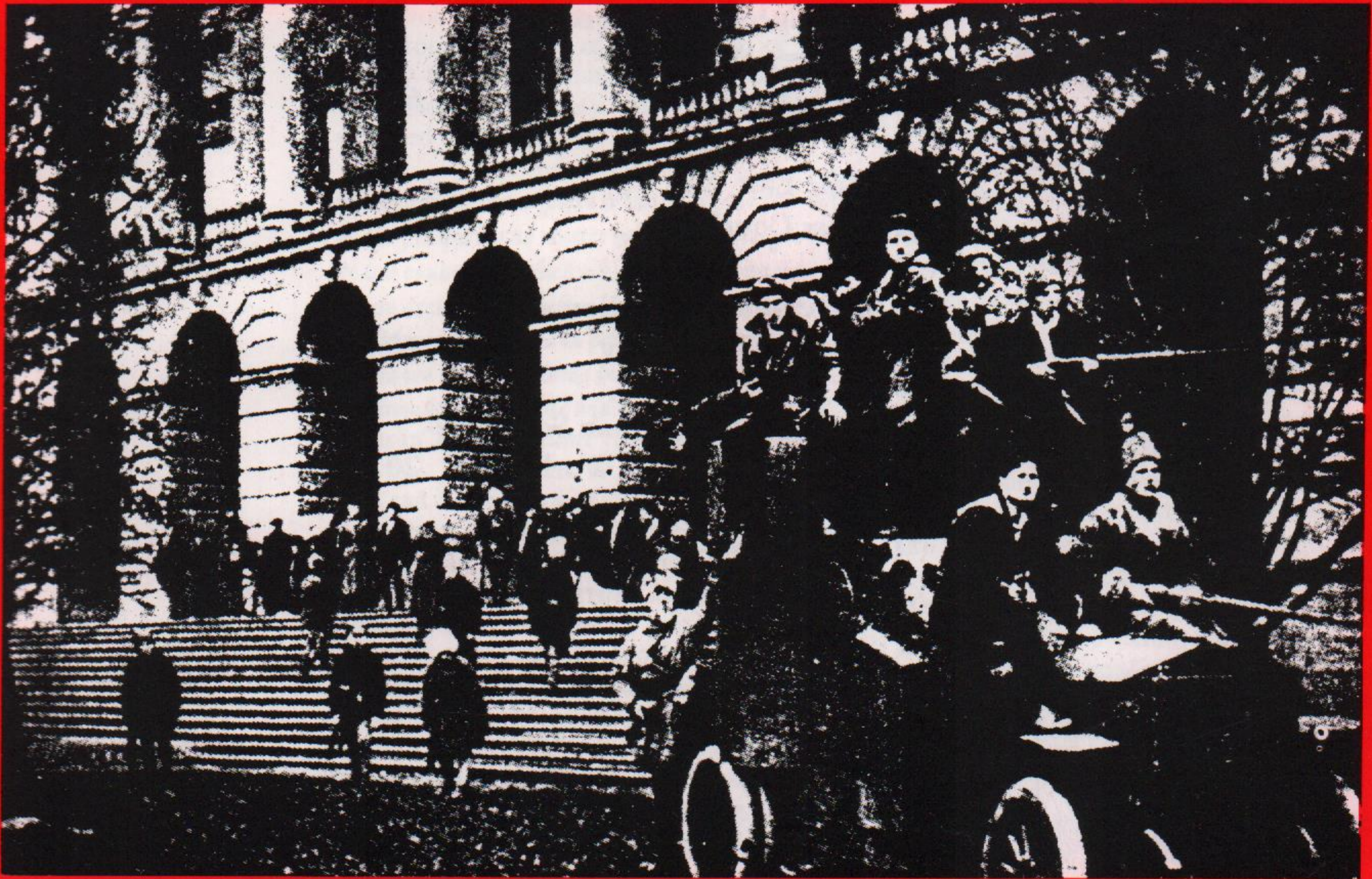


Revolutionary Perspectives 8

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation



The October Revolution and the Working Class Today

Nation or Class

UPS Strike in the USA

The Middle East War Process

Labour - Party of International Capital

German Social Democracy in World War One

Toothless Tigers Reveal the Real Capitalist Crisis

**Revolutionary Perspectives
Series 3 No.7 Summer 1997**

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RP	£10	£12	£15
ICR	£5	£6	£7
Combined	£15	£18	£22
Supporters	£20	£25	£27
Institutional	£20	£25	£27

The above rates are for one year and include postage

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Nation or Class?

The underlying theme of this RP reflects what has been going on in what passes for the real world recently. In the last few weeks we have been saturated with propaganda about "the nation". "The nation is united in its grief" intoned the press after the death of the Princess of Wales. Then public sector workers, who include some of the lowest paid in Britain, were told to accept pay restraint "for the good of the nation". Even the devolution referenda turned into a triumph of nationalism - not of the Scottish or Welsh variety but of the smug British "Gosh aren't we democratic" variety. And the Head Prefect summed it all up for us

Modern Britain is a place where everyone can share in our prosperity no matter what their background. It is a country in which we have a constitution where decisions are taken closer to the people so that confidence is restored in politics. It is a nation where we raise standards in our schools so that children have the skills and knowledge to succeed.
Blair in *The Guardian* 18.9.97

The sad thing is nobody laughed. This pompous piece of nonsense which is manifestly untrue was faithfully reported without comment. Nobody asked why Labour have asked working class students to pay £1000 of their fees and their total maintenance costs if this is a land where "everyone can share in our prosperity." Blair, Blunkett, Straw etc. (like most of the Cabinet) are of the generation that benefited from the right to a subsidised higher education but now they are kicking the ladder away for children from working class homes. When Blair turns down a wage rise and only accepts one "in line with inflation" that only gives him £3000 or what 20% of households in Britain live on today. Presumably Blair thinks that his attacks on single parents (see article on next page) are helping them to share in "our" prosperity.

Blair however is not the only one on Fantasy Island. We were not going to comment on the obscene hysteria that followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. However our correspondents have asked us to and events themselves demand a response. The Wednesday following her funeral the BBC began a six-part serial trying to answer the question "why a cultured nation like the Germans should have supported Adolf Hitler?". An hour later ITV provided the answer when it screened the England-Moldova football match. Its preamble, showing football fans holding candles or their hearts (à la Ronald Reagan) as they sang "God Save the Queen" (after the Elton John song had done the Rudolf Hess warm-up bit), was like a Nuremberg Rally without the speeches (all the other trappings of mindless nationalism were there). It was truly a frightening spectacle. It conveyed

in pictures what Marx put in words in 1843 that

the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class.

Ideology always reigns supreme when there is no challenge to the existing order. And ideology is the means by which the dominated class submits to the rule of the dominating class despite the total irrationality of that domination. Only when there is a practical movement of resistance led by those who have already rejected that domination does the rational enter into human affairs. Judging by the evidence of the last few weeks we are a long way from such a state of affairs.

A Bosses' Britain

This is only underlined by the fact that the Liverpool Dockers have just passed their second anniversary locked out, whilst the sacked Magnet strikers from Darlington have also refused to go away. We salute their courage and their resolution but we also have to recognise their isolation. They have received at best, sporadic support from the rest of the working class partly because everyone is fearful in the current situation of the consequences of losing their job. But this is only one reason why the bosses are able to get away with their continuing offensive. They are also ably aided by the unions, and the new Labour Government. It was no accident that British Airways thought it could bully its ground staff and cabin crew into accepting worse working conditions as soon as Labour was elected. After all, their Chief Executive is a personal friend of the newly elected Prime Minister.

As for the unions the real scabs in the dockers dispute are the TGWU. It has helped select the workers that replaced those who were sacked. The other 900 TGWU workers in the Merseyside Ports Authority have continued working throughout. It is not just a question of changing the union leaders in order to get a different struggle. We will only get a more effective fight through a class-wide movement which does not defend this or that sector, this or that trade, or a single workplace in isolation. The article in this issue on the UPS strike in the US, written by a member of the Los Angeles Workers' Voice group fully accords with our own views on that strike and once again underlines the fact that workers struggling section by section cannot defeat a state which deploys not only the police but also the unions as part of its arsenal. By definition a successful strike in the future will be a strike outside of and in many cases against the unions themselves. The unions will continue to defend "the country" as they did in World War One but workers can only defend themselves through their own class solidarity.

Nationalism is not a natural instinct. It has been carefully manufactured in the last two

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Revolutionary Perspectives 1

Five years hard Labour

The idea that a Labour government would have something better to offer workers has worn very thin very quickly. Labour made it clear before the election that the interests of the state were paramount and it was elected amidst a frenzy of patriotic images and flag waving.

The agenda has shifted as the economic crisis has developed. Solutions can no longer be found within the boundaries of the nation state and capitalism is becoming increasingly globalised, with ever greater concentrations of capital being held by international monopolies whose sole aim is the maximisation of profit, naturally at the expense of the working class.

Blair and the Labour government are extremely conscious that they are acting as part of an international bourgeoisie. Before the election Blair quoted the reforms of sister parties around the world responding to the globalisation of the economy, and the Labour party makes no secret of the fact that they admire some of the most draconian attacks on the working class, such as those against welfare in the US. In other words Labour is doing exactly as the demands of international finance capital dictate. As we said in *International Communist* no. 15

Everywhere the state, that collective capitalist, conscious of its own role, has encouraged economic restructuring and capital concentration and has targeted its own intervention along four fundamental policy lines:

- a. liberalisation of the capital and labour markets (deregulation)*
- b. privatisations*
- c. restructuring of public spending*
- d. integration of the national economy into the continental context.*

The whole point of New Labour is that it is the party of the British ruling class which can best promote the interests of the multinationals and international finance capital through a comparatively united policy on European integration and a fresh assault on the working class. A brief look at each policy in turn will underline them further.

Deregulation

Labour will continue with the deregulation of both the capital and labour markets started under Thatcher. As far as the labour market is concerned Blair has made

it clear he wants British workers to be as competitive as those in the "tiger economies" of South East Asia. In certain parts of Britain he does not have far to go; wages in South Wales recently rivalled those in South Korea. Months before the election Labour was clear that the working class would pay the cost of globalisation and introduced plans to reduce job security (in the short term of course) in return for new working practices, including multi-tasking, productivity improvements and an end to demarcation. Labour is also anxious to copy the attacks of the private sector and of European firms. It is looking at the examples of:

- Blue Circle, where the GMB and TGWU have exchanged five years of job security for pay restraint and flexible working practices. In other words, the unions have agreed to limit any chance workers have of fighting back in exchange for 5 years guaranteed worsening conditions and increased exploitation.
- in Europe where German firms and their union partners have signed long-term deals limiting workers to set pay, hours of work and practices.

Freedom, it would seem, does not feature very highly in the free labour market. If Labour's plans go ahead it will feature even less, with cuts in benefits driving wage rates down further forcing workers to compete with each other for low-waged, low-skilled jobs.

The Labour Party is not carrying out its plans alone. It has had more than a little help from those staunch defenders of international capital - the trades unions. At the moment they are breaking their necks (unfortunately not literally) to help in the process of sacrificing workers in the interests of global capital. The unions are busily setting themselves up as 'partners in business'. The General Secretary of the TUC, John Monks, summed it up.

We want to develop a sense of common action and purpose with employers.

Financial Times, 3rd September 1997.

As a result the unions are working hand in hand with industry and the state. Both Monks and Edmonds (General Secretary of the GMB) have been appointed to the government's advisory group on competitiveness and other general secretaries meet regularly with the DTI and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to discuss the best ways of getting more for nothing from the working class.

Although it has been dubbed New Unionism, the only thing that is really new about it is the

element of greater honesty. Unions no longer need even to pose as the defenders of workers' interests, and as Monks says

The days when trades unions proved an adversarial opposition force are past in industry.

Financial Times, 3rd September 1997.

The TUC is trying to establish closer links with the CBI and like the Labour government it is practising what it preaches by ensuring its own labour force is 'flexible'. It has done this so well it is due to be rewarded by the CBI with an award for its management techniques. The TUC and the CBI are currently discussing issues close to the heart of the globalisation process, including labour market flexibility and employability, and preparations for U.K. membership of the European Monetary Union.

Privatisation

At the very heart of its election campaign Labour made it quite clear it had no intention of reversing any part of the process of privatisation. The idea that socialism exists when the capitalist state owns and runs an industry has outlived its usefulness both economically and ideologically. The state has rid itself of the burden of propping up unprofitable sectors of the economy and Labour has pledged a switch in state aid instead in the shape of huge grants to attract inward investment by the global corporations. In other words a continuation of the same policy as the Tories.

The Windfall Tax on the privatised utilities is not an attack on privatisation at all, and the money raised is to be channelled into the 'Welfare to Work' scheme, where it hopes to get 250,000 young people off the unemployment list and into low paid jobs, cutting social security spending at the same time. In any case the Windfall Tax has not worried any of the utilities too much, British Telecom described their share as very 'satisfactory' and none of the others have been damaged either.

Public spending

Labour is fully aware that in order to attract inward investment both public spending and the government debt must be brought under control. Its strict rules for spending and borrowing pass under the slogan 'save and invest' which replaces the 'tax and spend' philosophy of Keynesianism. As a result Labour has pledged a freeze on public spending for at least 2 years, and will not increase the £300 billion total public expenditure. Targets for 1997-8 are £266.5 billion and for 1998-9 £273.7 billion. This

means, of course, a continuing hard line over public sector pay rises, and further cuts on the social wage of the working class. No new money, for example, has been promised to the NHS and problems are being blamed on the cumbersome bureaucracy, despite the fact that waiting lists grew in August to the highest ever level of 1.2 million people.

Labour has also ended free education by completely cutting all subsistence grants and making students pay for tuition fees in universities. It was hard enough for young workers to get through university before but Labour has now ensured that those who make it will have to mortgage their futures. Even though the student situation will become increasingly desperate more and more young workers are now forced to look to higher education as an option due to appalling levels of youth unemployment and cuts in benefits aimed directly at young people.

Welfare Attacks

One of Labour's plans to reduce government debt and drive down wage levels in one go is the 'Welfare to Work' scheme. The philosophy behind it could have come straight from a Dickens novel but unfortunately it is real enough and is being pushed as progress. Their argument is that the massive levels of unemployment created by the international crisis and the whole restructuring process is, in fact, not the fault of capitalism at all but of bone idle workers living in luxury thanks to state handouts in the 'something for nothing' culture. Blair et al. want to turn this around and let workers have 'nothing for something'. 18-25 year olds, for instance, are to be offered a low waged job (a subsidised job or work with a voluntary or environmental organisation) or full-time education or training. Any refusal will lead to cuts in benefit and eventually withdrawal of benefit altogether. Likewise with single parents, who are coming under attack both ideologically and economically. Once their child is 4 years old the single parent will be expected to take a job or a training course. Compulsion at a later date has not been ruled out and single parents may lose benefits altogether. Child poverty is already a serious issue in Britain. According to DSS figures more than a million children live in households where incomes are half that of the poorest 10% and one in three children now live in families with less than half the average income. It is little wonder that charities set up in the Victorian era to provide children with shoes for school can hardly keep up with demand. The globalisation of poverty, it would seem, is real enough.

Europe

The greatest difference to emerge during the election between Labour and the Conservatives was the issue of Europe. Once in power Labour made a firm promise to fight for the completion of the EU's single market by mid-1998.

One of the greatest fears the bourgeoisie has about the process of globalisation is its vast potential for chaos. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the single nation state does not control enough capital to defend itself alone which is why we have a tendency, albeit hesitant towards supranational blocs. Labour like the Tories before them are anxious not to lose out on the chance for Britain to act as a springboard for capital into and out of Europe. Hence they are continuing the policy of courting both the USA and Germany.

One thing is certain adherence to the EU will certainly be at the expense of the working class. Everything will have to come under increasing scrutiny and control. Currency management will have to become more centralised and the control of wage rates and the labour market will need to be carried out to the satisfaction of monopoly capital. Again Labour has powerful allies in the unions who are smoothing the way for the worsening conditions to come. For John Monks and the TUC it is backward managements which prevent workers being used to their full extent

We want positive flexibility of the kind one sees on the continent. Britain comes top of the flexibility league on ease of hire and fire and willingness of employees to work long hours. We do not do very well on skills, an lead times to introduce new products, reliability and efficiency and changes in organisational structures ... management structures are the blockage

Observer, 7th September 1997.

Naturally the whole process will be sold back to workers as progress, although the *Social Chapter* is hardly anything to celebrate. Under the *Parental Leave Directive* workers will be entitled to 3 months **unpaid leave**, whilst under the *Working Time Directive* workers can refuse to work for more than 48 hours a week. This will only be real choice if wage levels are high enough, which is unlikely given the growing pressure to keep them low.

The other great step forward is the creation of works councils where workers will be able to let off steam without causing too much disruption and where they will be encouraged to help management think up new schemes to keep their workplace competitive. Despite all this, Blair is anxious in case it interferes with

flexibility and pushes labour costs up. Labour have repeatedly voiced opposition to a minimum wage for the same reason, despite the fact that where the minimum wage does exist it is hardly ever legally enforced.

All this makes it increasingly more difficult for the capitalist left to keep up its nonsense that Labour is really a workers' party which has simply been hijacked by a right-wing leadership. Instead organisations like the SWP are now telling us in feigned surprise that "We didn't vote for this". A lot of workers didn't despite being told to do so by the SWP. Their latest cynical manipulation in calling for a vote for Labour only underlines their real class nature. Real communist and revolutionary politics can only be based around an unambiguous programmatic critique of capitalism which helps to educate the working class, not manoeuvres within the system itself.

In reality Labour has become "New" because capitalism has new demands which it, as a loyal supporter of British capitalism since its foundation, is only too keen to meet. Even the most undemanding liberals who hoped for the 'human face' of capitalism have been severely disappointed. Whilst the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, promises a more humanitarian foreign policy Britain has quietly increased its share in the world's arms market (Robin Cook himself negotiated the latest arms deal with the murderous regime in Indonesia) and is now the world's second biggest weapons merchant.

Some things never change and the class nature of the Labour Party is one of them. It will do everything it can to control public spending (wage freezes for public sector workers), government debt and the money supply to make Britain a stable low-inflation country for international investment. It will make sure this is all done at the expense of the working class. The whole process of globalisation brings home the necessity for greater international links within the working class. In the present age internationalism is not an ideal but an absolute necessity, since attacks on wage rates and conditions of workers in one geographical area now have a direct impact on workers in another. As Labour's policies show our enemies are internationally organised and very conscious of their role as the exploiting class. They will have to be fought by a working class conscious of its historic role and armed internationally with its own political organisations. The working class may have a long way to go in this process but when it rejects the Labour Party and the unions, and all their leftist hangers on, and all they represent, global capital will cease to be as powerful as it now looks.

RT

Why the UPS Strike was No Victory

The 15 day strike of 185,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers, the largest US strike in more than a decade ended on August 19. The key issues in the strike were the massive amounts of part-time hiring of workers and the threats to full-time jobs, gruelling speed-ups and the control over the huge Teamster-UPS pension funds and wages.

While most of the corporate owned monopoly media and the reform leftists are parading the results of the strike as a huge victory for labor and as "showing the new militancy of the AFL/CIO unions", the actual results are what few positive gains are signified on the surface are practically nullified when one is able to peek underneath and look at the lawyerese small print in the 5 year contract and the low level state of general class consciousness that was gained by the workers on the picket lines with their supporters.

On the key issue of more full time jobs (now 40% of the strikers averaging \$19/hr) for the presently much lower paid part-timers (now 60% of the strikers averaging \$9/hr), the new labor contract implies the company will create 10,000 new full timer positions over the 5 year life of the contract. But there are huge catch-22s involved in the fine print!

For one thing the 'hidden' clauses say that if the company sales volume declines because of recessions, etc, then UPS is relieved of the obligation to create ANY more full time positions! There are other clauses that give the company the right to "increase labor efficiency", its code for even more speed-ups and job combinations. Also the company decides where more full timers will be used, so in cities where UPS grows they will use more full-timers but in cities of little growth or none, no increases of full-time jobs will be implemented. So, under the settlement over 90% of the part-time and two tiered workers will stay that way, even though many work up to 35 hours a week!

Also, it should be noted that even those advanced to full time status will only have their pay only incrementally brought up to \$17.50 over the 5 years of the contract. This is still below the \$19+/hr present full time drivers or loaders receive.

Part timers making the base \$8/hr now get \$8.50 immediately and pay is to rise to \$10.75 over the 5 years of the contract. But part time work is so gruelling (package loaders/drivers must be able at times to lift 75lb+ packages at rapid speeds) now that the average employment of part timer is less than half a year! Raises of part timers on the job for several years will be 8% a year and are supposed to narrow pay between full-timers and part timers.

Also the company may still lay-off 10,000 workers because of the loss of market share because of the strike and will only recall workers as it gains back pre-strike market share figures. The company admits losing \$800 million in sales during the strike. But this is a company that made after tax profits of \$1.15 Billion in 1996!

When discussing the work condition with pickets, we found that the company is a veritable slave driver, demanding more speed-ups and for both men and women to lift 100/lb parcels at times. They re-affirmed that many part timers are held in that status, some only having 3 hours a day off work, while others are working close to 35 hours a week-- all on part-timers pay/benefits! It seems one might have to be put on steroids to be able to meet the machine like pace of UPS work and be 're-warded' with more hours needed to get enough pay to make ends meet!

Strikers in many cities, especially on the East coast at times fought valiantly against management scabs and the capitalists' other reliable scab-defenders, the cops. Many dozens of workers were beaten and arrested and at this time we do not know that all of them will get charges dropped and be re-hired. But in other cities, like Chicago, workers were told by the Teamster union bosses **not** to try to blockade or harass the scabs at all, and here more scab deliveries were carried out. In other cities the UPS company agreed to pay the city governments (Democrats & Republicans) a special fee to provide a more plentiful supply of scabherding cops.

To many the results of the strike will seem to favor workers, but this mirage is mainly an image relative to the open whippings workers have received by the exploiter triumvirate, the corporations, the state and the unions, especially in strikes recently at Staley, Caterpillar, Bridgestone - Firestone and the Detroit Newspapers, etc... And only a few advanced militant strikers evolved to see the need for rank and file to build new political and industrial class combat organizations. The illusions in the unions are still pretty strong. It was positive that some workers from other industries joined in the strikers picket lines and otherwise spread support for the strike. But to advance the workers will have to spread all struggles to other companies in their industry and across industry lines to have real gains for the future intensified class struggles. The workers here at best are fighting rear guard actions and these can only for a time lessen the retreat and prevent another all-out rout. But the rear guard actions against the capitalist offensive can provide valuable lessons for the class that must be combined with political work of communists to help galvanize the workers to face up the the larger class battles that are brewing.

Neil (LAWV)

Tigers Come Up Against Global Finance Capital

There are not two different kinds of capital—interest bearing and profit-yielding—but the self same capital which operates in the process of production as capital, produces a profit which is divided between two different capitalists—one standing outside the process, and, as owner, representing capital as such... and the other representing operating capital, capital which takes part in the production process.

[Marx *Theories of Surplus Value* Part Three]

Over the summer financial journalists were becoming increasingly alarmed by 'tumbling stock markets' and sudden currency devaluations among the so-called emerging markets of south-east Asia. Starting in May with a speculative attack on the baht — the currency of Thailand — the crisis spread to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines with knock-on effects throughout the Pacific Basin. In a frenzy of currency speculation and stock market selling share prices plummeted on local markets. By the beginning of September the Thai baht, Malaysian ringgit and the Philippine peso had all hit record lows against the dollar. As this article is written the latest figure for the baht's depreciation against the dollar is 30%. Now that "a measure of composure" [*Financial Times*] has returned to the region's financial markets the same journalists are faithfully reporting World Bank and IMF reports allocating blame for the extent of the turmoil to "structural flaws"[World Bank] in East Asian financial systems which led to a crisis "deeper and more widespread" [IMF] than necessary but which in any case "will subside without damaging the region's long term prospects". [*Guardian*] More important, according to the IMF it will not seriously damage global prospects for growth (a predicted 4.3 per cent in 1998).

So we can all breathe a sigh of relief that this latest in more than a score of banking and currency crises over the last twenty years has not had more serious consequences in capitalism's western heartlands. For this is all these institutions set up by western imperialism at the close of the 2nd World War are really concerned about: preserving a stable economic environment for the continued accumulation of capital, the bulk of which is controlled by the banks and conglomerates of the US, Europe and Japan. The Keynesian vision of a crisis-free international economy disappeared twenty five years ago. The signal for the end of the post-war cycle of accumulation came when the US delinked the dollar from gold and not only 'competitively devalued' its own currency but provoked massive instability to international trade, the bulk of which was (and still is) via dollars. The fluc-

tuating exchange rates which followed in the wake of the collapse of this underlying pillar of the 1945 Bretton Woods agreement paved the way for the rise of the gigantic globalised financial markets we see today.

In 1973 the Chicago Board Options exchange was opened. By the 80s New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, London, Tokyo and more had joined the list. Beginning as a means of insurance safeguarding investments, they quickly became a means of speculation.

[*Global Finance Capital, the Costs of Speculation* in *Workers Voice* 77, April 1995]

Since then a whole host of obscure means for speculating over the price of commodities sold on the world market has evolved under the heading of 'financial services'. At the same time local stock markets have been made more open to international investors. Stock markets of the so-called underdeveloped countries now account for 10% of world capitalism's equity capital (shares), another investment target for international finance capital. Until this recent crisis UK pension funds had more than 4% of their portfolios in south east Asia, excluding Japan. This may not sound much but 4% of over \$1 trillion (£650bn) is no small sum.

Today, however, commodity speculation is vastly overshadowed by currency speculation. Initially encouraged by the creation of the currency options market in the US in 1982, and considerably eased by the advance of information technology which now allows deals to be conducted world-wide at the press of a button, currency speculation now involves an amazing \$1,300 bn per day chasing round the world in pursuit of the quickest profit ever imaginable.

To get an idea of the scale of this mass of capital it's enough to know that the central banks of all the OECD countries put together have no more than \$350bn at their disposal. ... the great financial groups can now determine the amount of currency in circulation and thus exercise the kind of control hitherto the exclusive preserve of states and their corresponding central banks. Thanks to the hold they have over

the volume of money the whole of international price formation is in their hands, or rather the hands of a limited number of investment houses, banks and pension funds.

[*Globalisation and Imperialism*, document from VIth Congress of Battaglia Comunista, April 1997, see *Internationalist Communist* 16.]

As the British government discovered to its cost in September 1992 — when speculators forced sterling below D-mark 2.7780 and out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) — national states are powerless to defend their currencies against the concerted massive buying and selling of the international speculators whenever they sniff the possibility of an easy profit by buying up a relatively weak currency in order to drive the price down when they sell it later. If this is the case with the UK how much more impossible was it for a country like Thailand to defend its currency once it came under attack? This did not stop the Thai central bank from trying. Indeed, it was obliged to, since the baht was pegged to the dollar — in accordance with previous IMF advice. When the dollar started to rise against other currencies the weakness of the Thai economic miracle began to be exposed as the baht struggled to keep up with the official exchange rate. The central bank resorted to the traditional, but futile, methods of defending the national currency: interest rates were raised sky high and \$23bn [£14bn] of currency reserves were spent buying up its own currency. In addition local banks were instructed not to sell baht to foreigners. The net effect of this was only to exacerbate the crisis. Local businesses dependent on short-term loans went bust and a further 10% of Thailand's GDP was burnt up trying to "provide liquidity" for collapsing finance companies. In July the struggle to maintain the link with the dollar was abandoned and the baht was floated, provoking an immediate run on the currency and inevitable devaluation. This in turn had a further knock-on effect on the stock market as foreign investment fund managers withdrew funds to less risky markets like Hong Kong or New York. Eventually the Thai 'authorities' [i.e. the representatives of the local ruling class] submitted quietly to the diktat of the IMF. In return for a \$17.2 bn [£10.8bn] IMF bail out Thailand has accepted the need for a new political constitution which, in the words of the *Financial Times* is "designed to reduce the role of money in politics and create more effective and stable government" [12.9.97]. — More stable, that is for the international finance capitalists, with a political set-up that doesn't squander potentially valuable finance capital on bribes or award building contracts and the like as a political favour. More impor-

tant, that guardian of international financial stability, the World Bank has already come up with a recipe for correcting the "structural flaws" of economies throughout the whole of south-east Asia. Predictably in the present climate the solution is simple: governments must open up their financial markets to more foreign competition.

Free trade in financial services could generate considerable benefits, including improved access to foreign capital, deeper financial integration with the rest of the world, new and better domestic financial services and stronger financial infrastructure.

Are Financial Sector Weaknesses Undermining the East Asian Miracle? World Bank Report, quoted in *Financial Times* 12.9.97]

At the same time there must be "greater transparency" on local stock markets which are at present "dominated by trading in shares of family-controlled companies" [FT]. Clearly the priority of the World Bank is how to ease the way for the further penetration of international finance capital into the region. The picture is clear: in future a larger portion of the surplus value extorted from the unpaid labour power of the working class in the area will go to the international financiers. Any illusion that economic growth had led to greater national independence from foreign capital was rudely shattered.

Global Capitalist Crisis - Who Pays?

The efforts of Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, to prove otherwise only confirm that the Asian tigers are firmly under the whip of their old imperialist masters. Towards the end of August, whilst railing against 'racist' foreign speculators for impoverishing Malaysia and suggesting that "rumour mongers" be shot, he set up a £20bn fund to prop up the market and imposed trading restrictions on foreign fund managers including a ban on short selling of shares. 'Short selling', the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* inform us, is the "widespread practice in stock markets round the world of selling shares "one does not own in hope of buying them later at a lower price". Mahathir's loss of face when he was obliged to withdraw the restrictions was only matched by the loss of capital when the foreign speculators stampeded from Malaysia's and every other market in the region.

Even Hong Kong, whose economy has little in common with Thailand's or Indonesia's, saw its share index slide nearly 15% over three days. Although some markets have bounced back, it would be an exaggeration to say that

they have regained their poise. That will not happen, says Wong Yit Fan, an economist with Standard Chartered Bank, until the various governments prove that they are receptive to foreign investment and serious about economic reform.

[*Economist* 6.9.97]

It didn't take the "various governments" long to show how receptive they are to foreign capital. Just as the Thai parliament has set a date for voting on a new constitution (27th September), just as President Suharto of Indonesia has urged an adjustment to "new realities", so Dr Mahathir Mohamad now recognises that foreign fund managers are "serious investors" and along with the other governments has renounced work by indebted building firms on massive construction projects (such as the Bakun Dam, a new administrative capital Putrajaya and a projected information technology city, Cyberjaya).

I appreciate that these people do not want us to have megaprojects. We understand that is the message now.

[*Financial Times* 8.9.97]

Yet if even the most successful 'underdeveloped' economy has to bow to the exigencies of a vastly more powerful international finance capital which is being managed in the interests of the same old imperialist powers, the latter themselves cannot escape the effects of crises like this. It is particularly bad news for Japan whose biggest banks are being reduced to writing off long-standing bad debts (the legacy of the bursting of a property speculation bubble) and whose latest GDP figures show a contracting economy (minus 2.9% for the last quarter). At least a third of Japan's exports are to south-east Asia in general with about 12% going to the four economies worst hit by this recent crisis. In addition Japanese banks have about £52bn lent out to affiliates in these countries. Even the US economy will be slightly affected by a drop in exports to the region.

In general, however, international capital has recovered from the shock. Fund managers are readjusting their portfolios — reducing their holdings in 'under-performing' south-east Asian markets in favour of Latin America, China or even Russia. Nobody cares about the workers who lost their livelihoods when the construction works were abandoned or when local businesses went bankrupt. All the fund managers are worried about is getting the maximum possible returns with the minimum of risk. All the World Bank and IMF are worried about is how to maintain a diminishing rate of world economic growth. This 'growth' has nothing to do with a growth in living standards for the majority of the world's population. On the contrary, over the last twenty-five years the richest 20% of the

world's population have increased their share of global income so that they now get over 70%. (According to the latest UN *Trade and Development Report*.) The only growth that capitalism worries about is the accumulation of capital itself. In simple terms, 'profit'. And it doesn't matter where it comes from. It may be from 'ethical' or unethical investment. (The UK for instance is now going to incorporate the 'growth' of the black economy in its official GDP estimates.) It may be the result of financial speculation, dividends from shares, interest from loans or even from the sale of industrial commodities. Yet, as a certain student of the political economy of capitalism noted back in the nineteenth century:

There are not two different kinds of capital—interest bearing and profit-yielding—but the self same capital which operates in the process of production as capital, produces a profit which is divided between two different capitalists.. [Karl Marx, last emphasis ours]

In other words, the sort of profits that are made by doing nothing — interest on bank accounts, loan payments, insurance dividends, above all from financial speculation, are a drain on the global pool of accumulated capital which originates in the production process. The source of this new capital is not a mystery: It quite simply represents the unpaid labour power [surplus value] of the workers who produce the commodities they themselves have no control over but from which capital makes a profit. It is testimony to the depth and extent of the crisis of late 20th century, globalised capitalism that a larger and larger portion of this profit is not being returned to productive investment and used to accumulate more capital but is instead being shored up to boost the returns made by the myriad forms of parasitic, financial 'investment'. The world is awash with surplus value — potential capital looking for a means of making a profit. Trillions of dollars alone are floating around in pension fund portfolios. [\$8.5 trillion, according to a piece of research reported in the *Economist*.] Less than half of this is being put to productive investment. This 'overproduction' of capital coupled with a dearth of profitable investment outlets is a classical sign of capitalism's cyclical profitability crisis. More than ever before this crisis is a global one. This is what is enabling capitalism to prolong and to a certain extent limit its effects. But the fundamental problem remains. It is impossible to predict exactly what course the crisis will take. What we can say with certainty is that there will be more local crises with the epicentre moving closer and closer to the capitalist heartlands. In the meantime it is up to those of us who see that there is an alternative to prepare the groundwork for a revival of the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. ER

Middle East War Process Continues

Even within the twisted logic of imperialist propaganda it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the pretence of a Middle East "peace process". Before the recent visit to the region by US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, her officials made it clear that the prospects for getting the Oslo Accords back on track in the foreseeable future are pretty minimal. They were dead right.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has made it clear that his government feels under no compulsion to make further troop withdrawals from Palestinian areas in the occupied West Bank. On the contrary the Israelis have continued to consolidate their control over substantial tracts of the West Bank through the ongoing construction of Jewish settlements. This policy gives the Israelis the upper hand in any future negotiations on the final status of the West Bank as they are unlikely to concede any Jewish settlement to Palestinian control. A West Bank peppered with Israeli enclaves cannot pose any significant military or economic threat to Israel.

Not surprisingly Israeli intransigence has further fuelled Palestinian nationalist resentment particularly amongst the militant Islamists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The suicide bombs which have twice recently brought death to the streets of Jerusalem are testimony to the frustration with a "peace process" in which the Israelis have always determined the agenda. Following the bombings the Israeli government implemented its usual tactics of mass arrests of Palestinians and sealing off the West Bank creating increased hardship for the thousands of Palestinians who rely upon employment in Israel.

The strength and arrogance of the Israeli approach is indicated by its policy towards Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian National Authority. Rather than supporting Arafat and his moderate cronies (who are generally more interested in making a fast buck than promoting Palestinian "national aspirations" - see RP7) the Israelis prefer to force Arafat into ever more humiliating accommodations to Israeli might. Arafat is blamed for allowing the suicide bombers to operate from the West Bank whilst the evidence suggests that they came from elsewhere. Palestinian terror is made responsible for the collapse of the "peace process" which neatly avoids Israel's wilful contempt for Oslo and its own

vicious repression of the Palestinian masses.

The Israelis can do more or less what they like because they are secure in the knowledge that they have the full support of American imperialism. In the wake of the suicide bombings the Palestinian National Authority has succumbed to American pressure to arrest Islamic militants and close a pro-Hamas newspaper. We have yet to see reports of similar US pressure on Israel to halt the Jewish settlements and implement the long overdue troop withdrawals from the West Bank. It appears on the face of it that the Israeli tail can wag the American dog. Israel is America's most stable and reliable agent in the Middle East and in turn is the largest beneficiary of American aid without which it would collapse. There is no reason why the USA should not give the Israelis a certain amount of latitude in dealing with the Palestinians as the Israeli / Palestinian conflict does not in itself threaten America's vital imperialist interests, provided of course that it remains on a relatively low level. Of more importance to the USA is Israel's relationship with the major regional powers particularly those not yet fully integrated in the American camp such as Syria and its puppet government in Lebanon. It is no surprise that even Netanyahu has indicated more willingness for flexibility in dealing with Syria than with the Palestinians.

Within the nation state framework there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East. The Zionist state of Israel cannot by definition offer equality of citizenship to its Arab population nor can it tolerate the prospect of anything other than an emaciated and impotent Palestinian state on its borders. For the same reasons Palestinian national aspirations can never be effectively fulfilled whilst Israel continues to exist. Yet as far as the working class is concerned, Israeli and Palestinian workers have objectively more in common with each other than they do with their national ruling classes who offer only more exploitation. It is necessary to create a revolutionary organisation which is capable of intervening in workers struggles to point out the international nature of the proletariat the need for class solidarity across national boundaries. The dismal saga of the "middle east peace process" will continue indefinitely until the working class is in a position to challenge all imperialist initiatives.

PBD

The October Revolution and the Working Class Today

The eightieth anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 falls on November 7th according to the modern calendar. As we wrote in the introduction to our pamphlet *1917*,

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was unique. It was the only time in history when workers themselves took over the running of the state in a conscious attempt to build socialism. The fact that it eventually failed does not diminish its power to inspire. Whatever your views any understanding of revolutionary experience has to take the October Revolution as its starting point. Of course the October Revolution was not perfection itself. Revolutions tend not to stick to the clean paths of historical schemas dreamed up in the abstract. But the events of October 1917 were more heroic and promising than the lies of academic hack historians would have us believe.

Since the October Revolution was the only time when workers actually succeeded in overthrowing the capitalist class, the ruling class of both Left and Right have been trying for the past eighty years to undermine workers faith in their own capacity to fight by wiping out the revolutionary significance of October.

The revolution in Russia was an inspiration to workers throughout the world. In the months that followed there was a massive wave of strikes and struggles which actually brought to an end the imperialist butchery of the First World War. There were attempts at revolution, first in Germany as a whole, then in Bavaria, followed by Hungary where a short-lived Soviet Republic was set up. At the same time there were massive struggles, in Northern Italy, which unfortunately did not go beyond factory occupations, on "Red Clydeside" and in many other parts of the world from Seattle and Winnipeg to Peru. This revolutionary wave, as we call it, did not finally die out until the massacre of the Chinese workers of Shanghai in 1927. By this time there had been an extraordinary effort on the part of workers everywhere to extend the revolution but their failure¹ meant that the Russian revolution was isolated in a relatively backward capitalist country. In such circumstances the decline in

the revolution inside Russia had set in long before the end of the revolutionary wave. As Rosa Luxemburg said at the time

The question of socialism could only be posed in Russia. It could not be solved in Russia.

For millions of workers however the October Revolution had opened up the vision of a new society in which exploitation of one human being by another, nationalism and war, money and starvation would all be replaced by a collective, cooperative system in which everyone would be able to pursue their own development whilst society guaranteed them the necessities of life. In 1917, as our cover page shows it was enough for workers to carry the banner of "communism" in the streets to evoke a response from the rest of the working class.

Eighty Years of Capitalist Lies

For the historians of the capitalist Right the main focus has been to deny that any workers' revolution took place at all. For writers like Richard Pipes, Raymond Aron, Leonard Schapiro and Norman Stone, the October Revolution was simply a coup d'état, carried out by a small but determined minority (the Bolsheviks) with a ruthless leadership. They differ in their details but they would have us believe that Russia under Kerensky was quietly evolving towards a capitalist democratic state until the whole course of history was hijacked by the Bolsheviks. This Whiggism faithfully reflects the bourgeois conception of politics. The bourgeois ideal is that the working masses remain inert to allow small ruling elites to carry out their work without too much interference. If the Bolsheviks were therefore successful in October 1917 it must have been because they were better at fooling the masses than the bourgeoisie!

The notion of a minority coup is itself only achieved through massive historical distortion. One of their tricks is to refer to Lenin's *What is to Be Done?*, written fifteen years or so before 1917. In it he advocated the creation of a small tightly knit party of professionals if socialist politics were to survive in Tsarist Russia. Given that it was a police state, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks could not act like the Social

Democratic Parties in Western Europe who could campaign openly without fear of arrest in peacetime. Even after a limited constitutional regime was brought in in Russia after 1905 the Okhrana still hounded and arrested all the opponents of Tsarism. But the Bolshevik party of October 1917 was no longer in the same mould as that of 1903. After the February Revolution it was possible for the Bolsheviks to act openly and they began to grow enormously throughout 1917. By October there were at least 50,000 Bolsheviks in Petrograd alone and perhaps as many as 300,000 throughout the country. As the only political party which had an All-Russian presence they can hardly be dismissed as a tiny minority.

On top of this the Bolsheviks policies were hardly secret. From April they had been publicly calling for the overthrow of the Provisional Government by the Soviets - the only party to do so. Additionally they had openly campaigned amongst the working class for an end to the war for three years. After June 1917 there was nothing the Russian working class wanted more and they supported the Bolsheviks in droves. In so doing they created the Bolshevik Party as one of their revolutionary instruments. In the late summer of 1917, despite the attempt by the Provisional Government to paint them as "German spies" the Bolsheviks held the overwhelming majority of delegates in the main soviets. At the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets which met as the October Revolution took place 80% of the delegates were from the Bolsheviks or their allies.

The idea that the Bolsheviks were "putschists" also cannot be sustained. When Lenin found that many of his own party were interpreting the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" as an immediate demand for action rather than a slogan or orientation he issued this statement

The government must be overthrown, but not everyone understands this correctly. So long as the Provisional Government has the backing of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, you cannot simply overthrow it. The only way it can and must be overthrown is by winning over the majority of the Soviets.

(Collected Works Vol. XXIV p.146)

And true to his word Lenin only began advocating the overthrow of the Provisional Government once that majority had been achieved.

However even the fable of the *coup d'état* turns out to be a more complicated event than our bourgeois historians would have us be-

lieve. It is true that the actual takeover of power was conducted by the Military Revolutionary Committee on which the Bolsheviks had a majority (the Mensheviks refused to join it). However the takeover was hardly a secret. Against Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev had published an article in the Menshevik-supporting *Novaya Zhizn* (owned by Maxim Gorky) which denounced Lenin's calls for a takeover of power. The fact that neither were later disciplined for this betrayal of the Party demonstrates how impotent the Provisional Government had become. Only when it was too late did Kerensky realise the the Petrograd garrison of 300,000 men (which he had been trying to send to the front line for months) were almost all behind the Bolsheviks. Typical of their resolutions was that of the Egorsky Regiment which declared that it would not go to the front.

The pulling out of the revolutionary garrison from Petrograd is needed only by the privileged bourgeoisie as a means of stifling the revolution ... We declare to all who listen that, while refusing to leave Petrograd, we will nonetheless heed the voice of the genuine leaders of the workers and poorer peasantry, that is the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. We will believe in and follow it because everything else is pure treachery and open mockery of the world revolution.

Quoted in A. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* p.227

When Kerensky did act he found he could only send cadets from the officer training schools, a women's shock battalion and rifle regiment of war wounded to shut down the Bolsheviks press. This simply provoked the takeover that everyone knew to be inevitable. Although the Military Revolutionary Committee headed by Trotsky almost bloodlessly and quietly took over the main public buildings in the capital this was not the only force which prevented Kerensky from acting. When he sent his cadets to close the bridges over the River Neva connecting the working class districts to the city centre

...they were challenged by an irate crowd of citizens, many of them carrying weapons. Forced to give up their arms, the cadets were escorted humiliatingly back to their academy.

Rabinowitch op. cit. p. 261

What is common to all the right wing historians' approaches to the events of 1917 is to insist on a separation of the Bolsheviks from the working class. But this separation simply cannot be made. As we demonstrated in our pamphlet *1917* the Bolsheviks were the only consistent supporters of soviet power. Furthermore they were the only group which

unambiguously wished to put an end to war, and which consistently supported the seizure of the land by the peasants. This was enormously significant as Edward Acton, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge and a supporter of the "libertarian" view of the October Revolution argues

The upsurge in Bolshevik popularity was confirmed by an explosive growth in the party's membership. Indeed the party was virtually recreated by a mammoth influx of new recruits ... a clear majority of the members were workers, with a substantial minority of soldiers and sailors ... This is not to imply that the Bolshevik Party was the passive recipient of mass support ... it played its part in providing the socialist vocabulary in terms of which workers, and to some extent, soldiers and peasants, interpreted events and articulated their aspirations ... it evoked so powerful a response precisely because it so accurately articulated the masses own goals.

Rethinking the Russian Revolution (Edward Arnold, 1990) pp. 193-5

The important point here is that the party "was virtually recreated" in 1917. Although it grew from less than 10,000 (i.e. a revolutionary nucleus inside the working class) to something like 300,000 members by September the Party was also substantially altered politically by the events of that year. The old programme of the "democratic revolution", already undermined by the revolutionary events of 1905, was now obsolete. Revolutionaries today have to recognise that not only was the class as a whole transformed by the events of 1917 but so was the politically conscious vanguard **at the same time**. 1917 gave life to the question Marx had posed in *The German Ideology*. If the working class was going to throw off capitalist ideology and domination the only way it was going to do this was through "a practical movement" i.e. a revolution. This "practical movement" also answered Marx's other question of "who will educate the educators?" or what role would the vanguard play? What happened in 1917 was that the years of preparation of those who thought they belonged to the most conscious part of the working class was now put to the test. Some "Old Bolsheviks" like Kamenev and Zinoviev undoubtedly failed this test miserably. They never really accepted the changes to the Bolshevik programme in April 1917 and were still looking for compromise with the Mensheviks and SRs after October. It was the Bolsheviks rank and file, those who were part of "the real movement" who were the first to call for and accept the new orientation of the party. It was not the rank and file that Lenin

chastised in his writings as "being unable to think" but his closest comrades. He told them

But we are out to rebuild the world ...

Yet we are afraid of our own selves. We are loath to cast off the 'dear old' soiled shirt ...

But it is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen.

Quoted in Neil Harding *Lenin's Political Thought* [Macmillan 1983]p. 124).²

It was the support of the local sections for the April Theses which ensured that the old Bolshevik programme calling for a democratic revolution was so rapidly replaced by a new one supporting the proletarian takeover in Russia as part of a world socialist revolution.

What Lenin asked of the Party was not that it was infallible but that it learned from actual experience. Lenin himself kept contact with all areas of working class life through individual Bolshevik militants. Several of these could make him alter his opinions (such as Raskolnikov in Kronstadt)³ and, as 1917 progressed Lenin began to depart from the Social Democratic ideas of the Second International in which he had been educated but which he also recognised had betrayed the working class. He began to see in the remarkably sophisticated debates in the soviets that the working class had the organisational capacity to go beyond the Fabian-style paternalism of the Second International intellectuals who aimed to plan society for the workers. This lesson is the core of his *The State and Revolution*. Written in hiding in August -September 1917 and published in 1918 it was Lenin's testament to the capacity of the working class to reorganise their own "semi-state", that of the armed workers themselves. It was a work which not only settled accounts with the statist conceptions of socialism of the Second International (and in particular with Karl Kautsky) but also underlined that the soviet movement of 1917 and the development of imperialism had made a workers' revolution **practicable**. This is why he wrote:

We ourselves, the workers, will organise large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict iron discipline backed by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "foremen and accountants" ... Such a beginning on the basis of large-scale production, will, of itself, lead to a gradual "withering away" of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order, an order without quotation marks, an order bearing no similarity to wage slavery, an order in which the functions of

control and accounting ... will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population.

The State and Revolution (Beijing, 1970) pp. 58-9

What we have tried to show here is that the Bolshevik Party in 1917 was already rooted in the class but these roots were deepened as it became, to quote one bourgeois historian,

... a catch-all party for those radical Social Democrats who agreed about the urgent need to overthrow the liberal-dominated cabinet, establish a socialist government and end the war.

The Bolshevik Party in Revolution. A Study in Organisational Change 1917-23 (London 1979) p.49 Robert Service.

Commenting on this ungenerous testimony Edward Acton concluded

The divisions that would soon splinter the mass alliance of 1917, therefore cannot be traced to a rigid and fundamental division between 'Bolsheviks' on the one hand and 'the masses' on the other. The Bolsheviks in 1917 were not alien beings; they were neither demonic nor superhuman; the great majority were themselves workers and soldiers.

Rethinking the Russian Revolution p.200

Libertarianism and Trotskyism

This quotation brings us to the main issue. It is not only the capitalist Right which makes a distinction between the Bolshevik Party and the working class as a whole, This is also the case of the libertarians who claim to be revolutionaries. The only difference is that for the bourgeois Right the working class is naturally loyal to capitalist democracy so it must have been duped down the communist road by the Bolsheviks in October. For the various anarchist, councilist and autonomist versions which are collectively baptised as libertarian the working class are instinctively communist and so have no need of a party to represent their historical gains and to coordinate the political movement against capital.

We were reminded of this when we received what appears to be an offprint from the journal *Radical Chains* entitled *Beyond Kronstadt*.

This informs us that

An understanding of the Russian revolution is vital for any understanding of why the left failed in the 20th century.

Substitute "working class" for "left" here and we would agree absolutely. But it is a significant substitution. "The left" they mean

includes those like the Stalinist and Trotskyist whom we consider to be the promoters of a new state capitalist order. For *Radical Chains* (henceforth *RC*) there are only two valid interpretations of the Russian Revolution - those of the libertarians who blame Bolshevik authoritarian policies for the defeat of the revolution, and those of the Trotskyists who blame the material conditions of civil war and isolation "exclusively for the revolution's degeneration". *RC* then concludes that it must be a bit of both but that the Trotskyists are more wrong than the libertarians because they support "the top down approach of the Bolsheviks". The problem for *RC* is that

...neither anarchists nor libertarian communists have succeeded in fully developing a critique that could lead to a practical alternative...(p.7)

This is true but we would argue that *RC* ignores a third interpretation - that of the Communist Left. This shares neither the idealism of the libertarians nor is it weighed down by the problems of being involved in the introduction of a state capitalist regime in Russia after 1921 as Trotsky was. This tendency, which the CWO (and other groups of the Communist Left) adhere has already answered some of the questions that the *Radical Chains* article poses but does not answer. For eighty years the Communist Left has recognised that

the main responsibility of revolutionaries should be to supersede rather than emulate their (i.e. the Bolsheviks) political theories.

Beyond Kronstadt p.1 as well as developed a coherent self-emancipatory politics (p.7)

However whilst we do not wish to repeat the mistakes of the revolution we also do not wish to wipe it out nor diminish its achievements. By focussing solely on the relationship of the party to the other revolutionary bodies *RC* fails to see that problem of the failures of the Russian Revolution are simultaneously social, economic and political. This leads them to characterise the Trotskyist organisations which exist today as somehow mistaken proletarian organisations. This is not the case. Trotskyism as a current went back into social democracy in 1935 with the entry into the French socialist party in a disastrous bid to find a mass base to oppose Stalinism. Thus it abandoned a revolutionary programme. We have dealt with this in greater length in other texts⁴ but we will make some brief remarks on Trotskyism and the Russian Revolution here.

Trotsky was a brilliant revolutionary who not only recognised what the Russian proletariat had achieved in 1905 and 1917 but also contributed to that victory. He was the one who argued most consistently that the October

Revolution was made on behalf of the Congress of Soviets. It was Trotsky, as a Commissar for Foreign Affairs, who said he would just publish the treaties of the imperialist powers to show why they really were fighting the First World War then he "would shut up shop". However like the rest of the Bolshevik Party he altered with the development of the counter-revolution. Once the Soviets created a Red Army and once they themselves ceased to regulate that army the tendency for arbitrary decisions soon became habit. The victorious commander of the Red Army (backed by Cheka squads) had shown the necessary ruthlessness to win the civil war but what kind of proletarian power was left at the end?⁵ In this context it is not surprising that Trotsky should have

displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work.

(Lenin in his *Testament* written on December 26th 1922)

Lenin was presumably thinking of such episodes as Trotsky's promotion of the militarisation of labour which Lenin had fought against successfully in 1920. And being part of the administration of the new state Trotsky was hardly in a position to understand its real nature. He always contrasted the "socialist" economic base of the USSR with its deformed political system - a theoretical achievement which breaks with Marxism. The fact was that the process of building socialism had been hardly begun in Russia before the retreat set in (as we demonstrate below). On the political front, Trotsky also participated in the political degeneration of the Bolshevik Party (such as the banning of factions in 1921) so that when he came to argue against Stalinism he started from the premise of supporting party unity (one reason why much of his opposition remained unknown to the Russian working class). Given that the cult of the supreme Party was being developed Trotsky followed it and did not stand against it. He was thus often left grasping for arguments when faced with places where the Party had failed or been relatively unsuccessful as in the February Revolution. His *History of the Russian Revolution* is brilliantly written but the beauty of the prose sometimes hides the poverty of the argument. His assertion that the February Revolution was led by

Conscious and tempered workers led for the most part by the party of Lenin

op. cit p171

borders on the metaphysical. If it were the case that the Bolshevik Party had led them then why were the Bolsheviks relatively poorly represented in the soviets? Trotsky

only puts this down to the weakness of the local leaders like Shlyapnikov (who in his own memoirs admits that the Bolsheviks actually were not really prepared for an insurrection). All this contrasts markedly with the practical analysis of Lenin and the practical activities of the Bolshevik rank and file.

However the main issue lies in the economic and social analysis of the revolution. RC are quite right to argue that the decline of mass participation in the factory committees and soviets (and we would argue the Party) of the working class was an indicator of the incapacity of the revolution to move toward socialism. They are also correct to see that the Trotskyists failure to recognise this is a fatal weakness as far as revolutionary politics are concerned. But they don't see that the formula "nationalisation plus workers control" is not just organisationally wrong but fundamentally anti-working class and lies at the heart of the Trotskyist idea that somehow some socialist mode of production (however deformed) was created in the USSR. This affects even those groups who claim only a nodding agreement with Trotsky's ideas.

Take for example the neo-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. They have often appeared more radical than their more traditionalist rivals because their founder stole the idea of state capitalism from the Communist Left tradition (but told us that he had removed it from its "ultra-left" associations in the 1948 introduction to his book *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*). In fact for Tony Cliff state capitalism was a useful critique to rescue the absurd Trotskyist idea of "degenerated workers states" (which does not address the question of what was the mode of production in Russia) from the various conundrums caused by the advance of Russian imperialism into Eastern Europe after World War Two. Here "socialism" arrived not via revolution but via the Red Army. If they were not workers' states in the first place how could they be degenerated? Hence a number of Trotskyists, like CLR James and Tony Cliff, now concluded that Russia was state capitalist at about the same time. What Cliff did not take on board was that nationalisation was a fundamentally anti-working class policy designed to preserve capitalist rule (it was only adopted by the Labour Party for example in 1918 in the face of the Russian Revolution). The Socialist Workers Party still has the same analysis today. "Nationalisation with workers control" is for them socialism. This supposedly anti-state capitalist Party has had a state capitalist programme for its entire existence.⁶ RC don't reflect on this (and it is why they include counter-revolutionaries as part of the revolutionary

movement). Fixated as they are by the role of the Bolshevik Party in the counter-revolution the only weakness they see in Trotskyism is its extolling the virtues of Bolshevism.

The Decline of the Revolution and the Libertarians

However one thing cannot be gainsaid in the Trotskyist analysis and that is that the revolution was defeated due to its isolation and to the material drain on the most class conscious workers by the civil war in Russia. The question of the wrong ideas held by the working class at that time (and not just by the Bolsheviks who themselves represented many shades of working class opinion) only explains, at most, **the way** in which the revolution declined. The Bolsheviks had advocated a working class seizure of power in October 1917 not because they thought they could build socialism there and then. The whole premise of the October Revolution was that world revolution was imminent. When Lenin addressed the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets in October 1917 he stated

Let us proceed to build the world-wide socialist order!

and every comment by himself, Bukharin or Trotsky was that

Without a German Revolution we are doomed (Lenin).

And no-one had thought of what would become of an isolated working class area if the world revolution did not happen. This was the unique dilemma the Russian working class was faced with. Although many errors were made from the beginning it is the crisis of the economy and the process of the civil war from the summer of 1918 onwards which transforms the situation and the Bolshevik Party in Russia. By July 1918 over a third of Petrograd's factories were shut, 50% of workers in heavy industry (which had been linked to the Tsarist war effort) were unemployed, a million proletarians had deserted Petrograd and another 500,000 from Moscow. At the Seventh Party Congress (March 1918) Bukharin talked of "the disintegration of the proletariat" whilst Lenin himself described the plight of the economy in July.

The people are like a man who has been thrashed within an inch of his life.

By this time the ordinary bread ration was two ounces a day. Jacques Sadoul described the situation in Moscow where

...frightful poverty prevails. There are epidemics of typhus, smallpox, children's diseases.

Babies are dying en masse.

Quoted in Marcel Leibman *Leninism under Lenin* (Merlin 1975) p. 223

All this had an impact on the Bolshevik Party. Although in March Lenin could tell the Seventh Party Congress

A new type of state, without a bureaucracy, without a police, without a permanent army, which replaces bourgeois democracy by a new democracy, causes the labouring masses to act as a vanguard, and confers upon them legislative, executive and military power, thereby creating the means by which these same masses will be educated. We are just beginning this work in Russia and for the time being we are doing badly.

[Quoted in Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* p.208] he also had to recognise the new reality

History has not provided us with that peaceful situation that was theoretically assumed for a certain time .. We have only just taken the first steps towards shaking off capitalism altogether and beginning the transition to socialism. We do not know and cannot know how many stages of transition to socialism there will be. That depends on when the full-scale European socialist revolution begins ... (op. cit. p.206-7)

This Congress, in which the Communist Left presented its alternative theses, represented the end of what one Bolshevik economist, Kritsman, called "the heroic period of the revolution". Lenin signalled the sea change when he recorded in his *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* that

In order to go on advancing successfully in the future we must suspend our offensive now.

Selected Works Vol II p.592

The same text, one of a number stamped with the same character written between April and July 1918, reflected what the meaning of this suspension was. First the party was given greater prominence in the struggle for socialism and though the article's title talks of the tasks of the Soviet Government, it is really about the tasks of the Bolshevik Party

For the first time in Russian history a socialist party has managed to complete in the main the conquest of power and suppression of the exploiter and has managed to approach directly the task of administration.

Selected Works Vol II p.590

Administration now meant "the strictest country-wide accounting", "the guidance of experts" with "high salaries" (the exact opposite of what he had written in *State and Revolution*), "introducing compulsory labour service", "the Taylor system" or the "refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation". Lenin conceded that this was "a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune and every

proletarian power" but still held out the hope that "bureaucratism" could be avoided by

the closeness of the Soviets to the "people", to the working people, that create the special forms of recall and other means of control from below which must be zealously developed from now.

Unfortunately soviet democracy was already fading fast. It did not do so in a linear fashion nor was it apparent even in 1919 (if we take the unwitting testimony of Arthur Ransome who found soviet democracy in the provinces alive and well but had noticed that it was less in evidence in 1920). The process now begins to go the other way. Whereas up to March 1918 the debates in the soviet and the party tended to be the same because of the natural concerns of both the class-wide bodies and the party members (in fact sometimes the distinction seems to have hardly existed) now (Eighth Party Congress 1919) it is decreed that the party will form fractions in each soviet to win

individual sway in the soviets and effective control over all their activities

E.H.Carr *The Bolshevik Revolution* Vol I p.227

In 1919 Kamenev told the Seventh All Russian Soviet Congress that the soviets were dying. He explained that the cream of the class conscious workers have already disappeared whilst "the people busy themselves with purely mechanical chores". Alexandra Kollontai was more brutal when she wrote in 1920

We are afraid to let the masses do things themselves. We are afraid of allowing their creativity. We fear criticism. We no longer trust the masses. Therein ... lies the origin of our bureaucracy. Initiative wanes, the desire to act dies out.

Quoted in O. Anweiler *The Soviets* p.243

It is in 1920 that Trotsky for example theorises the "militarisation of labour" something opposed by Lenin but this is a significant indicator that already we are talking of a class of administrators in the old Social Democratic model. Although the Revolution is not quite dead the road to the Kronstadt tragedy lies open⁵ It is this which Stalin later builds on to create a monstrous state which only the Fabian socialists Sydney and Beatrice Webb could conclude was "a new civilisation".

The Errors of the Russian Working Class

If the material problems of the working class in Russia fundamentally explain why the workers were defeated this does

not excuse revolutionaries today from looking at the revolutionary process itself to see what lessons must be learned. As we have shown above our fundamental difference with the libertarians is that we see the party as an institution of the class. Libertarians tend to accept the Otto Ruhle position that "all parties are bourgeois". His experience as a member of the German Social Democratic Party would tend to make him think that. In 1914 Ruhle had voted for war credits when told to do so by German Social Democracy before joining Leibknecht in opposing the war but he was not prepared to allow the mistakes of the Russian working class any generous treatment. He was condemning the revolution in Russia even before the end of 1920. In Russia the situation of the working class was different to that in Germany. The Bolshevik Party was not a huge bureaucratic machine with millions of roubles in funds and offices everywhere (until Yakov Sverdlov's death in 1919 it had two main officials (himself and Stasova) plus four secretaries. The Bolshevik Party became what it was both in terms of size and programme only through the events of 1917. It was the chosen revolutionary instrument of the Russian working class. The libertarians who wish to deny the role of the party are wiping out the October Revolution as a proletarian experience. They are either unconsciously expressing the view of the liberal democratic historians that the workers were fooled or they try to maintain the nonsense idea that the revolution was simply an affair of the class wide organisations and that the Bolsheviks had little or nothing to do with it. They too are a product of the victory of the counter-revolution. Whilst the Stalinists and Trotskyists emphasise that the revolution is only a party affair the libertarians would leave the field free for all sorts of bourgeois forces to politically organise the working class. They have simply seen the revolution in terms of forms and not also as a question of political content. It is not a question of soviets good, parties bad (or the German Revolution would have succeeded) but of the development of the class political consciousness of the exploited - and this means the development of both class wide organisations (workplace committees and councils) as well as the political vanguard.

Whilst the *Radical Chains* article is a little more sophisticated than previous libertarian analyses it does use some of their fundamental arguments. One of these is to pose the "antiquated Social Democratic ideas" of the Bolsheviks against the pure revolutionary instincts of the masses. Take for example their statement that

In 1917 Lenin argued that, as private capitalism could not develop Russia, a revolutionary

state would have to use 'state capitalism' to build the prerequisites for the transition to communism.

Beyond Kronstadt p.1

They give no evidence at this point to back this assertion up but later quote a passage from *State and Revolution* in which Lenin states

...socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.

The first thing that can be said about this "evidence" is that it rips this argument from its context. Lenin was addressing social democrats, trying to demonstrate to them that socialism was materially practicable from the existing situation. The passage has to be read in the context of the rest of the work (see our quotation from it above) where he expresses great confidence in the capacity of the working class as a whole not just to control the socialist economy but also to create it. It is not true to say that the Bolsheviks had a state capitalist programme in 1917. The truth is that they had no economic programme. The *April Theses* had made the old programme obsolete and the *Theses* themselves only called for land nationalisation and the confiscation of large estates and the amalgamation of the banks under the control of the soviets. There is nothing about how industry is to be run, presumably because it was unthinkable to begin the socialist transformation from the standpoint of Russia alone. This was further confirmed when the Bolsheviks themselves clearly had no idea of expropriating the capitalists after October. They tried to mediate with the capitalists only to find that the latter were refusing to have anything to do with the proletarian state. It was the factory committees which started expropriating the factories as the bosses deserted them. But the Bolshevik Party not only did not oppose this it actively learned from the activity of the working class. Throughout the period up to March 1918 there is a constant thread in Bolshevik thinking - only the masses can create socialism. In November 1917 Lenin stated

Creative activity at the grassroots is the basic factor of the new public life. Let the workers set up workers' control at their factories. Let them supply the villages with manufactures in exchange for grain ... socialism cannot be de-

creed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves.

If this is not good enough to demonstrate the case, take what Lenin wrote in *To the Population*

Comrade workers! Remember that you yourselves now administer the state. Nobody will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take all the affairs of the state into your own hands. Your Soviets are henceforth the organs of state power, organs of decision.

So much for the canard that the Bolsheviks were only prepared to concede control and not management to the working class.⁷ What it does show is that the class as a whole, party and mass are learning together at this point, and it is only after the desperate economic crisis of the spring of 1918 at the start of the civil war that Lenin returns to the idea of managing the economy as a technical and not a political and social question. But, as we showed above, this also came with the recognition that the revolutionary offensive was being suspended. When *RC* gives its account of the chronology of the decline of the revolution it tends to blur the facts so that the really positive period of party and mass movement as one (Oct 1917 - March 1918) is obscured. Instead they try to indicate that the revolution only went forward at this stage because there were 900 soviets and 2,000 elected factory committees concluding that

The Bolshevik party was dwarfed by these bodies and was often overtaken by the rapid radicalisation of the workers.

This is a stupid remark. The Bolsheviks were the elected majority in these bodies and it was they who represented the aspirations of the mass of the workers at this time. It was after October that the idea of Soviets was extended to areas which had never had them and it was the Bolsheviks who were largely (though not uniquely) responsible for directly spreading soviet democracy. October was not the end of a process but the beginning of one which was cut all too tragically short. There was no separation between party and class that *RC* tries to maintain.

We do not deny that all was not perfect with the revolution nor can it be denied that over the course of the civil war the revolution did degenerate. But it did not do so in a unilinear fashion. At certain points in 1919 soviet democracy did revive but the tendency is always downhill.. The international revolution did not appear and this was the premise on which the October Revolution had been undertaken. Lenin, who had seemed so prescient and in

For a detailed account of the events of the Russian Revolution...

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touch with the working class in 1917 becomes less and less clear and coherent. After his stroke he makes repeated statements that the revolution is retreating, that the bureaucracy is strangling the revolution. His last political fight is the idea that the 300,000 members of the Rabkrin (Workers and Peasants Inspectorate) should be replaced by 400 working class members of the Party. The whole thing is tragic but the article in *RC* seeks only to identify instances of Bolshevik "crimes". Had they treated all parties in the Russian Revolution the same this might be acceptable but they don't. The Mensheviks and SRs are treated as if they were proletarian despite the fact that they had supported the imperialist policies of the Provisional Government and rejected soviet power. In fact by boycotting soviet power they contributed to its weakening (as they intended). *RC* excuses the Mensheviks by saying that "some" of the Mensheviks were indisciplined. What they don't tell us is that this indiscipline involved taking up arms against Soviet power when the Bolsheviks were popular but then joining in soviet elections when they were less so. This takes us back to the weakness of *RC* over Trotskyism - they do not see that these parties have bourgeois programmes and that this (rather than their "substitutionism") is the reason why they stand outside the revolutionary working class. Until *RC* and other libertarians see that socialism is **both** a question of the right organisational forms **plus** a working class **political content** then they are doomed to offer no alternative to the Trotskyists.

Lessons of the Russian Experience

So what can revolutionaries learn from the Russian experience of eighty years ago?

1 The first lesson is that the Party is international and the spread of world revolution is its prime concern (this was actually proposed by the Left Communists in March 1918 in their famous *Theses* of that year)*. This party cannot be a product of the last minute nor of the post-revolutionary period. It must be centralised at an international level and exist at least as nucleus inside the working class of as many countries as possible before the revolutionary outbreak is feasible. Although the party members in any territory participate to the full in the life of the class-wide organs (whatever their nature but not unlike the soviets and factory committees of the past) the leading bodies of the party, being international, only intervenes by guiding the activities of the militants in any one area through the revolutionary programme. The Party does not identify with the state, not even

the proletarian semi-state. Conversely it is impossible to create socialism in one country. If the working class does not repeatedly expand and destroy the capitalist class globally the latter will sooner or later reassert their domination.

2 The revolutionary programme developed and defended by the class party contains the historic lessons of the proletariat's conflicts with capitalism and is constantly developed in the light of the revolutionary experiences of the working class. We can add to that the lessons of the Russian experience. This definitively showed, for example that "nationalisation" is not the same as proletarian socialisation. The adoption of nationalisation as part of programmes for preserving capitalism (e.g. Clause 4 by the Labour Party in 1918) only underlines this fundamental lesson.

3 As the Bolsheviks stated in their best moments the socialist revolution cannot be decreed from above but is the work of the workers themselves. Although the vanguard can act as an organiser against the bourgeoisie before the revolution, thwarting its schemes to divide and defeat the working class; although it will lead the assault on the institutions of the bourgeois state it cannot build socialism. Socialism is the exact opposite of the bourgeois idea of leaving everything to the professional politicians - it can only come about through the transformation of millions of individuals.

4 The revolution of the working class is social, economic and political at the same time. The first task is the destruction of the capitalist state but this has to be followed by the beginnings of the socialist transformation of society and economy. This in turn can only be maintained if the revolution is extended internationally which is again why we must have already established an international and centralised party in advance of the initial attacks on the bourgeois state in any geographical area.

5 In the class wide organs all delegates must be elected and revocable at all times as well as armed with mandates from their electors. The class-wide militias as well as any other special forces required by the working class must be controlled by the councils. Only the active power of the class itself can ensure the revolutionary character of the semi-state.

State power of the Councils, an intransigent attack on capitalist relations of production and a revolutionary communist party; these are the weapons of the working class in a revolutionary struggle. But even this "Holy Trinity" is merely a collection of empty shells unless they are the emanations of a powerful, international class movement. As weapons of

the masses they are everything, without the masses they are nothing.

Revolutionary Perspectives 4 (First series) (1976) JD

Footnotes

1. In which the domination of the pro-imperialist Social Democratic and Labour Parties played an enormous part (see current series on the German Revolution in RP). When "revolutionaries" today criticise the Bolsheviks (and by implication the Russian working class) for not having completely broken with the Second International's conception of socialism they are obviously correct. It could not have been otherwise. Their "mistakes" are part of our "wisdom" today. Anybody who cannot recognise this is historically illiterate. What those who criticise the Bolsheviks should ask themselves is who did most to combat the pro-capitalist tendencies of Social Democracy **before** and during World War One. There are no better candidates than the Bolsheviks who prepared the working class better than any other party and were still prepared to learn from the mass movement in the course of 1917.
2. For more on how the Bolsheviks changed their programme in 1917 see *The Democratic Revolution - A Programme for the Past in Revolutionary Perspectives* (Second Series No.20). This is now out of print but a photocopy will be sent to anyone sending a stamped addressed envelope and £1.
3. See his exchange with Lenin over the Kronstadt adoption of election of state officials in 1917 in F.F. Raskolnikov *Petrograd and Kronstadt in 1917* (New Park 1982 p.94)
4. This has its origins in those currents, but especially the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy which first opposed the adoption of polices ("to the masses", the united front with the Social Democratic party leaderships, "socialism in one country") which destroyed the Communist International as a revolutionary body. It supported Trotsky's right to oppose Stalin in the 1920s and was expelled from the International de facto from

1926 and de jure from 1930. The Italian Left founded itself as the Internationalist Communist Party in Italy at the end of the Second World War. Today the party is linked with the Communist Workers Organisation in the UK in the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. The only other group existing in Britain which is part of the same broad tradition is the British section of the International Communist Current, *World Revolution* (BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX). For more on the Communist Left see *Internationalist Communist* Nos 12-15 and our pamphlet, *Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925*.

5. For Kronstadt see *Kronstadt 1921: An Analysis of Popular Uprising in Russia in the Time of Lenin* in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 23 (Second Series). £1 from our address.

6. See our texts *Theories of State Capitalism* (in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 19 (second series) and *Internationalist Communist Review No 10 The Life and Death of Trotskyism* and *Internationalist Communist Review 11 Trotskyism and Counter-revolution* (all £2 from our address).

7. We have not gone into the debate between Maurice Brinton of Solidarity and Chris Goodey in *Critique* No.3. Goodey, the Trotskyist, however demonstrates that not only does Brinton (an ex-Trotskyist) distort the facts but that he is also something of a charlatan (using impeccable Russian quotations despite not being able to read that language). The truth is that Goodey demonstrates that the centralisation of the factory committees into the Council of National Economy was a result of their own decision not any Bolshevik programme. At this point party, committees and soviet are all agreed on it. What is surprising, in view of subsequent history, is the way the Bolsheviks continued to support the factory committees at this time (i.e. before March 1918) when it was already clear that some localist tendencies (such as taking over railway rolling stock and turning it into workers' houses) undermined the economy.

8. See *Theses of the Left Communists Critique Pamphlet 1977*

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Breaking from German Social Democracy in the First World War

The 1913 Jena Congress of the Sozialdemokratischer Partei Deutschlands (SPD) defeated the left and supported the SPD Reichstag fraction's vote for the military budget. This was on the grounds that the expenditure would be raised by direct taxation with the SPD vote and by indirect without it. Afterwards Rosa Luxemburg quoted August Bebel's comments in the 1904 Dresden congress:

It is ever and always the same old struggle: here left, there right, and in between, the swamp. These are the elements that never know what they want, or rather, never say what they want. Like sharp-eyed chameleons they are always glancing about to right and left, asking, 'Which way is he going to go?' They sense who has the majority and head that way. We have this sort in our party too. A whole number of them have come to light in these proceedings. We must denounce these comrades. (From the floor - Denounce them?) Yes, denounce them I say, so that the comrades know just what kind of weakling they are. The man who at least openly puts forward his point of view lets me know where I stand. I can fight with him, and either he wins or I do. But the rotten elements always shirk their duty and avoid any clear decisions. They always say, 'We are all united, we are all brothers.' They are the worst of all! Against them I fight the hardest.¹

Luxemburg comments that the "swamp" (or, to give it its own name: "Marxist Centre"), which stood with the left against the revisers of Marxism in the past, did so out of conservatism, and, now, at Jena, out of the same conservatism, it stood with the right, to defeat the left.

When, in 1914, a Serbian schoolboy provided the spark to ignite the flammable material that imperialism had spread throughout Europe, by shooting the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the story with the "swamp" was the same as before. The SPD right, already fully-fledged social chauvinists, spied on the rest of the Party for the Kaiser's Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. One of the spies, Albert Südekum, was able to report "... no actions of any kind... are planned or even to be feared, precisely because of our desire for peace."²

The reason there were "no actions of any kind" to be feared from the official SPD was because of the anodyne effect of the "swamp". Although, internationally, Social Democracy itself genuinely expected the friction between Austria and Serbia to blow over, or, at most, to result in a local war³, the Marxist Centre used the inactivity of the masses as an excuse for its own inactivity. For example, the arch-centrist Karl Kautsky wrote on 25th August to the Austrian Social Democratic leader Victor Adler that

Now would really be the moment for an anti-war protest in Austria with a mass strike. But there is not the slightest sign of any protest campaign by the masses. We must be content to preserve the unity of the parties in the circumstances.⁴

The "swamp" had always striven to dampen down spontaneous proletarian activity, and now it was blaming the Party's failure to lead on the lack of such activity!

And the next few days showed that a section of the proletariat was far from indifferent to events. On July 28th, thousands of Berlin proletarians demonstrated against the impending war. But to give leadership to these proletarians would have been to "endanger the unity of the party", which fact, if not open or hidden chauvinism, prevented the "swamp" from acting like Socialists.

The Marxist Centre used its own unpreparedness and the alleged indifference of the masses to dub the little it did in the run-up to the war as "all" that could be done, and then, when war was patently inevitable, it claimed that the Fatherland had to be defended. This was the situation at the start of the war, when the gravitational pull of the right was having its greatest effect on the tides within the swamp (later, things would be somewhat different).

In this environment, the SPD Reichstag fraction met to decide its vote on war credits for the German military machine (traditionally, the SPD voted in the Reichstag as a single bloc in line with the majority view in their private internal vote). In their fraction meeting, the

SPD voted 78 to 14 for a vote in favour of the credits. Hugo Haase, one of the minority, was pressured into reading to the Reichstag the SPD resolution, which, after blaming the war on "imperialism" continued

... The cold reality of war is upon us. We are threatened with the horror of enemy invasion. Today we have to decide not whether we are for or against the war, but what steps must be taken to defend the country...

... We will not forsake our fatherland in its hour of need. In this we feel that we are in accord with the International[!], which has always recognised the right of every people to national independence and self-defence, just as we agree with it in condemning all wars of conquest...

We hope that the merciless school of war will awaken an abhorrence of war in ever more millions of people and will win them to the ideal of socialism and international peace. Guided by these[!] principles, we approve the required credits.⁵

But all the imperialisms claimed to be waging a defensive war, and, in a sense, they all were. In the imperialist era, there is an economic cycle resulting in periods where the bourgeoisie can only defend its economic interests through military aggression. To concede the bourgeoisie's "right" to defend itself is to concede... everything. In the vote, on the tragic day of August 4th, 1914, discipline held, and the fraction gave its unanimous support to the war credits.

The Response of the Left

It has been asserted that Luxemburg seriously considered committing suicide when she heard of the SPD's Reichstag vote. Be that as it may, she had recovered enough by the evening of the same day to call a meeting to organise against the Reichstag fraction's betrayal.

Karl Liebknecht was quick to recognise that he had been mistaken as a Reichstag deputy to hold to Party discipline and to vote with the majority in the chamber. At first he had thought that the majority had been the temporary victims of mass hysteria and could be won around, but, by September, he was saying he would fight resolutely against "the Kaiser and the Kaiser's Socialists".⁶

By December 1914 the insatiable military machine was demanding more money to accompany the blood it had swallowed. More credits were required, and the Reichstag had to vote them in. This time, as the result of a little turbulence in the swamp, the minority gained four and lost one vote in the SPD private ses-

sion. More importantly, in the Reichstag itself, Liebknecht claimed the honour of being the first Socialist to vote in line with the discipline imposed by socialist principles, and not with that required by an ex-socialist party. The Reichstag refused to minute Liebknecht's arguments in favour of his vote, but his explanation was distributed illegally, as the first in a series of leaflets later entitled "Spartacus letters". Although Liebknecht's argument did not emphasise the class struggle (presumably in an inexperienced attempt, in a new situation, to get it reported), it was followed, in May 1915, by the inspirational "The Main Enemy is at Home", which begins:

The senseless slogan "Hold out to the end" is bankrupt and only leads deeper into the genocidal maelstrom. The task of the hour for Socialists is the international proletarian class struggle against international imperialist slaughter. Every people's main enemy is in their own country! The main enemy of the German people is in Germany: German imperialism, the German war party, and German secret diplomacy. Here in our own land is the enemy that the German people must combat. We must wage this political struggle alongside the proletariat of other countries, as they struggle against their own imperialism.

And ends:

End the genocide! Proletarians of all countries, follow the heroic example of your Italian brothers.⁷ Unite in international class struggle against the conspiracies of secret diplomacy, against imperialism, against the war, and for a peace in the socialist spirit. The main enemy is at home.⁸

Thus the people close to Liebknecht and Luxemburg succeeded in building an organisation which was able to spread propaganda calling on the workers to defend their interests against the imperialists, and this was despite the repression unleashed in early 1915 by the German state. Luxemburg was gaoled for twelve months in February of that year⁹, and Liebknecht was called up into the army in the same month. Others of their supporters suffered similar fates.

Also in 1915, the sole issue of the theoretical journal "Die Internationale" appeared. This journal gave the Luxemburg/Liebknecht current one of the two names it was known by: the other was to be Spartacus.

Luxemburg's leading article outlined one of the group's tasks, the Reconstruction of the International. First she flays the present role of Social Democracy:

...Napoleon once said that two factors decide a battle's outcome. One is the "earthly" factor - the terrain, quality of the weapons, the weather, and so forth. The other, the "spiritual factor", incorporates the moral state of the army, its enthusiasm, and its faith in its own cause. The "earthly" factor on the German side was largely taken care of by the Krupp firm in Essen. The "spiritual" factor can primarily be charged to the account of the Social Democracy. Since August 4th it has daily rendered immeasurable services to the German war effort. The trade unions suspended all struggles for higher wages when the war broke out and now invest all the security measures undertaken by the military authorities to prevent mass protests with the aura of socialism. The Social Democratic women withdrew all their time and energy from Social Democratic agitation and, arm in arm with the patriotic bourgeois women, tend the needy families of the soldiers. The Social Democratic press uses its daily papers and weekly and monthly periodicals, with a few exceptions, to promote the war as a cause both for the nation and for the proletariat. Following the war's twists and turns, it graphically portrays the Russian danger and the dreadful tsarist regime; abandons the perfidious Albion to the people's hatred; rejoices at the uprisings and revolutions in the colonies of other people's states; prophesies that after the war Turkey will grow strong again; promises freedom to the Poles, the Ruthenians, and all peoples; imparts courage and heroism to the proletarian youth; and in short completely manipulates public opinion and the broad masses to win them to the ideology of the war. Finally the Social Democratic parliamentarians and party leaders not only approve funds for the war effort, but they also condemn as "intrigue" every stirring of doubt and criticism in the masses and try to suppress it decisively. They also support the government with discreet personal services and with pamphlets, speeches, and articles displaying the most pure-bred German nationalist patriotism. When in world history was there a war in which anything like this happened?¹⁰

She then turns her attention to that part of the "swamp" which had not entirely been absorbed by the right.

The world historic call of the Communist Manifesto has been substantially enriched and, as corrected by Kautsky, now reads: "Proletarians of all countries, unite in peacetime and cut each other's throats in wartime!" Today our slogan is: "May every bullet find a Russian, every bayonet a Frenchman." Tomorrow, after peace is declared, it will be: "We embrace the millions of the whole

world." For the International is "essentially a peace instrument" but "an ineffective tool in wartime."¹¹

This sums up the approach of those, like Kautsky, who thought that the wartime task of the workers' movement was to "preserve the unity of the organisation" until the unpleasantness was over and one could get back to "business as usual". But then Luxemburg continues:

... "Only by pouring merciless scorn on all our half-measures and weaknesses," on our own moral collapse since August 4th, and on the liquidation of our entire system of tactics employed since August 4th can the reconstruction of the International begin!¹²

Here we see evidence of one of the two main failures of the Internationale leadership. After the betrayal of the SPD as an organisation, the yoking of the proletariat to the Kaiser's war chariot, the task for Luxemburg is not the construction of a new International and a new Party, but arranging the Pauline conversion of the old ones. We do not criticise the Internationale group for not splitting immediately from the old Party, but for not preparing a split, for substituting the impossible task of proletarianising a Party which had proven itself to be irremediably bourgeois for the task of bringing as many proletarian elements as possible out of that bourgeois Party.

There can be no question that we are projecting back to 1915 a policy which could not have emerged at the time, as there were organised Marxist elements outside of the SPD, and these elements were also in advance of the Internationale group in respect of the other failure of their leadership: Internationale group anti-war propaganda contrasted with the utterings of the pacifist limb of the "swamp" in that it called on working class struggle for peace, rather than addressing appeals to the bourgeoisie for the same end. The other German groups, the Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands (ISD) and the group around the Lichtstrahlen publication were in advance of the Internationale group here, too, as can be seen from the position taken up at the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences.

Zimmerwald

The Zimmerwald conference emerged from an attempt by the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) to convene a conference of the leaders of the Second International. Naturally, this failed, as the

warmongering "socialists" could no longer tolerate their former colleagues. The PSI, however, received positive responses from the minorities of the Parties approached, and decided to go ahead with a conference of these minorities.

This was the Zimmerwald (near Berne, Switzerland) Conference of 5th-8th September 1915. Zimmerwald was preceded by an international women's conference and one for youth which considered anti-war politics, but Zimmerwald was the first full-party international socialist conference at which revolutionary defeatism was discussed.

Of the 42 delegates, ten were from Germany: seven from Georg Ledebour's wing of the Marxist Centre, two from the Internationale group and Julian Borchardt from Lichstrahlen. The latter, together with the Russian Bolsheviks, Lenin and Zinoviev, were among those who met on the eve of the conference to produce a resolution and manifesto of the left to present to the conference as a whole.

This resolution contains the following, attacking the opportunists of the "swamp":

Imperialism can be overcome only by abolishing the contradictions from which it sprang, through the socialist reorganisation of the capitalist countries. Objective conditions are already ripe for this. At the outbreak of the war, the majority of the leaders of the working-class parties did not raise this, the only slogan possible in opposition to imperialism. Possessed by nationalism and rank with opportunism, they handed the proletariat over to imperialism when the war came. They gave up the principles of socialism and thus any real struggle for the interests of the proletariat.¹³

It also points out the way to struggle against imperialism:

... We utilise every struggle and every reform demanded in our minimum programme in order to intensify the crisis of the war, as we do with every political and social crisis of capitalism, and to broaden it into an attack on the foundations of capitalism. conducted under the banner of socialism, this struggle will inoculate the workers to the calls for the enslavement of one people by another, for the domination of one nation over another, and for new annexations. This struggle will make the workers immune to the appeals to national solidarity that led the workers into the slaughter. The prelude to the struggle is the fight against the world war and for an end to mass slaughter. This fight demands

rejection of the war credits; resignation from government ministries; denunciation of the capitalist and antisocialist character of the war from the parliamentary floor and in the columns of the legal and, where necessary, illegal press; and a merciless struggle against social patriotism. It demands the utilisation of every movement of the people called forth by the impact of the war (want, tremendous loss of life etc.) in order to organise anti-government street demonstrations, carry out propaganda of international solidarity in the trenches, promote economic strikes, and, where conditions are favourable, to turn them into political strikes. "Civil war, not 'civil peace', is our slogan!"¹⁴

Despite the fact that the above slogan was taken from a letter by Liebknecht to the Conference, and despite the left sacrificing any explicit rejection of national defence in order to improve the chances of the Centre accepting the resolution, the Internationale group did not support it¹⁵, and it was not adopted by the Conference. Nevertheless, after the rejection of their own, the left supported the resolution which was adopted, which toned down the attack on the opportunists almost to vanishing point (which was not surprising, as Ledebour et al. still hadn't voted against war credits), reduced the struggle against imperialism to demanding a peace without annexations and failed to spell out what the class struggle actually meant in the circumstances. The reason the left supported this milk-and-water version of what was actually required, was the immense importance they attached to the existence of international organisation against the war. And the existence of the Conference resolution in no way stopped them from circulating their own.

The Junius Pamphlet

It might be argued that the Internationale group at the Zimmerwald conference merely made the same concessions that the left made to the pacifist centre, but sooner. But their confusion over defencism went much deeper, as can be seen from the famous Junius pamphlet, "The Crisis in the German Social Democracy".

This was written by Luxemburg, under the pseudonym Junius, whilst in gaol. Although it was finished in April 1915, and smuggled out, the Internationale group could find no printer until January 1916. The pamphlet is one of the great works of Marxist politics, seen from a literary point of view, but it has a great, and dangerous, political flaw. It sets out to prove that the claims that Germany was waging a

defensive war were false, but lets in the possibility that if Germany had been fighting for her defence, she should have been supported.

Yes, Socialists are obliged to defend their country in great historical crises. Here lies the great fault of the German Social Democratic Reichstag fraction. When it announced on August 4th, "We will not forsake our fatherland in its hour of need," it denied its own words in the same breath. For truly it did desert its fatherland in its hour of greatest danger. The first duty of the Social Democracy towards its fatherland was to expose the real background of this imperialist war, to tear away the web of imperialist and diplomatic lies that conceals this assault on the fatherland. It was their duty to speak loudly and distinctly, to proclaim to the people of Germany that in this war victory and defeat would be equally fatal; to oppose to the utmost the gagging of the fatherland by the state of siege; to proclaim the necessity of the arming of the people; to demand that the people alone decide on war and peace; to demand that the people's representatives meet in permanent session while the war continued, in order to ensure a watchful control over the government by parliament, and over parliament by the people; and to demand the immediate removal of all limitations on political rights, since only a free people can adequately defend its country. It was their duty, finally, to combat the imperialist war program aimed at maintaining Austria and Turkey, that is, reaction in Germany and in Europe, by counterposing the old, truly national programme of the patriots and democrats of 1848, the programme of Marx, Engels and Lassalle, the slogan of the united pan-German republic. That was the banner that should have been carried before the country - truly national, truly free, and in accord with the best traditions of Germany and the international class politics of the proletariat[!]...¹⁶

But the "old, truly national programme" was a bourgeois programme, and naturally would have left the bourgeoisie in control in Germany!

In truth, the only revolutionary programme after the dawn of the imperialist era was (and is) the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. But then, after that overthrow, the defensive war would not have been that of Germany, but of the proletarian revolution, of the proletariat in the liberated areas (inside or outside Germany) against the bourgeoisie (inside or outside Germany).

Lenin's criticism of the Junius pamphlet per-

ceptively links

Luxemburg's failure to **completely** reject defencism with her fear of splits:

*...There is no doubt that Junius is decidedly opposed to the imperialist war and is decidedly in favour of revolutionary tactics; and all the gloating of the Plekhanovs¹⁷ over Junius's "defencism" cannot wipe out this fact. Possible and probable calumnies of this kind must be answered promptly and bluntly. But, first, Junius has not completely rid himself¹⁸ of the "environment" of the German Social-Democrats, even the Leftists, who are afraid of a split, who are afraid to follow revolutionary slogans to their logical conclusions. This is a false fear, and the Left Social-Democrats of Germany must and WILL rid themselves of it. They are sure to do so in the course of their struggle against the social-chauvinists. The fact is that they are fighting against **their own** social-chauvinists resolutely, firmly and **sincerely**, and this is the tremendous, the fundamental difference between them and the Martovs and Chkheidzes, who, with one hand (a la Skobelev¹⁹) unfurl a banner bearing the greeting, "To the Liebknechts of All Countries", and with the other hand tenderly embrace Chkhenkeli and Potresov.²⁰ Secondly, Junius apparently wanted to achieve something in the nature of the Menshevik "theory of stages", of sad memory; he wanted to **begin** to carry out the revolutionary programme from the end that is "more suitable", "more popular" and more acceptable to the **petty bourgeoisie**. It is something like a plan "to outwit history", to outwit the philistines. He seems to say, surely, nobody would oppose a **better** way of defending the real fatherland; and the real fatherland is the Great German Republic, and the best defence is a militia, a permanent parliament, etc.²¹*

The War Continues, the Left Grows

By 1915 the war of attrition had set in. Thousands of lives were lost to gain a few feet, which had to be fought over again the next day. In the words of the Junius pamphlet

Things are not as they were. The scene has thoroughly changed. The six weeks' march on Paris has burgeoned into a world drama. Mass slaughter has become tiresome and routine, without bring a solution one step closer. Bourgeois statesmanship is caught in its own trap, and cannot lay to rest the spirit that it has invoked. Gone is the first mad delirium. Gone is the patriotic clamour in the streets, the chase after suspicious-looking automobiles, the phony telegrams, the cholera-poisoned wells. Gone, the mad tales of Russian students hurl-

ing bombs at every railway trestle in Berlin, of French planes over Nürnberg; gone, the spy-hunts in every alley, the teeming throngs in the cafes where deafening music and patriotic songs drowned all else out; gone, the lynch mobs, looking for victims, harassing women, ready to whip themselves into a delirious frenzy over every wild rumour; gone, the atmosphere of ritual murder, the pogrom atmosphere that left the policeman on the corner as the only remaining representative of human dignity. The show is over...²²

In the Reichstag, Liebknecht had been joined by Otto Rühle in voting against the war credits in March 1915, and this time 30 other SPD'ers abstained²³.

By December 1915, the SPD anti-credit vote was 20, with 22 abstaining. This led to the fraction leadership taking action. First, they expelled Liebknecht in January. Rühle left the fraction in solidarity. Outside of the Reichstag, many Party organisations supported the minority. Then, on the very evening after they had voted against an emergency budget (24th March 1916), a disparate collection of 18 centrists, including Haase²⁴, was expelled.

The situation was described by Ernst Meyer, who was, by that time, close to the Luxemburg/Liebknecht opposition:

The growing scarcity of foodstuff, the ever greater conscription of the population into the army and the munitions factories, the ever more barefaced appearance of bourgeois annexionists created a favourable soil for the opposition. Reliable newsletters appeared in an ever more rapid succession. Illegal leaflets were distributed in ever greater numbers. The slogan that Karl Liebknecht had coined for the Zimmerwald Conference, "Civil War, not 'Civil Peace'", inflamed the masses. Without the resolute opposition around Liebknecht and Luxemburg officially agreeing to the platform of the "Zimmerwald Left", there nevertheless appeared in their propaganda an approach to the main point of the Bolshevik demand for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. In the opposition's internal debates there appeared an ever clearer distinction between the Liebknecht-Luxemburg group on the one hand and the Ledebour-Hoffmann group on the other.²⁵

This atmosphere of war-weariness had enabled Liebknecht to call a meeting of socialists to the left of Ledebour on New Year's Day 1916. Luxemburg's theses, smuggled out of prison, were adopted by the meeting, including the 12th thesis, which read:

In view of the betrayal of aims and interests of

the working class by the official representatives of the Socialist Parties of the leading countries, in view of their desertion from the terrain of the proletarian international to the terrain of bourgeois imperialist politics, it is a matter of life and death for socialism, that a new international is created, which assumes the leadership and ensures the coherence of the revolutionary class struggle against the imperialism of every country.²⁶

However, this international split did not yet imply a national one, as we shall see.

The meeting also decided to produce propaganda under the watchword "Spartacus".

The Kienthal Conference

Also known as the second Zimmerwald Conference, this was held April 24th-30th, 1916.

Reflecting the lessons given to the proletariat in the interim by King and Country, Kaiser and Empire, God and the Tsar, and, not least, bourgeois democracy and freedom, the Left was stronger here than at Zimmerwald. Out of 43 delegates, this time 12 supported the Left, but again the Spartacists (as the Internationale group rapidly became known) were not of the Left, although they were closer to it than they were to the Centre. The sole German representative of the Left was Paul Frölich.

Although the main text adopted by the Conference did not go much beyond the Zimmerwald framework, except in its demand that war credits be opposed (the Zimmerwald declaration had left this out as the result of a purely legalistic argument by the representatives of the German Centre), several subsidiary documents did. Chief among these was the resolution on the ISB, which was informally described as an arrest warrant! It rejected the Centrist demand for an "amnesty" for all currents after the war, and attacked the open chauvinists.

In Germany itself, the Spartacists were growing, gathering up radical opposition to the war, including the youth of the Party, whose underground Easter 1916 conference supported the Spartacists. In the Spartacist ranks, there was now a current aiming at an independent Party. Luxemburg, who had been released from prison in February 1916, answered them by saying that the SPD membership could not be voluntarily left to the leaders. For her, the task was not to found a "sect", but to form supporters into an organised direction within the Party.

In 1916, for the first time since the outbreak of the war, May Day demonstrations took place

in Germany. The Spartacists organised one of 10,000 workers in Berlin, and Liebknecht spoke against the war. For this, he was arrested and charged with high treason. In June he was sentenced to two and a half years, and this was extended to four years in August. 55,000 Berlin metal workers struck in protest against the verdict, and they were joined by workers elsewhere in Germany in the first political strikes of the war.

However, the need to actually find a charge was clearly too onerous for the German state; in mid-1916 it introduced "protective military custody" and turned the arrests of revolutionaries into a purely administrative matter. Luxemburg was one of many arrested under this suspension of law, in her case in July 1916.

The winter of 1916-17, the first "turnip winter", brought great suffering to the workers of the Central Powers. Forced labour was introduced for the male civilian population. This worsening of workers' conditions was a precondition for a strengthening of the revolutionary forces.

After the SPD majority deprived the opposition of its control of the Party journal *Vorwärts*, the latter called a conference for the 7th January 1917. Out of 157 delegates, 35 were Spartacists. Meyer enunciated the Spartacist viewpoint:

The opposition is only able to persist in its membership of the present Social Democratic Party so long as this Party neither hinders nor inhibits the opposition's autonomous political action. We remain in the Party only to cross up and combat the policy of the majority in every way, to protect the masses from the imperialist policy pursued under the cloak of Social Democracy, and to use the Party as a recruiting-ground for the proletarian, anti-militarist class struggle.²⁷

Kautsky presented a Manifesto, which was supported by the Spartacists. In this he gave his position on peace.

What the opposition demands is not a preparedness for peace at any price, but also not simple preparedness for peace without any further specification of its conditions. What it demands is the preparedness for a peace in which there is neither a winner nor a loser, for a peace of understanding without conquests.²⁸

That the Spartacists supported this in preference to giving their own positions is a rather clear demonstration of how much they surren-

dered in order to stay in the SPD.

And to no avail! The SPD majority responded to the opposition conference by expelling the opposition.²⁹

The USPD

The Unabhaengiger Sozialdemokratischer Partei Deutschlands (USPD - Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) was thus not formed at a time of its own choosing, but because the majority had had enough of the opposition. After the expulsion, a conference to form a new Party was called for the 6th-12th April 1917. The Spartacists held their own conference beforehand, and, despite some resistance from its local organisations, decided to join the new Party. Without some of the more determined opponents of the decision, and unaccompanied by the ISD, the Spartacists joined with an opposition fraction of the SPD which stretched from Bernstein and Kautsky to themselves, in the USPD.

The extremely federalist organisational structure of this new Party, which was the organisational form that the Spartacists themselves preferred, illustrates the organisational deficiencies of most of the German Left. Instead of a Party tightly organised around a definite revolutionary programme, which could make its politics known to the class as something entirely separate from the bourgeois programmes (or lack of programme) of other tendencies, it preferred to set up the false dilemma: in the Party, with the masses, or outside the Party, with no contact with the masses. It was a false dilemma, because they were in an objectively favourable situation for making direct contact with the masses irrespective of party affiliation - if the army couldn't stop them, Karl Kautsky certainly couldn't! And, even if the dilemma hadn't been false, they gave the wrong answer to it, for in objectively unfavourable situations, the task is to keep revolutionary programme alive, and not to dilute it in order to keep in touch with the masses under the influence of the bourgeoisie.

The idea that it does not matter much which Party you are in so long as it allows you freedom of action was to bear bitter fruit in the German Revolution, when one of its consequences was the ease with which Social Democracy was able to act as a bourgeois Fifth column inside the workers' councils. But that is to anticipate our story. **EDL**

Footnotes

1 Quoted in *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International (LFSI)*, Monad Press, 1984, p95.
2 LFSI, p120.

- 3 The central organ of the Second International, the International Socialist Bureau (ISB) shifted its planned Congress from Vienna, it is true, but it shifted it to Paris! The Congress never took place.
- 4 Socialism and the Great War (SGW), Georges Haupt, 1972, p189.
- 5 LFSI, p124.
- 6 LFSI, p173.
- 7 Italy entered the war on the Entente side, but against the clear opposition of Italian Socialists.
- 8 LFSI, p177. The slogan "The Main Enemy is at Home" was echoed by revolutionary groups throughout Europe.
- 9 She had actually been found guilty of incitement to soldiers to disobey orders in a pre-war trial. At that time, the German state made its prisoners serve their sentences it felt was convenient.
- 10 LFSI, p185.
- 11 LFSI, p187.
- 12 LFSI, p189, our emphasis.
- 13 LFSI, p298, emphasis in the original.
- 14 LFSI, p299, emphasis in the original.
- 15 Nor did Trotsky, who wasn't yet a Bolshevik.
- 16 LFSI, pp428-9.
- 17 Plekhanov: chauvinist ex-Marxist. When

- he was a Marxist, he was known as the father of Russian Marxism.
- 18 Lenin does not know the identity of Junius, or, at most, only suspects it.
- 19 Martov, Chkheidze and Skobelev: Menshevik components of the Russian "swamp".
- 20 Chkhenkeli and Potresov: Russian social-chauvinists.
- 21 LFSI, pp444-4, emphasis in the original.
- 22 LFSI, p421.
- 23 The credits had been incorporated into the budget, and it was an SPD tradition to vote against the budget!
- 24 And also including Bernstein, who, by way of exception for a revisionist, was a pacifist and not an out-and-out chauvinist.
- 25 Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik (KPDWR), Ossip K. Flechtheim, 1969, p94.
- 26 KPDWR, p96.
- 27 KPDWR, p102 and German Social Democracy, 1905-1917, Carl E. Schorske, 1983, p313
- 28 KPDWR, p102.
- 29 This expulsion was not sanctioned by the Party statutes, but no-one was bothered by that detail.

Revolutionary Perspectives

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Meetings

The CWO holds regular open meetings on the first Tuesday of every month at Cortonwood Miners Welfare and on the third Tuesday of every month in the Owen Building, Sheffield Hallam University (ask for "CWO Meeting" at the desk). All meetings at 8.00 p.m.. Details of other public meetings can be found in our agitational sheet *Workers' Voice* which is free to supporters or can be sent on receipt of stamped A5/A4 envelope. WV 82 is currently available.

continued from page 1

Nation or Class?

hundred years by the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class. They aim to make "citizens" of all classes accept their rule and die fighting to defend **their** property. This is what "fighting for your country means". Currently in Britain the New Labour government, basking in the electoral victory it won largely as a result of middle class votes, has been beating the nationalist drum in a way that would have sounded crass if it had come from the Tories. War is currently not on the agenda between the great powers but Labour are certainly doing a fine job for the British state at the moment. In this sense they are in the great tradition of the Second International (to which they are still affiliated) which betrayed everything that it had stood for by supporting the imperialist war effort in 1914. The part played by Social Democracy in defending capitalism is another issue treated in these pages. So too is the successful revolution which so terrified the world's ruling class that it eventually brought their imperialist butchery to an end in 1918. The Russian Revolution remains a great inspiration despite the eventual victory of the brutal state capitalist regime of Stalin. What revolutionaries have to understand today are the positive actions of the working class in Russia in 1917 and how they can be emulated in the very different conditions which will apply in the future. Understanding how capitalism operates today is an essential weapon of the working class so the other articles are devoted to that task. The most significant shows how the crisis has finally undermined the myth that there is independent capitalist development in South East Asia.

Readers' Letters

Introduction

In our last two issues we have engaged in debate with the Indian communist group, Kamunist Kranti. One of the points of criticism we made of them was that they told us little about their actual work in India despite the fact that they are based in an industrial town. KK seem to have taken this to heart and have sent out the following appeal. We are printing it as an act of solidarity with the workers involved. We do not hold out any hope for the course of political action advocated by KK but have written to them asking not only for further information but what other forms of practical help we can give. We encourage all revolutionaries to send any messages of support or ideas for advancing the struggle of these workers to the KK address printed at the end of the letter. Our next issue will include an update on the situation as well as an analysis of the struggles going on around the world at the present time. In the meantime we would encourage readers to study the letter from Los Angeles Workers Voice, an internationalist group in the USA (printed on page 5) which has made what we consider an excellent intervention in the strike of the UPS workers which recently finished in the USA. Whilst leftists here, like the SWP, hailed this as a great victory the reality is, unfortunately, rather different as the LAWV letter clearly demonstrates. We are publishing the second letter from a comrade in Los Angeles because it relates to the debate we held with KK in our last issue even if shameless self-publicity is not our usual style!

Struggles in Faridabad

Dear Friends,
We are writing to you for support to wage-workers acting on their own.

Jhalani tools (India) Limited is a major manufacturer of handtools in the world and has three plants in Faridabad. The management has not paid sixteen months of wages to its 2183 workers. The plants are in operation.

Realising that leaders and unions are hand-in-gloves with the management, workers in groups of eight to ten started activity on their own to obtain their outstanding wages. The number of such groups increased in May-June and by July two thousand workers became active on their own in groups of 5 to 10.

To counter this self-activity of factory

workers the government machinery, management, union leaders, have together started harassing, provoking and persecuting workers.

Please send protest letters to the Prime Minister of India through the Ambassador of India in the country of your residence demanding immediate payment of sixteen months outstanding wages.

Please do circulate this letter.

Sher Singh
Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi,
N.I.T. Faridabad - 121 001 India

Comments on RP7

Dear comrades
Wow! I just got the new RP#7 and it is great. I was so elated I wished to congratulate the IBRP comrades on another job well done. Copies will be passed out to other comrades this week and I am sure, per usual, that it will provoke much agreement and discussion. You took a very principled position hitting the flaws and confu-

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.

sions of councilists and anarchists. I hope more of their rank and file militants can get this issue. It's great medicine for them - If they are serious about rebuilding a revolutionary workers movement - they need to look at the key front of the party/ political trend and its work in the struggle, yesterday, today and tomorrow!
I thank the Italian/British comrades for their powerful article exposing the savagery of the cuts/austerity of the Corp. rulers and state here in the US.
NC

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!

Find the CWO and IBRP on the Internet

<http://www.geocities.com/~italianleft>

Articles from the current issues of our main publications, *Battaglia Comunista*, *Prometeo*, *Revolutionary Perspectives* and *International Communist* are all available. Internet users can contact the CWO by e-mail on

CWO <106361.1743@compuserve.com>

Internationalist Communist

Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

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