination of ideas.

(from *Seven Essays on Peruvian Reality and Other Political Writings*, Einaudi).

Anyone who might consider this analysis too crude or simplistic, should cast an eye at Cuba, the latest tottering ideal of so many 'oppositionists' where 'socialism', only installed thanks to Russian Imperialism, is quickly 'opening up to the market' (which, in our opinion it always has been).

Therefore it is not through guerrilla warfare, through a more or less armed reformism that one can effectively struggle against exploitation and oppression. They are the natural products of capitalism, which today are massively on the increase throughout Latin America because of the ruthless 'neo-liberal' politics imposed on governments by capital's crisis in the incessant pursuit of extra-profits, mostly of a speculative nature. Since the 80's, the dismantling of the so-called social state - what little there was of it - privatisation (also carried out to pay off foreign debt), the brutal attacks on wages, reduced to minimum levels everywhere, have made the workforce completely "flexible", This has thrown the doors open - admittedly they were already half open - to the so-called markets, that is to say to international finance capital.

Between 1981 and 1991 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Latin America grew by 16.3%, while the fraction of GDP destined for investment has gone down from 21.1% to

15.6%.

That foreign capital is mainly directed at financial speculation is proven by the fact that in 1992

from a total of 22.4 million dollars constituting the flow to Argentina and Brazil, only 1.9 million have assumed the form of direct foreign investments.

(The quotes are from *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 94).

Peru fits into this framework perfectly, so much so that Fujimori had declared that the country "had become the promised land of foreign capitals", who in fact arrived *en masse*, especially after the defeat of *Sendero Luminoso*. The Peruvian President, who had been elected by demagogically declaring war on poverty, in reality declared war on the poor. He became perhaps the most faithful executioner of the orders coming from international capital through the IMF and the World Bank. The results are that inflation is drastically reduced, but, for example, a great number of small and medium businesses have collapsed, unable to resist international competition, after the lowering of the custom's barriers. Another 750, 000 workers have been cast into unemployment, or as is hypocritically said, into the world of informal labour (that is to say the difficult art of making do) which in '93 affected 76% of the active population. In short, today in Peru, according to the calculations of the World Bank, 79.4% of the population live below the poverty threshold, i.e., in misery, when in '91 it was nearly 70% (figures taken from *Le Monde diplomatique*, March '97 and January '92 respectively.)

The Massacre in the Japanese Embassy

The bourgeoisie now understand that "the markets" must at all costs be made secure through the stability of the country and so the action chosen by Fujimori was correct from their perspective. It took some time. He pretended to open some sort of negotiation until the trap could be sprung, thus depriving the guerrillas of their only advantage against an incompara-

Our Current Issue is

Internationalist Communist 15 Review of the International Bureau

It contains articles on:

Globalisation and the Capitalist State
Class Struggle under Global Capitalism — South Korea
Social and Political Breakdown in a Global Context — Albania
The Holocaust and the Communist Left
Years of Truth for the ICC

bly stronger enemy, that is surprise and speed of execution. That there were few possibilities of success is proven by the fact that their movements were constantly monitored by a well connected system of electronic surveillance from the USA, which transmitted live what the MRTA leadership did and said. To add insult to injury, according to news reported by *Il Manifesto* of 27 April, the usual tender intervention of the Catholic Church was not missing either. Ever the irreplaceable ally of bloody Latin American regimes (in first place in Chile and Argentina) it vilely collaborated in the massacre of the MRTA guerrillas through playing a false role as mediator.

To conclude, we have nothing further to add except to repeat what we said at the beginning as regards the absolute necessity of the Marxist, class, revolutionary party. Only with such a party will the desperation of the growing mass of the dispossessed stop fuelling hopeless acts of rebellion, in which potential revolutionaries sacrifice their lives, unfortunately in vain. **CB**

CWO Meetings

We meet on the first Tuesday of every month at Cortonwood Miners Welfare and the third Tuesday of every month in Sheffield Hallam University (Harmer Building) both at 8.00 p.m.

For contact with CWO members in other cities in Britain write to the group address

Labour Attacks Workers

continued from page 3

hopefully others could be brought out on strike. The fight is not simply between various council departments and the council employers, the council is attacking **all council workers, tenants, payers of council tax and users of council services**. A council strike could have been combined with strikes in other areas as well as a rent and council tax strike. By playing their stupid social democratic games the Trotskyists have once again shown their total disregard for the real conditions of workers' lives and our need to struggle together. The Union have already signed away the jobs by negotiating the "correct procedures" for redundancies. This safeguards their own positions as part of the management of the labour force. This is a sign of things to come under New Labour. It is not the end of the story as this struggle has hardly begun and the same issues are faced not only by other workers in South Yorkshire (the same moves are already underway in Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham) but throughout the country. Our call will be that we avoid all the manoeuvres of the leftists and the unions to ensure that when we do fight it is in the best conditions to really defend jobs and services. This is the best preparation of the class for the future overthrow of the system that will always attack us. **cde.**

Other Publications of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

The Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

A revised version in English, French and Italian, Spanish, and Farsi will be published this summer. Each price £1.

Internationalist Notes

in Farsi (write to either address for other Farsi pamphlets)

Prometeo

Theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy)

Battaglia Comunista

Monthly paper of the PCInt (Italy)

The International Bureau also has publications in **Bengali, Slovene, Czech, and Serbo-Croat**. Please write to the (Milan address for all these publications)

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Socialism or Barbarism

An Introduction to the Politics of the CWO

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A compendium of articles from *Workers Voice* since 1980

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Russia 1917

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CWO Pamphlet No.5

Platform of The Committee of Intesa 1925

£2

Italian Imperialism and the Crisis in Albania

CWO Introduction

The following article is from the April issue of *Battaglia Comunista*, journal of the Italian affiliate of the International Bureau. It is an analysis of the role of Italian imperialism in Albania. (A country the Italian ruling class have historically seen as within their legitimate sphere of interest, having twice “intervened” there this century already.) In addition our comrades have also pointed to the tragedy of a situation in which the crisis of the capitalist state is not accompanied by a clear consciousness on the part of the working class. The crisis in Albania may have led to a “popular insurrection” but it is not one of proletarian revolution as leftists like the Socialist Workers’ Party and the various remaining Maoist sects have so loudly tried to maintain. According to the SWP the committees which have appeared in the Southern cities of Albania were “proto-soviets”. Only a Lewis Carroll view of the world could have arrived at such a fantasy. Far from being the seeds of workers’ self-government, these ‘citizens’ committees became a barrier to the possibility of workers developing their own political alternative. Revolution is not about armaments (although these will be necessary) but about class consciousness. Unfortunately there was no sign of this during the Albanian insurrection. In fact, as we said in *Internationalist Communist 15*,¹ there is no evidence that the ‘armed citizens’ — with their calls for EU intervention — had any intention of imposing their own political solution. So without any kind of socialist aim, and without mass assemblies where workers could thrash out their demands the committees soon became the fiefdoms of gangsters. There is a message here too for the anarchists and spontaneists who think that the breakdown of the old political order automatically leads to the birth of the new. The working class needs a political programme and that programme can only be defended by the permanent anti-capitalist organisation, i.e. the political party. Currently the Albanian working class is disoriented by the collapse of Stalinism (which the bourgeoisie still portrays as “communism”) and this accounts for the re-establishment of some kind of stability without further trouble for the international order. However the crisis which created the outburst has not disappeared and the working class in Albania have seen that the state is not all powerful. It is a lesson which could be dynamite in the hands of a more conscious working class...

Italian Imperialism and the Collapse of Albania

Within the last few months the situation in Albania has come to a head. Hit by the extremely grave crisis of the pyramid finance companies which have squandered 90% of national savings, the Albanian State has collapsed beneath the blows of a ferocious civil war.

In the February issue of *Battaglia Comunista* we wrote regarding the swindle of the savings schemes, that President Berisha would have great difficulty in refunding the investors, and in fact the offer to reimburse those who were swindled, starting from 5th February, remained an empty promise, as we predicted. The economic difficulties of the country, aggravated by the total abandonment of the productive apparatus, were too severe to think that the government could shoulder the burden of refunding those who were swindled. After the first waves of demonstrations the presidential promises brought a relative calm

to the country. When the realisation that there would be no refund dawned, the protests began again with renewed violence. A huge wave of rebellion starting in the Southern cities swept away the entire State apparatus within a few days; the barracks deserted, the army and police dissolved, naval forces with white flags handing themselves over to the Italian Navy, entire cities under the control of bands of rebels, masses fleeing from the civil war towards the Italian coasts, a complete absence of a governing force.

In the recent history of global capitalism, despite the intensity of its political and economic crisis, the State had always remained intact as the ultimate bulwark for the protection of the bourgeoisie. The crisis in the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc, for example, is a demonstration of this. During the events which led to the collapse of the USSR and her satellites, the presence of the State which guarantees capital

never diminished, nor did the central activity of the government and the presence of the military and police apparatus. That is not all; thanks to a very subtle act of political transformation, almost the same men of the old governing "Nomenklatura" succeeded in placing themselves in positions of control within the new regimes. However, in the Albanian case, the leading structures of the State have collapsed. The most important cities in Albania are, at the time of writing, still in the hands of the citizens' committees of rebels and for many days the country has been the stage for inter-gang fights, some of which have made plunder their only reason for existing. Clashes between bands, which have destroyed the little active remnant of the productive apparatus have been numerous and very violent. Amongst the illustrious victims of the destruction were the "fearless" Italian entrepreneurs. The same ones who before the crisis praised Albanian workers for their keenness to work for very low wages, now call for Italian government aid to defend their investments from the assault of the rebels.

From the ashes of the bourgeois State, unfortunately, there has only emerged a war of all against all, a material expression of the barbarism which Marx foresaw in the *Communist Manifesto*. When a society enters into crisis the alternatives are these: either the revolutionary class succeeds in voicing its political programme and fights for the formation of a new social formation, a socialist society, or society gradually falls into some form of barbarism. In Albania, given the total absence from the political scene of the proletariat as an independent class, as a class in itself, the latter has occurred.

We have always maintained that even the most acute capitalist crisis can be brought back onto the terrain of the bourgeoisie if the political guide of the proletariat, (the party) is lacking. The Albanian case shows once again that the class party is not a simple intellectual whim, but the fundamental instrument to guide the class struggle, supplying it with the only valid anti-capitalist message. Without a revolutionary vanguard capable of working incessantly within and for the class, events like those taking place in Albania are, sadly, destined to occur more frequently in the future, with incalculable damage to the renewal of the class struggle on a world scale.

The destruction of a bourgeois State is, however, a social phenomenon of historical importance. Taking place, as it does, amidst the new processes of economic globalisation, it presents worrying aspects for world capitalism. This is happening in the heart of Europe,

a Europe committed to the creation of the most important economic-monetary area in the world. Moreover, the problem has another dimension. Since the European and Italian bourgeoisie have succeeded — thanks to the absence of a clear class perspective on the part of the working class — in transforming the bombshell represented by the intensification of emigration from Albania into a pretext to justify their own military intervention in the country. It is enough for a few thousand refugees from the "country of the eagles" to land on the Apulian coasts to unleash a ferocious racist attack against "the Albanian invader". The media have been anxious to transform thousands of refugees fleeing from hunger and war into filthy criminals to be expelled by any means. Throughout all this the parliamentary forces have put the accent on the necessity to put an end to the wave of immigrants by intervening at their place of origin and have therefore supported the formation of a European expeditionary force. The Stalinists of *Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation)*, whilst not supporting the direct intervention of the Italian Army, have declared themselves in favour of military intervention led by a European delegation (see their statement of 3rd April 1997). The Italian naval blockade and the sinking of a boat loaded with refugees, though not the specific responsibility of the Italian marine forces, were the obvious and logical consequences of this climate created to justify armed intervention. Officially this is supposed to be in order to distribute humanitarian aid to the population but in reality it seeks to protect the European, and in particular, Italian capital which recently has poured into Albania, attracted by low wages and the absence of any limits to the exploitation of labour power. Unfortunately, up to now the proletariat has not been politically able to impose its own revolutionary project in response to the siren song of Italian Imperialism. Although the collapse of the Albanian State and the resulting mass flight of the population were clearly the consequences of the speculative activity of the pyramid finance companies, its victims have allowed themselves to be caught in the net of the most filthy racist propaganda and the most miserable war between the poor. This is a confirmation, a tragic confirmation, of how urgent and necessary is the reconstruction of the revolutionary party. Without a class party, not only is there no socialist revolution, but only the inevitable triumph of the interests of imperialism and therefore of barbarism.

Footnote

¹ 'Albania: Financial Swindle that Reflects the Capitalist Crisis'. *Internationalist Communist* is the publication in English of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.

Behind the Taliban Stands US Imperialism

After years of clan and tribal warfare (which long pre-dates the invasion by the USSR in 1979) the advent of the Taliban seems to offer the Afghan ruling class the prospect of unifying the country for the first time in decades. This despite the fact that at the time of writing the Taliban have just suffered their bloodiest and heaviest defeat in Mazar-i-Sharif.

This defeat came after a typical "victory" for the Taliban. Like so many of their previous gains it came as a result of the local militia leaders coming over to them through negotiation (or bribery!). In this latest case it seemed as though the whole of the North-West of Afghanistan had fallen to the Taliban without a shot being fired. Previously this Uzbek-speaking area had been in the hands of the ex-USSR local warlord General Abdurashid Dostam. He had been ousted by one of his commanders General Abdumalik Pahlavan. Dostam had fled to Turkey and Abdumalik had invited the Taliban into the northern city. However the alliance last barely three days because the Taliban made it clear that they intended to rule the area as a conquered territory. The Taliban foreign minister, the mullah Mohammed Ghaus insisted that Abdumalik's troops hand over their weapons and that the Taliban Governor of Herat, another mullah, Abdurazzaq, was to be brought in to run Mazar-i-Sharif.

Abdumalik and his clan saw that they had made a mistake and his forces attacked the Taliban who were surrounded inside the city. The fact that the Taliban all came from the Pushtu-speaking part of the country and they wore the full beard decreed as compulsory by their mullahs made them easy to identify. According to United Nations' aid workers 500 were killed in a single day - the bloodiest fighting in the entire Afghan civil war.

The Taliban have, however, not lost everything. For months they were unable to advance out of Kabul to either the north-west

or the north-east. This was because Dostam controlled the Russian-built tunnel through the Salang Pass whilst the Tadjiki-supported warlord Ahmed Shah Massoud had driven the Taliban back down the Panshir Valley, just as he had inflicted heavy casualties on the Red Army in that area earlier. Whilst Massoud still holds the Panshir the Taliban now have troops (100 truckloads according to the *Financial Times*) in Pol-i-khomri, a town to the north of the Salang tunnel. This may allow them to establish a bridgehead in the north-west. And, as we shall argue, the north west is their real strategic objective.

The Origins of the Taliban

The first question we have to answer is to explain why the Taliban have been so successful whilst other similar movements have failed. The answer is largely in the strength of their outside support.

The Taliban name means "students" to denote that they are the product of the *madrassas*, the orthodox Sunni religious schools based primarily in Quetta in Pakistan. These schools in turn drew their recruits from the thousands of Afghan refugees in Karachi and Lahore. The Taliban recruits have been sustained for years on US aid (paid through American Express offices in the main Pakistani and Indian towns) and Pakistani government support. The Taliban have also benefited from support from their sympathising movement in Pakistan, the Jamiat-e-Ulama Islami (which has always supported the Bhutto clan in Pakistan). It is no accident that the Taliban staged their successful take-over of the south of Afghanistan whilst Benazir Bhutto was Prime Minister. Through her, the Pakistani secret services, the Interservices Intelligence (ISI) has fuelled finance away from Pakistan's original client Gulbuddin Hekmatyar towards the Taliban (after a brief period of discussion with Najibullah, the old Stalinist Prime Minister in Kabul). Hekmatyar had become a liability. Not only had he shown that he was incapable

of taking Kabul from the pro-Indian Massoud but he further enraged the Pakistani paymasters in the US when he was accused of supporting "international terrorism", including the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York. From 1993 on the ISI were looking for another force to support beside Hekmatyar. At the same time the USA and Saudi Arabia both realised that the various Sunni groups which they had supported in the past against Soviet imperialism were now turning against themselves (In 1991 for example they had supported Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War and then organised attacks on American advisers in Saudi Arabia itself). This is why they supported the decision of the Bhutto-appointed leader of the ISI, Naserullah Babar, to fund the Taliban and supply them with both American and captured Soviet arms. Without the support of the three governments the Taliban simply would not have existed. This can be seen by simply looking at the weapons and intelligence the Taliban use. They have tanks (see photo), they have an airforce and an efficient system of telecommunications. It was clear too that when they intercepted a Russian cargo-plane flying over Kandahar in 1995 that they had sophisticated radar support - of a kind which only Pakistan held. Above all, however, the fact that Pakistan's former clients amongst the Pushtu-speaking militias have gone over to the Taliban without a fight, has more to do with Pakistan's "persuasion" than any military victory won by the Taliban.

The US and Islamic Fundamentalism

It might seem odd that US imperialism should also support a resolutely fundamentalist Islamic organisation as its instrument in the region when the US Government has long since pronounced Islamic fundamentalism the number one threat to US "values". The Taliban with their imposition of sharia law, their refusal to allow women to be seen in public without the chador and their vision of a united Islamic world, would seem to pose as much a threat to the US as any of the fundamentalist organisations which the US has consistently opposed since Khomeini took over in Iran in 1979. Samuel P. Huntington, Professor of Political Science at M.I.T has recently articulated US ruling class fears on this question in a new book asserting that the causes of future wars will be ideological and that Islamic fundamentalism is the most likely cause of such wars (He conveniently did not mention the encouragement the US had given to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in undermining French interests in Algeria - see *Islamic Fun-*

damentalism - A Capitalist Ideology in Revolutionary Perspectives 1.)

In the event however, it is US economic and strategic interests which determine who it seeks out as an ally or agent. Years of using the Afghan Islamicists as clients in its proxy war with Russia taught the US that the diehard Islamic political organisation may not always find it appropriate to rage against "US imperialism". Devoid of regional allies (Pakistan apart) the US has had to use the Taliban. Already it has seen the success of this support since the Taliban have wiped out Iranian influence in Afghanistan by over-running the Shi-ite province of south west Afghanistan and murdering Abdul Ali Mazari, the leader of the Iranian-backed movement, the Wahdat.

However that is not the only Great Game that the USA is playing in Central Asia. The value of US commerce outweighs any moral or political values that the regime may claim to espouse. The fact is that Afghanistan is more than ever an important strategic area in Central Asia. Its chronic clan wars made it a graveyard of British imperialism (General, later Lord Roberts "of Kandahar" was forced into ignominious retreat across the Khyber Pass in 1877) whilst the death knell of Stalinist imperialism in the 1980s followed Brezhnev's intervention to hold together the divided People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (i.e. the old CP). The Great Game in Central Asia, as it was called in the last century, is now about to enter a new chapter. In the past Afghanistan was a buffer between the Russian-ruled Central Asian territories and the British Indian possessions (which then also included Pakistan). The buffer status of Afghanistan was formally declared in the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 which settled the question so that the two states could join with France in an anti-German alliance. Today the geopolitical situation is different. The US is fighting to maintain a toehold in Central Asia but finding suitable client states has not been easy. Russia still continues to dominate its former Asian republics like Kazakhstan whilst the Gulf War has rendered both Iraq and Iran permanent pariahs for the US. This leaves only Pakistan which can be relied on and this why it is the base for the movement into Afghanistan.

The Imperialist Imperative

What makes the situation all the more urgent is the new economic opportunities which the collapse of the old USSR has opened up for both local and international powers in Central Asia. Afghanistan is the conduit from the Indian Ocean



Taliban with ex-Red Army tank in the Panshir Valley which is now the front line between them and the forces of Ahmed Shah Massoud

to Central Asia. It borders Uzbekistan (which has the biggest goldmine in the world), Tadjikistan (the world's largest silver deposits), and through them we reach Kazakhstan, home of a quarter of the world's known oil supplies. The gas fields of Turkmenistan have also been a battle ground amongst western companies. It is the battle for the latter which explains the US sudden enthusiasm for the Islamic fundamentalism of the Taliban. In the US the Taliban are seen as fundamentalist but not "radical" (i.e. anti-Western) in the sense of Hekmatyar or the Iranians. As Sunni fundamentalists they are seen as close to the Saudi ruling class (pro-Western and Islamic) and it is no accident that the Saudis and the Pakistanis are also financing the Taliban. The US thus believes that it can continue to use the Taliban as a force for stabilising Afghanistan so that US multinationals can exploit the area to build a gas pipeline from the port of Gwadar in Pakistan to Herat in Afghanistan and then on north to Turkmenistan.¹

The prime mover in this project is the American oil company Unocal, linked to the Saudi firm, Delta Oil... This gas pipeline which will cost \$2 billions (double the cost of an oil pipeline) answers two American priorities: to get an assured link to extract the hydrocarbon products of Central Asia and the Caspian where the American companies (including Chevron is investing massively; reinforcing the isolation of Iran (according to current Washington dogma) which would be the natural outlet for any pipeline given its existing infrastructure and proximity to Central Asia... Unocal and Delta oil have played an important role in "buying" local commanders not to mention their lobbying in Washington and their co-ordination with Pakistan.

Avec les talibans, la charia in Le Monde Diplomatique November 1996

Unocal has made no secret of its support for the Taliban. Its vice-president announced that the Taliban capture of Kabul was a "positive development" and that

...recent events were tending to favour the (gas pipeline) project.

In Afghanistan history is tending to repeat itself. In the 1930s US companies (like Aramco) supported the Saudi family and their Islamic pretensions. Today it is the turn of Afghanistan and the Taliban. The situation is a bit more complicated today. Afghanistan is also a major opium-producing centre. Because the Taliban have pronounced against hashish the US sees them as anti-drugs but in reality the mullahs seek to control the vast heroin trade which at \$50 billions a year produces higher earnings than the entire Saudi economy. Control of such a trade would give the Taliban a financial support. This could also explain why the Taliban have still refused to sign the contract offered to them by Unocal. Once they have control of the drugs revenue the Taliban will be independent of their sponsors. However the idea that the Taliban is capable of holding themselves and Afghanistan together is also unlikely to last. It is known that some of their commanders are ex-"communist" commanders who are operating under pseudonyms (with the title of "mullah"!). Furthermore as Pushtu-speaking Sunnis they are opposed by the Farsi-speaking Hazaras and Tadjiks as well as the Uzbeks in the north west. At the moment it looks as though the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have all gained whilst the losers in this chapter of the Great Game have been Russia, India and Iran.

What is clear is that we are not witnessing a more promising future for the people of Central Asia. Imperialist rivalry will ensure that the peace of the region will not last long. The current Taliban control of much of Afghanistan is just one more bloody episode in the history of the region. For the world working class the path to emancipation lie not in supporting this or that national bourgeoisie since each bourgeois faction is just the tool of competing imperialist interests, as our study of Afghanistan shows. Very often the needs of these imperialists are immediate like making strategic or economic gains but just as often they are about ensuring that a rival is forced out of a region or for an ephemeral long-term goal which may never be reached. In the nineteenth century only British India was profitable as a colony but that did not stop the Europeans continuing to scramble for more colonies. Their expectation was that all colonies would become profitable in the future. *Similar hopes and fears still animate imperialist rivalry today.* In our last issue we analysed how the British and US governments intervened in Central Africa to oust the pro-French Mobutu. Today the Nigerians and Liberians are invading Sierra Leone ostensibly "to restore democracy" but really at the behest of British and US imperialist interests. However it is not just a new "scramble for Africa" which is well underway. There is a scramble for the whole world. This was made clear by the new US Secretary of State, Madeleine

Albright who stated in January this year that,

One of the major objectives of our government is to ensure that the economic interests of the United States will be able to be extended on a planetary scale.

This has been clear in every conflict since the fall of the Stalinist empire. Now the US is calculating that none of its former anti-USSR allies gain any of the fruits of victory in the Cold War. And this has ensured that the current international scene is littered with scores of undeclared conflicts as each power manoeuvres for its own advantage. Central Asia like Central Africa is yet one more victory for the US but each victory is only followed by further challenges to American supremacy. And in this the real victims are the populations of the areas over which the imperialists are competing. They face death, dispossession and dislocation to satisfy the bestial appetites of a social system decaying towards barbarism - a barbarism which every day make the case for socialism far better than we can.

JD

1. The very same need to control the territory through which the gas and oil pipelines from Central Asia will pass lies behind the recent war of Chechen secession from Russia. (see *Workers Voice* 76, 70p from our address)

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Palestine: The Sordid Reality of Nationalism Today

It is a fundamental position of the communist left that, in the present day period, workers have nothing to gain by supporting so-called national liberation struggles. The history of national struggles since the first imperialist war of 1914-18 has shown that the only beneficiaries are the factions of the local bourgeoisie who maintain power by falling into line with one imperialist bloc or another.

In the 19th century Marx and Engels broadly argued that national liberation from the crumbling feudal empires of, for example, Russia and Austria-Hungary, would create new progressive capitalist national states which would in turn create the objective conditions for pro-



Exploited equally by the Zionist state and the Palestinian authority the Palestinian working class needs international solidarity

letarian revolution. They did not support national struggles per se as today's capitalist left (largely Trotskyist) would like to make out. They opposed liberation for those states which they thought would simply be the cat's-paws of one Great Power or another. In particular (and this is a modern irony) they opposed independence for the Balkan states which they saw as puppets of reactionary Russia.

Using the same method for the present imperialist epoch, national liberation in any small state cannot be historically progressive as the whole planet has already fallen under the domination of imperialism. Historically

Marxists supported national liberation from a tactical perspective. There was never any expectation that the national struggle in itself was socialist in content until the later counter-revolutionary distortions of the Stalinists, Trotskyists and Maoists. Even Lenin, who still believed in the possibility of national liberation after 1918, never claimed that national liberation was socialist. The Leninist position envisaged that national liberation would weaken the imperialist chain and therefore increase the possibilities for proletarian revolution. Unfortunately Lenin underestimated the ability of the metropolitan capitalist states to maintain their hegemony through economic means in a post-colonial situation. But his was an error of his time. To repeat it today is a class error.

Whilst almost every country now has political independence on a formal level, all are subject to the economic domination of international capital. This inevitably means a more ruthless exploitation of the workers who put the new ruling class into power, often accompanied by brutal political repression of all opposition and oppression of minority groups within the new nation state.

The Palestinian struggle has long been seen as the epitome of an anti-imperialist struggle and has been a cause celebre of the bourgeois left from the Stalinists to the anarchists. On the face of it the injustice suffered by the Palestinians renders the cause worthy of support by all who oppose oppression. On the one hand we have the Palestinians, over 750,000 of whom fled their homes in 1947-48 following the Zionist terror which was the precursor to the creation of the state of Israel. On the other hand we see the military might of the Israeli state backed to the hilt by the financial and political clout of US imperialism.

The activities of what passes for a Palestinian state in Gaza and parts of the West-Bank depressingly yet predictably confirms the internationalist communist analysis of the futility of national liberation from a proletarian perspective. In January 1994 we wrote in

Workers Voice:

There is every reason to suppose that in whatever form the Palestinian state emerges the main beneficiaries will be the bosses and the bureaucrats.

**Re-Distribution of Wealth
- To The Rich**

The millionaires including Arafat who controlled the PLO from their comfortable exile in Tunis have now returned home to fleece the Palestinian workers. In Gaza, Arafat has established a personal fiefdom, the likes of which would not have disgraced Ceaucescu or Saddam Hussein. Operating through a non-legally registered company set up in his wife's name, Arafat is seeking to dominate the economic life of Gaza in areas such as construction, computers, health and entertainment. This shady company known as "Al Bahr" operates by coercing smaller bourgeois and petty bourgeois firms into a so called partnership. Anyone rejecting the advances of "Al Bahr" is likely to find themselves in jail or subject to other forms of harassment.

Even without the shadowy deals of "Al Bahr", Arafat also dominates officially constituted monopolies in supplies of basic commodities such as cement, petrol and flour. These monopolies operate in collusion with the Israelis and the substantial profits end up in Arafat's recently discovered secret bank account in Tel-Aviv which was set up by the former Israeli prime minister Itzak Rabin.

Whilst the majority of the Gaza population live in squalid shanty towns, as they have done for the last 49 years, the ruling elite build themselves multi-million dollar villas. Similarly, whilst thousands of workers face destitution because of the frequent Israeli imposed border closures which prevents them from travelling to work, the rich and powerful speed through the checkpoints to spend their fortunes in the fashionable shops and restaurants of Tel Aviv. And, even whilst the so called "peace process" flounders on the Israeli's refusal to halt construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and even though the Palestinian National Authority has made it a felony punishable by death to collaborate in the construction of the settlements, there is strong evidence that the Palestinian Civil Affairs minister Jamil Tarifi, a big building contractor continues to build settlements for the Israelis.¹

This blatant corruption and extortion is sur-

prising only in its scale rather than in its content. The PLO, like other nationalist movements effected a populist tone in order to mobilise the working class in its support. Yet even before coming to power the PLO had a clear anti-working class track record. The PLO received very substantial donations from such enlightened sources as the Saudi and Kuwaiti governments. That's why prior to the Gulf War Arafat went to Kuwait to persuade striking Palestinian immigrant workers to return to work. When Arafat changed tack and supported Iraq in the Gulf War the consequence was that thousands of Palestinian workers were imprisoned, tortured and expelled by the Kuwaiti authorities. Such was the PLO's responsibility for the Palestinian emigre workers who themselves contributed to the PLO coffers through a compulsory tax on their wages.

**Proletarian Internationalism Is The
Only Way Forward**

The average income of Palestinian workers has plummeted since the creation of the Palestinian National Authority. Of course it would be unfair to attribute this to the Palestinian state as Israeli border closures are a major cause of this decline. However this issue symbolises the futility of support for nationalism in this epoch. Even the largest states are hostages to the global nature of capital so what chance for a minute and impoverished entity such as Palestine? Even if the Palestinian bourgeoisie were not so manifestly redistributing wealth to themselves, the question of an exploited and destitute working class could not be resolved within the Palestinian context, no more than the question of the emancipation of the workers in any country can be posed on a national basis. This is why it is equally futile for Palestinian workers to reject the corrupt PLO in favour of more militant nationalists such as Islamic Jihad or Hamas. The terror meted out to workers by their fundamentalist friends in countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan has exposed the completely anti-proletarian nature of these groups.

There is no unique solution to the question of the misery of the Palestinian workers. Class struggle as opposed to national struggle is the only way workers can advance their interests. It is essential that revolutionaries are crystal clear on this issue and that the reactionary propaganda of the Trotskyists and other so-called "socialist" apologists of nationalism is exposed for the anti-working class garbage that it is.

PBD

Footnotes

1. *The Guardian* 24 April 1997

Readers' Letters

Against Work or Against Wage Labour?

The correspondence below is an exchange with a proletarian group Kamunist Kranti (Communist Revolution) from Faridabad, a large industrial town near Delhi, India. They have produced a booklet entitled *A Ballad Against Work*, a confused affair to which it was difficult to respond. However KK wrote and asked our views. When we said we thought it a waste of effort and resources for a once-promising communist group to produce a document which sees no need for workers to organise and act politically to change the world they sent the letter below. This shows a further retreat of KK towards the kind of confusionism that the CWO itself had to struggle against twenty years or more ago. As it represents an all too familiar trend around the world we have decided to publish the exchange. We invite further comments from our readers.

Dear friends,

Thanks for your e-mail dated May 16, 1997. We were taken by surprise by such an avalanche of dramatic condemnation. It seems that we are always deviating from some expressway of revolutionary ought to dos. It feels as if some barometer is thrust upon us and unfortunately we seem to have always failed in giving sufficiently illuminating results.

Anyway, to try to answer some of your accusations.

1) "ballad" concerns itself with the concrete history of the work regime that has evolved over the last two hundred years. We call this period the emergence and dominance of wage-labour based production for the market.

Now, maybe you disagree with our contention in "ballad" that this period has led to the following :

- a) intensification of work & other aspects of everyday living
- b) lengthening of the working day
- c) intensive and extensive expansion in the disciplinary apparatus
- d) lowering in the standard of living
- e) increase in the extraction of produce

It seems you have disagreements on

these points. Had they been expressed more concretely, we could have understood our analytical inadequacies better.

2) Another basis of your perturbation could be:

- a) wage-workers face a very different reality than what has been portrayed in "ballad" or
- b) more damagingly, we have deliberately erased & suppressed very effective methods of struggles or
- c) the instances of struggle & analysis in "ballad" motivatedly disarm wage-workers in their resistance to the apparatus of extraction, control & discipline. Again, had your contentions been clearer, we would have been able to evaluate our own experiences differently.

3) We are not very clear as to how you understand the perceptions of wage-workers. Our interactions and conversations with a large cross section of wage-workers have led us to recognize a few important things: There is a strong anti-leader, anti-militants (not militancy) feeling amongst wage-workers because of a realisation born of repeated bitter and painful experiences. Militants or leaders are now & then crushed and often capitulate and are co-opted by managements.

This realisation forces a recognition of the terrain of everyday struggles

To our Readers
Dialogue with our readers develops revolutionary theory. Take part in the fight for communism. We only ask that letters be as short as possible, with an address.

that each & every wage-worker wages, without leaders-representatives- middlepersons, individually or collectively in small groups. These are the very struggles that managements & leaders make all out efforts to erase so that representation can survive and sustain hierarchies. We are at present attempting to give these small steps some confidence and erase the guilt that is associated with being against work, against discipline and against productivity. These struggles have their particular dynamics and momentum which have to be recognized and disseminated. It is out of these seemingly small struggles that new forms of organised activity and

resistance could emerge that will not allow the collective strength of wage-workers to get abducted by different unities. How some people in the name of the proletariat can and do organise is fundamentally different from how wage-workers can do organised activity on a global scale.

If you think otherwise, you need to give us concrete examples to the contrary. Not merely homilies on class-conscious workers and political organisations.

4) That the future should be the product of the imagining of a few, and that others will follow and act on the basis of that imagination is not acceptable to us. What we envisage, instead, is the emergence of a practice that takes into account every wage-workers participation in order to imaginatively invent a non-hierarchical global community. Your statements make it look like that the path is already there, all one has to do is to steadfastly follow it. Is this a naturally ordained path or a historically derived one? If this is an historically derived one, then it is based on a specific set of experiences and conceptions and can be critically evaluated. Then, at least we presume, it should be open to dialogue with other experiences and conceptions.

If, however, the path is a naturally ordained one, a revealed category of faith and belief, then why fight over it. Your belief is yours.

5) As regards marxism, it is best for us to hold our comments until the publication of our next text "Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy". We will send you a copy as soon as it is out, and then pick up the debate about marxism in detail.

6) Some minor details :
 a) as regards "aufhebened". A small word which apparently means a lot. Our presumption in using it stems from the confidence that if in the 19th century workers were willing to read Capital, a book which deployed categories of Hegelian philosophy, as well as footnotes in Latin, Greek, Italian and French languages, then it is surely possible that in 1997 one word will not be such an impediment.
 b) as for the glossy cover, ours is a dusty landscape and the gloss makes for a good dustcover. It is perhaps a question of geo-cultural perception.
 With greetings,
 SS

CWO Reply to Kamunist Kranti

You've missed the main point of our criticism which is that your 'Ballad' has nothing political to say.

To take the most important point first, the question of revolutionary organisation for the emancipation of the working class. We entirely agree that the future communist society will not "be the product of the imagining of a few" with the rest of the working class ("others") following and acting on the "basis of that imagining". However, you say that this is unacceptable to you. We say that this is unacceptable because it is IMPOSSIBLE. It is idealist utopianism. The world is not changed by the dreams of intellectuals being taken up by the masses. Nor will it be changed by every wage worker "imaginatively inventing" his/her own utopia. We who are living under capitalism today can't possibly predict what the future global community will be like precisely because it will be shaped by the human 'collectivity' as it responds to material and practical problems. Unlike our pre-marxian forebears, we are not concerned with drawing up more or less imaginative blueprints for the future. That is not what we meant when we said that your document lacks a vision of communism.

To our mind it's confusing to speak of communism simply in terms of a "non-hierarchical" society and to present the struggle for communism as a struggle against hierarchies and leaders. (In a strict sense it is also wrong, since exceptionally talented or skilled individuals in particular fields will always be recognised and admired by their fellow creatures, albeit that in a communist world DIFFERENT talents will be appreciated.) But to return to the point. You know; we know; that communism means a stateless, classless society where wage labour, commodity production and money do not exist and where everyone who is physically and mentally able contributes to the communal effort of producing society's needs and to the equally communal process of deciding what those needs are. (Although it doesn't mean the abolition of work altogether as your

Ballad implies.) How do we know this? Is it because each of us has responded to our own experience of wage labour and happened to have 'imaginatively invented' a similar 'non-hierarchical global community'? Or is it because we, in our own political 'collectivities', have (even indirectly) absorbed, read, discussed and criticised the ideas in key political texts – notably, in this case, the Communist Manifesto? When it comes to HOW wage workers can transform their implicit resistance to capitalism into an outright revolutionary struggle for its overthrow and replacement with communism we entirely agree that this is a "historically derived" path; i.e. it is not a path which is naturally revealed by the continuous workplace skirmishes which occur daily under capitalism but rather requires an appreciation of the historical lessons of previous struggles of our class, an understanding of the nature of capitalist society and the capitalist state, and in fact a [historically conditioned] vision of a communist alternative to existing society. In other words, communist consciousness does not arise directly from the immediate struggle of 'wage workers' but is the collective product of theoretical analysis, historical experience and reflection on that experience. Now, at least the CWO and the International Bureau make no bones about the lessons we draw from past experience and apart from our regular press these are summed up in the IBRP Platform and the CWO's Socialism or Barbarism. Despite our long relationship KK has never "critically evaluated" either of these texts. However, this is not our current preoccupation. Our concern is that KK currently says less and less about what it has derived from history about the path to communism and that the Ballad Against Work doesn't say anything at all, at least not clearly and explicitly.

Your letter, however, is more revealing and confirms that KK is becoming more and more subject to what you yourselves once termed the "fetishising of spontaneity" (as opposed to the "fetish of the party"). [In a KK text ... "for discussion on 'Challenges before the communist movement' at Nagpur, 15-16 Feb 1992"] Five years or so ago KK could state that "Between these two extreme views, there is the possibility of an approach which synthesises both the objective and subjective factors. There is an urgent need for marxists to join on a broad international platform." With this we could only concur, but we did take issue with your view of the Russian Revolu-

tion, summed up in the sentence that followed, viz: "With all its limitations the Bolshevik practice between Feb. 1917 and Oct. 1917 provides a direction to a productive relationship between a marxist organisation and the working class."

Without going into the details, we argued that this revealed an essentially anarchistic view of October as a Bolshevik coup d'etat, the beginning of an attempt to establish a party dictatorship over the working class. You didn't accept this and evidently saw no need to re-examine the strange conclusion you had drawn that the party which had raised the watchwords which best articulated the immediate aspirations and way forward for the working class [Down with the War and All Power to the Soviets], which had encouraged the Russian proletariat to see their revolution as the first step in the world revolution, which had organised and led the insurrection, that on the morning afterwards should no longer have "a productive relationship" with the working class. This is an untenable position. Either you have to recognise that the most class conscious workers, those most clear and active in the revolutionary struggle, were Bolsheviks (hence the Party's enormous following and influence over the working class as a whole) and that this didn't change the morning after the insurrection; or you have to conclude that somehow the working class was duped into allowing soviet power to be substituted by a vicious party dictatorship. In the latter case, you have to immediately imply a separation between the party and the working class and downplay the significance of the political leadership accorded by the Bolsheviks (particularly Lenin with the April Theses) in the initial success of the revolution.

Moreover, as you found, it is difficult to explain how "the writer of 'State and Revolution' came as you put it, to "actively participate(s) in the formation of a standing army and secret police ..." only 3 or 4 months after October if you see the road to communism in idealist terms, simply as acting in consonance with communist philosophy, and ignore the fact that before the proletariat in Russia could get on with enjoying life in the transitional 'semi-state' they had to confront the armed reaction of their own bourgeoisie backed up by the military might of over a dozen imperialist powers. If the formation of the political police and the red army were mistakes they were mistakes

forced on the proletariat by the exigencies of the situation. Granted, the Bolshevik Party ended up as the executor of a brutal state capitalist dictatorship in a society where the word 'soviet' was emptied of all meaningful content but this was after more than 2 years of absolutely devastating civil war and famine, not to mention the failure of the revolution in Germany and the rest of Europe. Literally hundreds of thousands of workers, particularly the most class conscious, BOLSHEVIK workers, died. Many more were forced by starvation to 'drift back to the countryside'. The rest of the working class in Russia was on its knees. The influx of new members into the party in 1921 at the same time as factions were officially banned is, we think, symptomatic of what had happened to the Bolshevik Party: from the guiding light of the revolution to conservator of the Russian state.

Excuse us dwelling on what you probably know very well but what we are trying to emphasise is that essentially the Bolshevik Party became what it did as a result of the process of defeat of the revolution. It was not the cause of that defeat. On the contrary, the initial victory of the proletariat in Russia would have been impossible without the Bolshevik Party. Don't you agree? And don't you agree that this is the crucial lesson we have to learn today in the face of the bourgeois version of history which tells us that all revolutions end up with reactionary terror and dictatorship, that all power corrupts and that political parties per se are 'anti-democratic' and bureaucratic (the 'iron law of oligarchy'). In other words, any attempt at revolutionary political organisation will end up as a reactionary force. This scenario is of course echoed by the anarchists and in the case of the Russian Revolution by the heirs of Hermann Gorter and the German Left, the council communists. (And the so-called libertarian communists who may not even be aware of their historical precursors.) The CWO began its political existence by thinking it could follow in Gorter's footsteps and build a "party of a new type" "hard as steel and clear as glass" and without hierarchies. However, we had to break from this legacy, not only in order to have a consistent analysis of the Russian Revolution (whose defeat the German Left explained essentially in terms of the hierarchical Bolshevik Party) but in order to explain our own existence as an organised, class conscious minority. Most importantly, we had to accept the necessity of the existence of such a 'precocious

minority of the class in the development of a wider class consciousness and the practical building of a revolutionary movement. Once we did that (and again, this was a process shaped by practical experience not an instantaneous intellectual conversion) the difficult responsibility of building a clear political nucleus capable of influencing and politicising the daily class struggle has remained our central aim. Without, we hope, having a grossly exaggerated sense of our own importance, we accept that without a two-way relationship between revolutionary organisations and the wider class movement any sparks of class consciousness generated from day to day clashes between capital and labour will be dampened down by the unions and the capitalist left or simply burn themselves out through lack of political oxygen.

Our task, surely, is to encourage those sparks of consciousness to become revolutionary flames by drawing them together in the political organisation, or collectivity if you like, where they can develop into something more permanent that is fired by the process of political education. What worries us frankly, is that KK does not accept this responsibility out of a misguided fear that political leadership would disarm workers in struggle, would undermine their self-reliance and ability to organise independently and so on. In other words your trajectory is the self-contradictory path of 'libertarianism': a political organisation which rejects the need to organise politically because all supposedly proletarian organisations are hierarchical rackets designed to "abduct" the struggle (like Jacques Camatte and his heirs, several of whom you claim to "have gained immensely from") and undermine the self-confidence of workers. If this is the case, then what becomes of Kammunist Kranti? Answer - limit your role to recognising and disseminating news of small independent struggles from which "new forms of organised activity and resistance could emerge". Laudable as this is, disseminating news of struggles is not the be all and end all of revolutionary work. Moreover, although we readily accept that there is a distinction between the organisational forms workers create for themselves when they begin to struggle outside the unions and a political organisation or 'collectivity', we certainly don't accept that this means political organisation is irrelevant to the class struggle. (If this is what you mean by the obtuse reference to "How some people in the

name of the proletariat can and do organise is fundamentally different from how wage workers do organised activity on a global scale.") The potentially class wide bodies which emerge during struggles are in general temporary organs which disintegrate or are diluted and co-opted by management as the struggle dies down. The proletarian political organisation, on the other hand, is a permanent acquisition OF THE WORKING CLASS (not a set of usurpers ready to act in the name of and against the class) which not only disseminates news of struggles and wherever possible is actively involved in them, but which also aims to generate political consciousness by putting local struggles in the context of the broader, long term struggle for communism. And the best gauge of how successful we have been in developing class consciousness is how far we are able to strengthen the revolutionary political organisation. A revolutionary organisation which does not try to win over worker militants or, even worse, which pretends that it is not really interested in doing so and when it does pretends that it has nothing to teach them out of fear of being seen as just another political racket is really leaving potential communists in the dark (and arguably is one of the most dishonest of all).

This is not a question of elitist intellectuals thinking they have all the answers but of recognising that the struggle for communism is more than a question of organisational forms. By all means encourage workers to fight their battles collectively without any illusions that the unions will do it for them but we are in a better position to do this when we have communists in the workplace - as we know KK has in Faridabad. Now, are you saying that when workers struggle autonomously there are no leaders? This would be a complete fantasy. Of course the leaders are DIFFERENT leaders and are trusted by the rest of their workmates because they haven't been part of previous union sell-outs, management stooges or whatever. It is the most clear sighted people, with ideas about how to organise and the precise aims of the struggle who emerge as leaders and who end up being delegated by their fellow workers to the strike committee or whatever other collective body is created. Naturally this is an entirely different kind of leadership from the trade union official, with a permanent job paid to act in the service of capital. A genuine collective struggle demands regular mass meetings and the participation of everyone involved

with worker delegates subject to recall. As the strikes in the winter of 1995/96 showed in France the steps towards such a struggle are not necessarily going to be entirely outside the union mentality and framework. (They are more likely to be if genuine communists are involved.) Unfortunately, despite the undoubted widespread cynicism and mistrust of the trades unions that exists today, it is not our experience at present that workers are itching to break out on their own: they are either apathetic or still following the union methods although with little expectation of success. Evidently the situation is different in India. In any case this does not alter our basic disagreement that the anti-capitalist struggle is not about getting rid of leaders and hierarchies as such. On the contrary, communists have to be ready to put forward alternative ways of organising and be prepared to take on the responsibility of leadership. Simply focussing on 'anti-hierarchical' forms of struggle is doing a disservice to the working class and it is another fantasy to think that this too cannot be co-opted by capital. [We are reminded of the plethora of 'self-management' struggles in the Seventies which ended up with workers taking over bankrupt factories and self-managing their own, more intense, exploitation and redundancies. Today, for example, Japanese-style management techniques are based on the concept of anti-hierarchy: apparently workers are more ready to up productivity if they eat in the same canteens and think they are in the same boat as management.] In short, we think that 'anti-hierarchy' is not the core focus for communists. Moreover, we think you are up a gum tree if you think that the struggle is against work as such. Against capitalist exploitation and wage labour, certainly but communism will not mean the abolition of the necessity to produce. It WILL mean that everyone becomes a producer and an end to the alienation of the majority of members of society from control over the means to determine how and what is produced.

As for the details of the *Ballad* itself, it doesn't seem to us to be a very concrete history. If you are talking about the history of the conditions of exploitation over the last 200 years it's not true, at least here in Europe, that things have steadily got worse since the inception of capitalism. Certainly wages and living standards have been reduced since the onset of the crisis in the early Seventies but conditions are still not the same as in the early days of

the industrial revolution. The boom that followed the 2nd World War gave workers in the metropolises an unprecedentedly high standard of living: probably higher than the 'lucrative middle class market' that is currently emerging in India, according to Financial Times reports. The picture is a much more complex one than you make out. In our view it would have been much more useful if you'd written a systematic article on the evolution of wage labour in India with more conclusive evidence that living standards are worse than under feudalism. We'd also like to know to what extent globalisation (notably the transfer of jobs from the metropolises) is affecting the structure and conditions of the working class in India. Is a relatively better-off 'workers aristocracy' being created? More generally, we'd like to see you link the worsening conditions of the working class to the capitalist crisis. Is it really simply that conditions have declined for 200 years?

However this is not the main criticism we would like you to address. Our

more fundamental concern is that KK seems to have forgotten that to reach communism both the soviets (workers councils) and the party (the organised expression of communist consciousness) are necessary. We are sorry to see how far you have travelled down the spontaneist trajectory. To our mind it means that the efforts of KK will be increasingly wasted and irrelevant to the working class.

Internationalist greetings
ER

pp CWO/IBRP

A Ballad Against Work

can be obtained from:
Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi,
N.I.T. Faridabad, 121001, India.

It is free but we suggest that you send a donation. The text is also available electronically.

Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): COMMUNISM.
2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.
3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of

world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

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Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

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