

# *Revolutionary Perspectives 9*

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation



## **The German Revolution 1918**

**Con Tricks in Ireland**

**South Africa's Bitter Lessons**

**Labour Steps Up Attacks on Workers**

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**Revolutionary Perspectives  
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# Labour Steps Up Attacks on Working Class

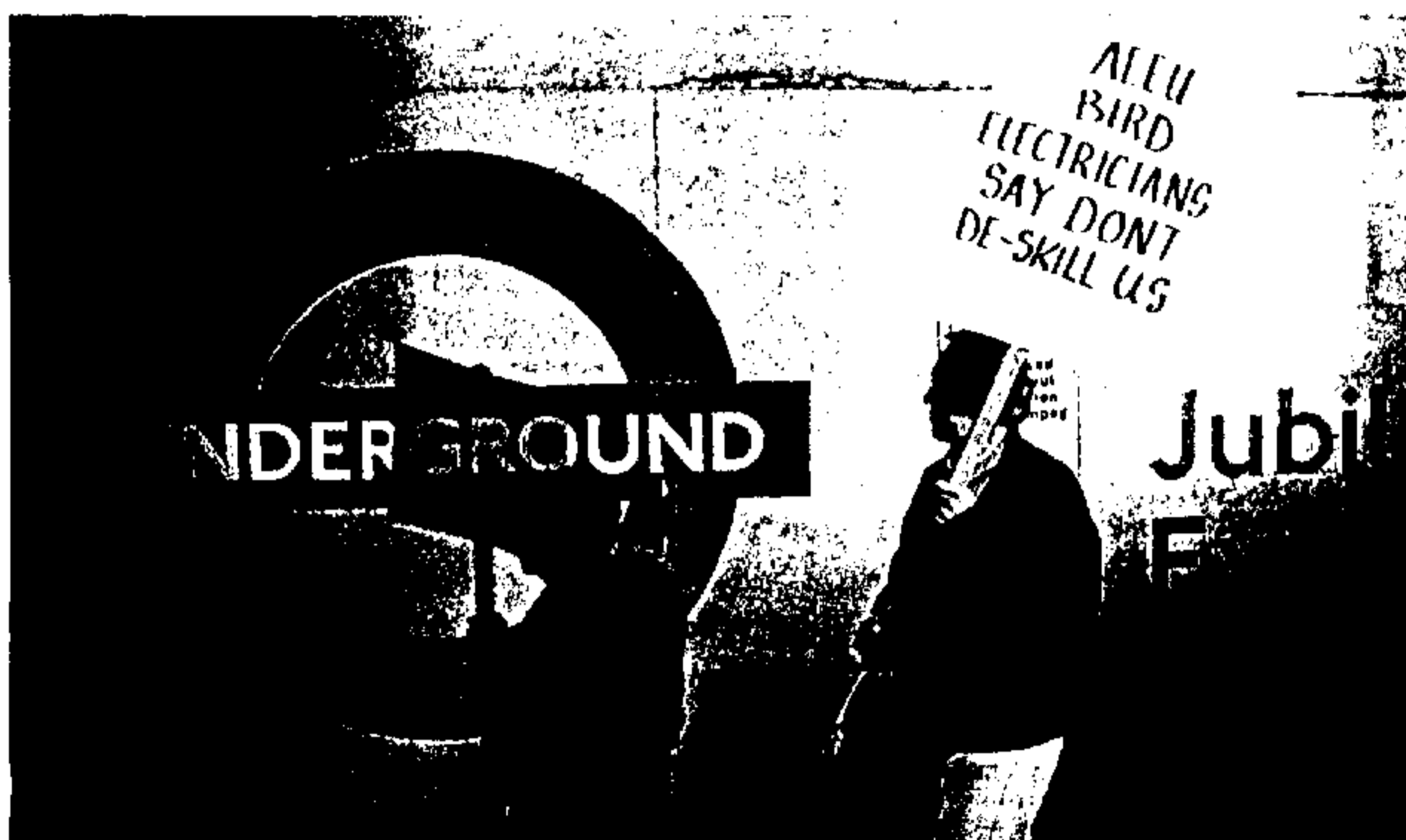
Throughout the dark years of Tory rule the working class in Britain were urged by the various rent-a-mob Trotskyist organisations to solve all their problems by shouting: "Tories out". When the election came along these same outfits told us to vote Labour, allowing us varying degrees of illusions as to the outcome. Voting Labour was something you didn't really want to do but had to, like going to the dentist. When pushed they would say "Well, they can't be as bad as the Tories".

Well, they can. The first week in January saw the launch of the pilot scheme for "the New Deal". The Chancellor Gordon Brown introduced the scheme by carrying on the tradition of blaming unemployment on the unemployed, by saying:

*From today there will be no option of simply staying at home on full benefit doing nothing.*

The scheme will cost £3.5bn to administer. Employers who take part will get £60 per week subsidy for 26 weeks. They will also get £750 to help train young people. Not surprisingly the big companies are queuing up. Ford, BT and Tesco are amongst those rushing to support it. Those employers who offer work to people over 25 who have been out of work for over 2 years will get a handout of £75 per week. Not a bad deal for them then. Under 25's will have three further choices: 6 months work with the voluntary sector; 6 months with the environmental taskforce the Government is setting up or 12 months full-time study (for those with no qualifications). Funny how Labour is anxious to improve the education of young people when a few months ago it happily destroyed any chance of a University education for thousands of working class people by introducing fee paying.

"The New Deal" represents a further



*Electricians on the Jubilee Line demonstrate against their own union which had just "negotiated" a new package which involved unpaid overtime, pay cuts and the loss of work to a new unskilled category. This strike spread to Sellafield Nuclear Power Station as well as Swan Hunter's shipyard on Tyneside. It is one moment of resistance to the ever increasing attacks which the British ruling class is making via the Labour Party and the trades unions.*

shift in state subsidy away from the working class to big business, a strategy much loved by the Tories. Those forced onto the schemes will have no guarantee of any work after it's finished, let alone of full-time well paid work. There are no real safeguards to protect people from employers who keep sacking those on the schemes to keep getting the subsidies. Nor are there any real guarantees against employers sacking existing staff to take on subsidised labour. If you dare to refuse any of the options of the scheme your benefit will be cut.

The idea that Labour is really banking on an upturn in the economy to make the scheme a success, contains a massive contradiction. If the economy was going to improve to meet social need it would cut unemployment and there would be no need for their scheme! But just like Roosevelt's New Deal in the '30's the prospect of capitalism peacefully manoeuvring itself out of its crisis is nil. All that Blair and Co. can do is manage the crisis and try to stop it becoming a full-blown collapse. In this sense

Labour complacency has been shocked by the collapse of the South-East Asian miracle. The "Tiger" economies now resemble the "blind-kitten-in-a-paper-bag" economies capitalism is so often forced to produce. In other words, no matter how deregulated the labour market becomes, no matter how cheap the labour or how far the cuts in social spending go, indeed no matter how far Labour is willing to push workers living standards down to make Britain attractive for inward investment, nothing will be enough to get the economy out of its present crisis. There are no capitalist solutions. This is why, in all essentials, the Labour Government has carried on all the Tories attacks. Since 1979 the number of people living in households with an income (after household costs have been met) less than half the national average has risen from under 10% to over 25% (13.3 millions). But Labour has not altered the way in which unemployment is calculated (which underestimates it by possibly 50% given that so many possible workers cannot claim benefit under new rules, and only benefit claimants are

recorded as unemployed). Similarly with benefits themselves. In the 1970s, when the post-war capitalist boom had come to an end but workers were fighting for a decent living standard, the last Labour Government attempted to buy social peace by linking benefits to earnings. The Tories altered this to link them to prices in order that the benefits bill would not rise so fast. According to David Piachaud, Professor of Social Policy at the LSE, the number in poverty (as defined above) over the next five years will actually increase by 1.5 to 2 millions.

### Labour - Perfect Instrument for Capital

The Labour Government will not only continue Tory policies, they will add some of their own cuts. They will preside over further cuts in wages and benefits, and "increases in productivity" so UK Plc can compete with the cheap labour of the Far East. Behind all the cosy phrases of creating a stakeholder economy the truth remains that Labour has the confidence to make vicious attacks on our class in areas where even the Tories feared to tread. The proposed cuts in disability benefits shows how low Labour is prepared to sink. Their plans to get the disabled off benefits and into work ignores two facts: firstly that most of the 1.4 million disabled people are past retirement age and secondly unemployment is a fact of life in the ailing global economy and not the fault of lazy disabled people.

The truth, however, has never stood in the way of good bourgeois propaganda. The Labour Party creates a picture of our class as lazy greedy fraudsters. It is true some young people are criminal drug dealers ready to swindle the system but since they live with the Home Secretary this isn't our fault. The caring stakeholding society in reality means ever more vicious attacks on the most vulnerable members of our class and increasing anti-working class propaganda from the likes of the dysfunctional Straws and other defenders of traditional bourgeois family values. The notion that

somehow we would be better off under a Labour Government has given way to the entirely predictable reality (at least that is what we constantly said in the run up to the election) that we will be attacked in exactly the same way under Labour as under the Tories and in some cases some sections of our class will be worse off under Labour than they ever have been before.

This doesn't simply mean that the slogan used by the left in every election for the past 18 years "Vote Labour with no illusions" must now go down as one of the most stupid of the whole century. It means we must understand how real social change can come about. It cannot come through pretending that the Labour Movement has anything to do with the working class. It has always managed the working class for capitalism right from the days when Ramsey Macdonald and his Chancellor Philip Snowden instituted the first cuts in unemployment benefits in 1931. Even then they were telling us it was for the "good of the country". The Left of the Labour (and their most active fringe are the Trotskyist groups like the SWP etc.) keep telling us that they are only calling for tactical support for Labour in order to unmask them to the working class. But this happened long ago. What the working class needs is a real revolutionary alternative which does not hang on the coat-tails of the Labour Party or the trades unions. The revolutionary alternative is not another governing party but a party to end all governments over the working class. As such it must be a product of the growth of working class consciousness itself. The sad thing is that many would-be working class fighters, burnt-out in the cynical manipulations of the Trotskyists, think that all attempts to organise a centralised international body to lead the fight against the capitalist organisations (and in these we include the state capitalists) would simply end as rackets. This is a paralysing product of the counter-revolution, of which the Trotskyists are the clearest representatives.

As capitalism has no solution the

working class will more and more be forced to fight for its own interests. How successful it is in halting the capitalist slide into barbarism will depend on how well organised we are as a class. RT

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# Harbinger of Things to Come

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.

"Tigers Come up Against Global Finance Capital" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 8

No sooner had international capital breathed a sigh of relief at the supposed financial stabilisation in South East Asia following a massive bail-out by the IMF (over \$55bn to Indonesia and Thailand alone) than South Korea and even Japan — the regional power and the world's second largest economy — succumbed to the 'contagion'. By the end of November it was South Korea's turn for the international bail-out: \$57bn, the largest ever sum to a single state. At this point South Korea's currency, the *won*, had lost nearly half its value against the US dollar. Banks and companies were going bust as they found themselves without the 'liquidity' to pay back dollar loans. By mid-December eight of the country's huge business conglomerates (*chaebols*) were bankrupt. Alongside them were 15,000 lesser companies whilst 14 out of 30 merchant banks had been obliged to suspend trading. Short-term foreign debt for 1998 is estimated to be around \$100bn.

Meanwhile the 'contagion' had spread to Japan itself. In the last week of November the collapse of a leading finance company, Yamaichi Securities marked the country's biggest ever corporate failure (with liabilities of close to \$26bn). This was closely followed by a major bank, Hokkaido Takashoku, and Sanyo Securities, a large broking firm. Financial commentators here, worried about the knock-on effect worldwide, forgot about the virtues of the free market and called on the Japanese government to intervene to prevent a wholesale collapse of the Japanese banking system and a veritable

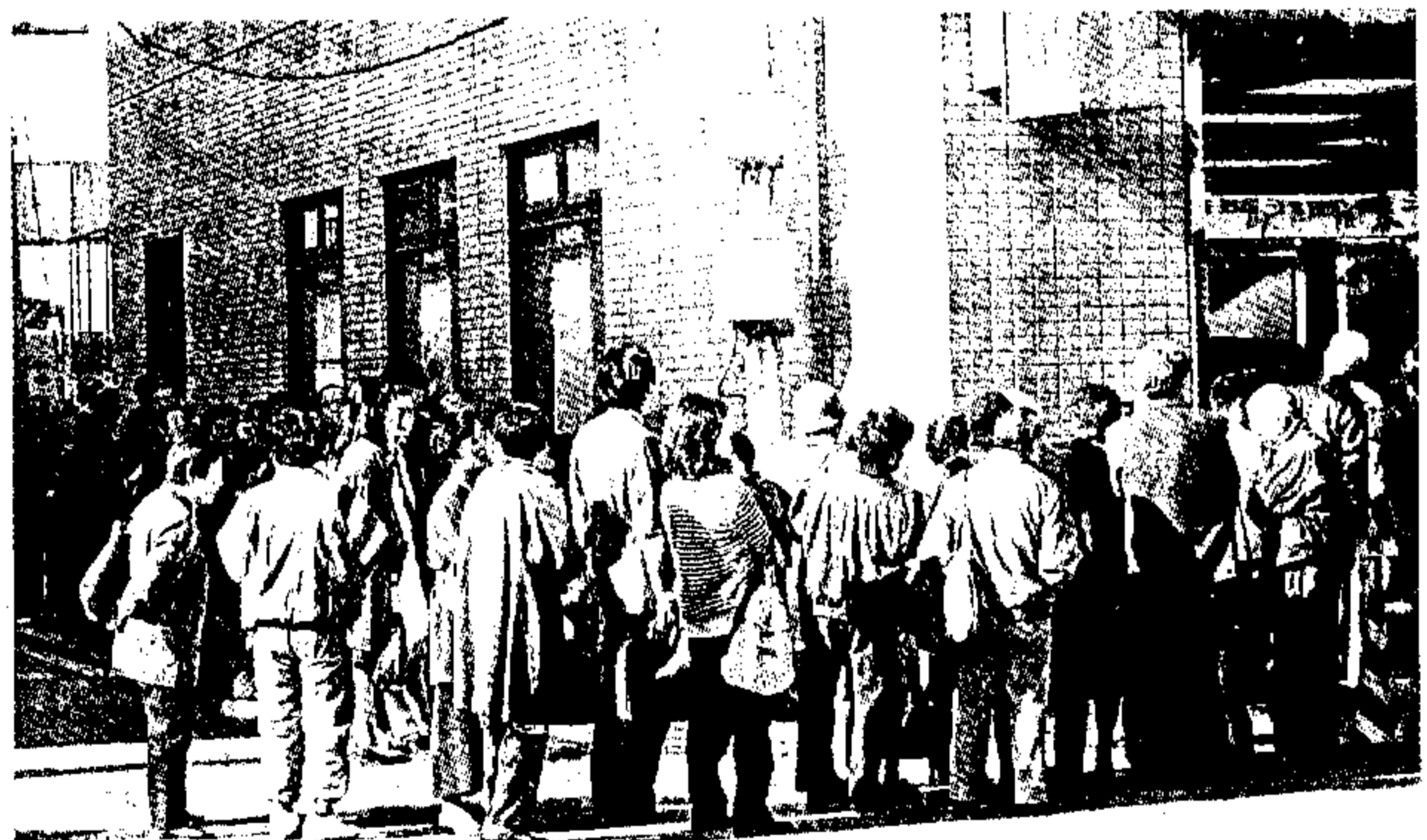
economic slump which would have inevitable dire consequences for the rest of the advanced capitalist world. Indeed the government has introduced emergency economic measures. However, tax cuts and stricter loan regulations have hardly been a weapon against further bankruptcies, investment cutbacks, business closures, falling stock prices, growing unemployment, i.e. an out-and-out slump; or as one writer in the *Financial Times* put it, "the deleveraging of the Japanese corporate sector through 1930s style debt destruction — in other words, through business failures." [Jesper Koll, head of research at J.P. Morgan, Tokyo, 7.1.98.]

## Asian Contagion is Part of Global Capitalist Crisis

The likes of Mr. Koll, employed in the service of finance capital, can only see the surface of the phenomenon. What he is describing was explained by Marx over a century ago: not just debt is being wiped out but capital itself, or rather capital values. Suddenly the whole assets of companies are worthless and either abandoned or taken over so that capital is more centralised and concentrated at a national level. It is

an unmistakable sign that capitalism, which needs to perpetually grow and accumulate in order to survive, is experiencing one of its cyclical crises. In the nineteenth century a periodic crisis where factories closed and businesses shut down or were taken over was enough to revive profitability and start another cycle of accumulation. For the firms who survived, the general devaluation of capital meant that it was once again 'worthwhile' (i.e. profitable) investing. By the twentieth century this classical boom-bust cycle became manifest at a global level but the straightforward economic crisis was not enough to revive a capitalist world economy. The necessary intermittent devaluation of capital has come about by the most horrendous means of world war with competition between rival firms overarched by imperialist rivalry between states.

Of course the possibility of another world war emerging out of a modern global economic slump is either ignored or flatly denied by the average *Financial Times* journalist or economic historian. Moreover, they can point to the legacy of the Bretton Woods agreement amongst the major powers after World War Two, an



Yamaichi Securities investors queue outside its Tokyo offices to try to get their money

agreement specifically aimed at preventing crisis-ridden states from retreating into autarchy, erecting import barriers and devaluing currencies in order to cheapen their own exports (so-called beggar-my-neighbour policies). And if the Bretton Woods mechanism that was meant to maintain world currency stability — the dollar's link to gold and the fixed exchange rates that went with it — collapsed over 25 years ago, haven't we still got the IMF and the World Bank to prevent national economies collapsing and the World Trade Organisation to ensure free trade? Further — we can hear them tell us — present day globalisation means that the interests of capital are so inextricably intertwined that old-style protectionism and trade wars can never again be on the agenda.

It's true that our lords and masters have learned from history. As the CWO wrote during the Latin American debt crisis at the beginning of the Eighties, the trend is for capitalism to abandon Keynesianism at home but to retain the basic Keynesian technique of deficit financing for managing the international economy. This is even more the case today when the demands of capital accumulation have produced unprecedented levels of capital concentration at a global level and limited the scope for states to manage their own economies as self-contained units.<sup>1</sup> This doesn't mean, however, that world capitalism has overcome the crisis that opened up over a quarter of a century ago. On the contrary, despite the massive devaluation of capital that has taken place under the banner of industrial restructuring and the replacement of obsolete equipment with new technology; despite the ability of capital to move production to areas of cheap labour power, despite the expansion of trade and the world market, despite the 'opening up' of weaker capitals on the periphery of the system to the full force of competition from the 'advanced' (read 'imperialist') powers, the crisis of profitability will not go away. At a global level annual growth rates continue to decline and global debt far surpasses annual global product.

#### 4 Revolutionary Perspectives



*Clenched fists but these Korean stock market workers were only demonstrating to shut the markets!*

(The present amount of global debt, corporate and personal combined, is \$33,100bn, or 130 times more than the value of annual global product.) The colossal sums of capital being invested in the financial rather than the productive sphere is testimony to the dearth of profitable outlets where new surplus value can be generated. The worldwide increase in absolute exploitation of the working class, while unemployment remains and in the face of 'labour saving' new technology, is testimony to capital's desperation to raise profit rates.

#### The Myth of the IMF

Not so very long ago the economies of South East Asia were being held up as an example of how to do just that. With more than double the growth rates of the West, Asian workers' diligence, Singapore's schooling system, not to mention Japanese capitalism, organisation of production, etc, were lauded by the UK media and politicians. Now, when they're mentioned at all it is in the context of economic crisis and — wait for it — the danger of their provoking a global depression.<sup>2</sup> The economic collapse in the region is so extensive that it is bound to have a knock-on effect on the global economy. The attempt to limit this is stretching the resources of the IMF as they have never been stretched before.

Truth to tell the IMF long ago ran out of resources on the scale required to bail out

capitalism's increasingly severe financial crises. The Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s was caused by commercial banks over-lending and was basically solved by massive debt writeoffs. At the beginning of 1995 the then unprecedented amount of \$40bn which went to bail out Mexico largely came from the USA whose own interests are closely tied in with the Mexican economy. Similarly with last summer's bail-out to Thailand and the other South East Asian states. Here Japan — who had most to lose from their economic collapse — contributed the bulk of the funds. In the case of last November's \$57bn 'rescue package' for Korea \$31bn came from the IMF and the World Bank, \$4bn from the Asian Development Bank (leading member is Japan) with the US and Europe combined contributing a further \$10bn which was matched by a direct contribution from Japan. In addition Japan provided a \$1.3bn bridging loan. All this as the Japanese economy itself was plunging into crisis and the whole banking system threatened by a gigantic pile of hitherto unrecognised but unrecoverable debt. (According to the Japanese Ministry of Finance the amount is \$168bn; according to non-governmental sources it is \$612bn.) In this context the prospect of Korea reneging on \$24.3bn of debt owed to Japanese banks was impossible for Japan to ignore.

On the other hand, neither were the US (owed \$10bn) and European banks, France, Germany (owed \$10bn

each), nor the UK (owed \$6bn) prepared to write off Korean debt. This is why the US Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, was spending Christmas Eve at the Federal Reserve Bank getting together a further "rescue plan" with representatives from US and UK banks. The plan was simple: they agreed that 90-95% of Korea's foreign loans be 'rolled over', i.e. extended. The rest of the G7 states concurred. There are conditions attached, of course. These are laid down by the IMF which is supposed to give them a semblance of objectivity but in fact they are a blatant means for international capital to get its hands on Korean assets. Almost overnight the IMF 'rescue package' has achieved the 'opening up' of the South Korean economy to international capital that this latest member of the OECD had been resisting.<sup>3</sup> By 30th December foreign investors were allowed a 55% stake in South Korean companies. By the end of this year this will become 100%. Foreign banks and brokerage firms can operate from March. While firms which are completely uncompetitive will be allowed to go bust (i.e. no state aid) Korea's new 'left-wing' president, Kim Dae-jung,

*has also promised to reform rigid labour laws and permit the sacking of workers in corporate takeovers. The inability to make redundancies has been regarded as a key barrier to foreign takeovers.*  
[Financial Times 27.12.97]

In an article on the same issue, the *Guardian* spelled out some of the immediate concrete results:

*Sangyong sold its tissue and napkin unit to Procter and Gamble, Bosch has taken control of its joint venture with Kia Motors and Coca-Cola has acquired soft drink bottling operations from Doosan, the nation's largest brewery.*

*Other deals are in the offing.*

*Hanhwa, for example, is reported to be negotiating the sale of its oil-refining and petrol station business to a leading international refiner, thought to be Royal Dutch Shell...*

[Mark Atkinson, 'No Bargains for South Korea in This Sale', 5.12.98]

These examples are just the start of

the 'reform package' which clearly is designed to protect and extend the interests of international finance capital rather than rescue Korean capitalism as such. Instead of the impartial "lender of last resort" in accord with Keynesian theory, the IMF is the mask behind which international financiers and their state cohorts shore up the wealth produced by the world's working class.

### Towards New Imperialist Blocs?

For the moment the major imperialist powers are content to wear this mask because it is in their mutual interest to do so. But the strains are telling. The current crisis in South East Asia not only marks a further stage in capital's global crisis, it has sharpened the rivalry between Japan and the US. Ostensibly the US is worried about the advantage of cheaper exports gained from the 'competitive devaluations' of the region's currencies as they have been forced to unlink themselves from the dollar. (And which the declining Japanese yen is also a part.) Behind this, however, is a more fundamental concern: that the impetus towards the formation of a yen currency bloc will become irresistible, just as EMU has become for Europe. As yet the interlinking of US and Japanese capital remains paramount but with a debt-ridden banking system at home and the economy in full recession the question is posed as to how long the world's second largest economy and biggest creditor state will be able or willing to continue propping up the federal debt of the world's most indebted state and no. 1 economy: the USA.. (At present 8.5% of US Federal bonds or \$320bn worth are in Japanese hands.) Once Japan began to 'disinvest' from the USA there would be no turning back from the re-establishment of rival imperialist blocs. This tendency whose eventual outcome can only be world war has not been eliminated with the demise of the Russian bloc because it is an integral part of capital's global crisis.

**B**y their attempts to manage the crisis the international capitalist class has prolonged it, ensured that no part of the world will

escape its effects and unified the world economy as never before. It is a crisis infinitely more complicated and sophisticated than in the Thirties. Capital's final solution, if it is left to carry on its course, can only be infinitely worse for that.

Meanwhile the proletariat of the world are being subject to essentially the same kind of attacks: work harder for lower wages if you have a job, blame yourself (or possibly the IMF or foreigners) if you haven't; tighten your belts, be more 'flexible' and accept what's coming when the capitalist economy is in jeopardy. For, as the bail-outs for Korea and the rest of South East Asia show, it is the working class who always pay for the capitalist crisis. Last December a so-called left-wing president, with close ties with the trades unions, came to power in South Korea. He promptly accepted the terms of the IMF and announced to the working class that "reform without pain is impossible". Sounds familiar don't it? If he doesn't succeed in getting workers to accept the need for mass redundancies, wage cuts and general austerity the way is open for another leader "with trade union links" to rally workers against the IMF and the West. Yet there is a glimmer of hope for workers' internationalism and that is that some workers at least are struck by the similarity of the situation of the working class everywhere and break from the union and nationalistic framework to lead a struggle for worldwide workers' solidarity. Only then will there be posed the possibility of a civilised solution to the longest crisis in capitalist history. ER

#### Footnotes

1 See For a marxist analysis of globalisation and the capitalist crisis see, 'The Two-Dimensional State: Globalisation of the Economy and State' and 'Globalisation and Imperialism' in *Internationalist Communist 15 and 16* respectively.

2 As, for example, with the *Guardian* of 25th November. An article entitled "Asian Meltdown" led with statement that "The downfall of Yamaichi could trigger a full-scale global depression the like of which has not been seen since the 1930s."

3 For more on the crisis in South Korea read "Class Struggle Under Global Capitalism" in *Internationalist Communist 16*

## Ireland and Britain

# Capitalism's Convenient Con-Tricks

### Clinton-Blair's "Peace" Train still rolling

The process of normalising conditions in Northern Ireland continues on the path begun during the Major government. With the bombing campaigns minimised, and despite the continuation of racketeering, beatings and mutilations, the all party talks and the rest of the paraphernalia have taken on a new gloss with the publicity given to Mo Mowlam the new Minister for Northern Ireland.

As we argued in previous editions of *RP*, and *Workers Voice*, the key characteristics of the process are as follows :-

- The US was decisive in originating and maintaining the process. This distinguishes it from previous initiatives.
- A major aim is to expand investment opportunities, with the potential for profiteering on the backs of a divided working-class who are used to some of the lowest wages and highest unemployment rates in the EU.
- The British state wishes to disentangle itself from its military commitments in Ireland - the case for maintaining direct political control over the Six Counties does not outweigh that wish
- All the political formations (whether armed or unarmed) - Republican, Social-Democratic, Unionist, Loyalist and the other smaller parties engineered into the talks - are competing bourgeois organisations. All stand for a maintenance of capitalist exploitation.
- The strategy takes into account the bourgeois democratic assumptions that some time in the next two or three decades there will be more Catholic (assumed Nationalist) than Protestant (assumed Unionist) voters in the boundaries of Northern Ireland
- The relationship between the "paramilitaries" and the respective

state forces is not one whereby the states are able to exercise full control over the whole range of "unofficial" armed organisations. Although the various organisations are equally reactionary, and whilst recognising the direct state involvement/infiltration of those organisations, it is misleading to classify all of them simply as organs or even proxies of any existing state

### Prospects for 1998

The killing of Billy Wright, one of the most prominent Loyalists to stand aside from the "peace" process, by the INLA, one of the most prominent Republican organisations to stand aside from the same process, took place inside a British state prison under the noses of state officials armed with some of the most sophisticated "anti-terrorist" techniques.

It is hard not to believe the accusations made by William MacRae, the Paisleyite M.P., that certain state agents must, at least, have had some prior knowledge of the plans. How far such complicity was "officially" approved and how far it shows the existence of splits and splinters in the state bureaucracy (also hinted at by Mowlam in comments during 1997) is a matter of conjecture.

A matter of fact is that Wright's death and the other ensuing killings again enabled the British government to point to their process as the only path to avoid murder and mayhem. With Blair meeting leading Sinn Feiners as well as the Unionist Trimble, and Mowlam visiting the UDA/UFF prisoners, the required inclusivity of the main bourgeois factions was retained to reinforce the message.

Blair, like Clinton before him, wants his place in history as the politician who solved the Northern Ireland problem. Having received the blessing of the US administration soon after the British election, it was Blair and Mowlam, rather than Clinton and his emissary Mitchell, who were allowed to play the prominent roles in the lead

up to the new rounds of talks scheduled for January, 1998. For Blair to achieve maximum benefits from the Northern Ireland process he needs to complete it in time for the next election, scheduled for 2001 or the first half of 2002. It looks increasingly likely that the Blair government will try to give the process further impetus by unveiling a new set of democratic structures.

### Blair's new constitution?

The first six months of New Labour in power were marked by an obsession with generating new political structures in Scotland and Wales and associated referendum razzmatazz. All the indications are that the zeal for constructing new state layers will also appear in Blair's suggestions for Northern Ireland. In devolution he thinks he has found a way to retain the integrity of the UK state as well as find a solution to the "Irish Question".

The leaks prior to the January talks suggested a new power-sharing assembly sounding suspiciously like the "Sunningdale" arrangement which came to a quick end as a result of the "Ulster Workers" (sic) strike/lockout of 1974. They also suggest some sort of "Council of the British Isles" involving a degree of confederal structure. Leaving aside the specifics of the formulations there is a clear drift here which links in with the strategy already deployed in Scotland and Wales. (It also lies on the shelf for Regions in England waiting for a time when the ruling class feels able and willing to whip up sufficient electoral hysteria around that particular diversion).

The strategy of "modernising" the British state is a central element of Blair's strategy. Whilst making the biggest attacks on welfare provision since the 1945 post-War settlement, and junking whole chunks of old Labour's social-democratic credo, the renaming of state structures serves the government well. In the short term the process of referendums and elections has - and will continue - to provide a



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## South Africa

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# The Bitter Lesson of National Liberation

**A**t the conference of the African National Congress (ANC) in December Nelson Mandela stepped down as ANC president to make way for his deputy Thabo Mbeki who is also expected to succeed him as SA president in 16 months time. This was a further step in the consolidation of the ANC as a responsible party of capitalist government and was greeted with delight by the bourgeois press. "Mbeki," the *Financial Times* (22/10/97) enthused, *understands about global competitiveness, market forces, capital flows and the irrelevance of old Marxist (meaning state-capitalist - CWO) dogma to which some of his colleagues still cling.* To put it plainly Mbeki understands the needs of capitalism in the 90's and will do what it takes to meet those needs.

The painless change in leadership, so welcomed by the capitalist class, is the latest in a series of steps to stabilise SA capitalism taken by the ANC government after its election in May 94. Other celebrated steps have been the consolidation of local government by successful elections in November 95 and the adoption of a new constitution in May 96. This new constitution will come into force in 1999 with new elections, the ending of the period of so called National Unity Government and the creation of normal bourgeois democracy and normal (i.e. non-racial) exploitation of the working class.

The CWO has consistently condemned the ANC as a bourgeois political force - a force necessarily against the working class. We pointed out that the ANC represented the interests of the rising African capitalist class but that it was brought to power in the 90's by the SA capitalist class as a whole. This was done in order to rescue SA capitalism from the catastrophic situation the apartheid regime had produced in its last 2 decades in power. Because of its populist appeal and wide social base, the ANC was best placed to calm the social revolt, and to pacify and discipline the working class. We

further pointed out that the victory of the ANC would not produce significant improvements for the working class. On the contrary, the great lies of capitalist freedom and capitalist democracy would be used as vehicles for more sophisticated attacks on the workers that the apartheid could ever get away with.

Since the elections of 1994 many of these points have been graphically illustrated.

### The ANC's Capitalist Character

**T**he bourgeois nature of the regime is now so obvious that even its Trotskyist and Stalinist sycophants no longer deny it. There is virtually no difference between the economic policies pursued by the government and those of other countries in capitalism's periphery. These policies are dictated by the needs of international capital and are not dependent on the programme of the ANC. The much vaunted Reconstruction and Development Programme, which was trumpeted from the rooftops during the election campaign of 94 and which promised one million homes, 2.5 million electrifications of existing homes, millions of jobs, thousands of new schools and medical facilities and all the rest in 5 years has produced precious little.

Today a different tune is being sung as we hear of the need to cut government spending, reduce budget deficits, cap inflation, remove trade barriers, restructure (i.e. privatise) state assets etc. - all the usual capitalist aims so familiar to us in the West. The "Growth Employment and redistribution" strategy introduced by the government in June 1996 has been accepted by the World Bank and the IMF as a model of the new economic orthodoxy. What has happened to the millions of jobs promised in the Reconstruction and Development Programme? The truth is

that the needs of the unemployed, and indeed all the needs of the working class do not fit into this strategy. The government's priority is to reduce the costs of production, i.e. wages and living conditions, in order to attract foreign capital. At the same time it hopes this capital will increase growth rates and thus create jobs. Hence it claims, like capitalist governments everywhere, that attacking the working class will make everything better for them in the long run.

Together with these general policies which have so delighted the world institutions of capitalism, have emerged policies blatantly aimed at fostering black capitalists, as if black capitalists actually benefited black workers whereas only white ones exploited them.

These measures are ironically much the same as those pursued by the Afrikaner Nationalists to create Afrikaner capitalists, though then the enemy was the English capitalists, but reflected back to front in the racial mirror of the ANC. The government has created special institutions to channel loans to small and medium sized enterprises owned by "black" capitalists. It has also restricted tendering for government contracts to consortia which contain black capitalist partners. Thus every white capitalist company needs a black capitalist partner if it is to compete for government work. The private sector capitalists have, of course, been only too happy to try and integrate African capitalists into their ranks and many of the ANC leading members have become instant millionaires. The white bourgeoisie has been happy to assist in the setting up of black finance houses, black merchant banks, black insurance companies and so on. Leveraged buy outs of some of the largest companies, such as the mining house JCI, have been arranged. Some of the money for this has come from using pension funds of black trade unionists. Men like Cyril Ramaphosa, who was himself once leader of the union of miners (NUM),

then general secretary of the ANC then chairman of the Constitutional Assembly, and his colleague Mzi Khumalo have simply quit politics to become leaders of major SA companies. At present "black" capital controls about 2% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. In addition to the above the new administrative structures in the 9 new provinces have spawned a mass of officials getting rich on the spoils of office. Of course, all the spoils with which these new capitalists enrich themselves are extracted from the working class.

### **No Improvement for the Working Class**

**F**or the mass of the population conditions are not essentially different from before the government of national unity. 18 million people out of a population of 38 million live below the poverty line, many of the households headed by single women. Health and schooling remain abysmal, infant mortality, for example is still over 200 per 1000 live births and 85% of schools in rural areas have no electricity. Housing is catastrophic, and even if the squatter camps outside the major cities are excluded, 40% of the urban housing and 50% of the rural have no potable water. A popular joke in certain squatter camps is that when Mandela promised to build 1 million homes in 5 years he got the numbers the wrong way round.

The working class suffers unemployment at a rate of 30% on average and in certain areas the local rate is over 50%, without access to unemployment benefit payments. It is a measure of the success of the anti-apartheid movement in restoring capitalist peace that hardship on such a scale has not led to a class response but instead to crime and individual acts of desperation indicating social decomposition. For those workers with jobs pay and conditions remain bad. Despite this there have been fewer strikes since the election than before and the ANC intends to keep things this way. In 1995 Mandela told workers earning R225 per month (£36) to tighten their belts in order to help create jobs for the unemployed. The government has also turned on the township electricity and water payment strikes, which continued under the apartheid regime as a protest at the bestial

conditions in the townships, and told residents to pay up or face eviction, despite the fact that conditions have not improved. The ANC, as the new administrator of capitalism, wants the bills paid just at the apartheid regime wanted them paid. This strike has now been largely broken and other strikes such as the nurses strike at the end of 95 have been similarly dealt with. One strike in particular which illustrated the ANC's treatment of the workers was that of miners at the Rustenburg platinum mine in July 96. 28 000 miners struck demanding the return of monies deducted from their pay by the bosses. This strike was condemned by the NUM and was, needless to say, led by workers outside the union. The ANC itself attempted to get the miners back to work but when this failed gave the owners, Anglo American, a free hand. The owners sacked all the strikers and began evicting them from their hostels and recruiting new miners. The bosses, the government and the unions were all in open alliance against the miners.

So what has changed from the bad old days of apartheid? Very little. Only the faces of the main actors. The government is no longer the hated apartheid regime but the ANC so beloved by the leftists, and the unions are no longer ambivalent to the workers struggles but in alliance with the government against them - all in the interests of capitalism.

### **Illusions Laid to Rest?**

**T**he developments in SA since the 94 election are more or less as predicted by the CWO, [see *Workers Voice* 72 "South African elections - a victory for capitalism," still available £1 from our address] and illustrate two general positions on which the left communist movement has taken its stand for the last 50 years.

Firstly the national struggle is counter revolutionary. Workers should no longer support this struggle and it is not worth a drop of workers' blood. The SA workers supported this struggle to the point at which 4 million workers struck, in August 92, to support the ANC's negotiating position at the CODESA talks. Now the ANC is in power these 4 million workers are told to accept low wages and atrocious conditions, and when they dare to strike they are given the sack. The bosses right to lock workers out has

been enshrined in the new constitution. Workers now find the political forces they supported turning against them, and there can be no doubt that SA workers are now confused by this, and consequently disarmed. This allows the ANC to attack them more effectively than the apartheid regime ever could have done.

The CWO has consistently pointed out that there is class solidarity between the ANC and the bosses, and class enmity between the ANC and the workers. Workers are paying a bitter price for the illusions they had in the ANC.

Secondly the trade unions are today the enemies of the working class. This is true world-wide but is graphically illustrated in SA where, under the apartheid regime the unions were banned for 25 years, and only resurrected by the bosses themselves in the late 70's in order to control the class struggle. The unions joined forces with the ANC, whom the more far sighted elements of the capitalist class also supported, to harness the workers struggle to the national struggle. Once the ANC gained power the unions openly assisted it in defusing and sabotaging the struggles of the workers. What happened at the Rustenburg mine shows this process in action and also shows workers having to go outside the unions to fight.

### **The Future**

**W**orkers in SA need to break from the illusions of the past 20 years. The enemy is capitalism itself and it doesn't matter whether the boss is black or white. The black government and the white government are just two faces of the same animal. Similarly black workers and white workers have the same interests and need to unite against a common enemy. Workers need to struggle for their own class interests which are directly opposed to the bosses interests. All calls for belt tightening or sacrifices, for the nation, for the unemployed, or for whatever other reason the bosses dream up are really sacrifices for the bosses and should be resisted. In the longer term, whatever other organisations the South African working class create in the course of their struggle, it needs to create a communist minority to return the lessons of the past to this struggle and give it a communist future. CP

## Middle East Shapes Up For New Conflicts

With the Oslo accords now effectively moribund, the so-called Middle East peace process continues to be exposed as the sham it always has been [see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8]. The Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO which was effectively brokered by the USA, represented a high point in the fortunes of American imperialism in the Middle East. The collapse of Russian influence in the Middle East following the demise of the Soviet Union gave America a free hand in the region. This was boosted by the defeat of Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War by the US led western alliance supported by the pro-US Arab states.

### Oslo Confounded

The process of conceding land and statehood to the Palestinians as envisaged by Oslo has ground to a halt through Israeli intransigence, particularly since the coming to power of the rightist Likud coalition in 1996. In flagrant breach of the accords, Israel has failed to honour planned troop withdrawals from the West Bank and has continued to build settlements in the occupied territories. The policy of terror against the Palestinian population has continued with mass detentions, and collective punishments such as the levelling of the family homes of suspected terrorists. Furthermore, Israeli incursions into Lebanon have continued and projected talks on the return of the Golan Heights to Syria have barely got off the ground.

### Pax Americana Frays at the Edges

In this situation it is not surprising that even the pro-American regional powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with America's failure to discipline Israel. For example, the recent Mena conference to promote Arab-Israeli economic co-operation had to be cancelled when no Arab states turned up in protest against America and Israel. Tensions have also arisen between Egypt and the USA over the Sudan. Whilst Egypt now favours an accommodation with the Islamicist regime in Khartoum, the US remains intent on getting rid of it by supporting Ugandan based opposition forces and imposing economic sanctions. It is unlikely that Egypt can afford a serious

rift with the USA from whom it receives \$2.4 billion a year in aid, making Egypt the second largest recipient of US aid after Israel. However from a US perspective there is a question over Egypt's long term effectiveness and stability as an ally.

Outside of the US camp there are signs of a thaw in relations between Syria and Iraq and even between Iraq and Iran. The ability of the US to maintain its domination over the region, whilst still effective, is less certain than it was a few

years ago.

This partly explains why America is reluctant to use its considerable economic clout to force Israel back into the Oslo process. As Israel is America's most trusted and military effective ally in the region, anything which weakens the Israeli state could also potentially damage US interests in the middle east.

### A New pro-US Alliance Emerges

Whilst some of America's Arab allies are wavering, the US has been able to engineer an agreement between Israel and Turkey which is a major pro-western regional power and NATO member. The agreement followed a

*continued on page 20*

## Barbarism in Algeria

With the beginning of the Islamic Holy month of Ramadan in the last days of 1997 the killing season resumed in Algeria. On the night of December 30th in a remote mountainous village in Western Algeria near Oran some 400 people, mostly women and children were brutally murdered by gangs of men wielding axes and knives. Young women had their breasts cut off, babies had their heads battered against walls whilst decapitation and throat slitting were the normal methods used by the murderers. This bestiality marks a new downward turn in a dirty civil war between the army-dominated government of General Zeroual and Islamic militants. Since 1991 the year the Algerian army annulled elections won by the Islamist FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) 100,000 have died in this war. Nearly 1000 died in the last days of 1997 alone.

Mind-numbing as this carnage is we have to try to make some sense of it. This isn't easy the further you delve into the "facts". Algeria has been ruled since independence by the same party that ousted the French colonial regime in 1962, the FLN (National Liberation Front). This has been no stranger to violence including factional violence within its own ranks. For years it was led by Boumedienne who gradually took it back into the orbit of the old imperialist master, France. Today the Zeroual government can only count on France for unlimited support abroad.

The FLN as the chief representative of the Algerian national bourgeoisie have grown fat on acting as a client of France but with the gradual worsening of the

world capitalist crisis they have only been able to enjoy their privileges only at the cost of imposing greater and greater austerity on the Algerian masses. The latter, having no class party have turned more and more to the siren sounds of Islamic groupings. At first these were a joke in the new Algeria but as the Cold War was coming to an end in the Gorbachev era of the late 1980s the FIS was formed and partially financed by US funds as part of its strategy of undermining the independent imperialist position of France in Africa. As we demonstrated in "The Great Power Struggle in Central Africa" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6, French imperialism has lost out badly in Zaire and Rwanda as the US has supported anti-French forces. The US was less successful in Algeria because the Algerian army, with French diplomatic support, was able to carry out a coup d'etat which went virtually unnoticed in the world.

### Who are the Terrorists?

Cheated of victory at the polls the Islamists turned to terrorism which was at first against Europeans starting with some Italian sailors who just happened to be in Algiers when the new campaign began. The FIS had already spawned a terrorist organisation the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and this carried out the early atrocities. However as time went on the FIS and the GIA both were riven with internal disputes (as is the Zeroual military dictatorship). It is now claimed that some of the atrocities are actually carried out by GIA splinter groups who have been infiltrated by army agent provocateurs. Certainly the

## Algeria *from previous page*

failure of the army to defend villages within earshot of their barracks suggest that these were carried out with at least the connivance of the army. The evidence of deserters from the Algerian secret service who confessed to having

infiltrated Islamic groups in order to encourage atrocities further confirms that "Islamic violence" is also coordinated by organs of the state. It is possible that some hardline army generals who want to avoid any dialogue with the Islamists are carrying on their own "dirty war". It would also explain why other army generals have

called on villagers in remote areas to set up their own self-defence militia to keep their attackers out.

This however is so much speculation. What is clear is that the victims of this power struggle between two sections of the Algerian ruling class are the ordinary workers and peasants. JD

## Ireland *from page 6*

series of electoral diversions and confusion. However, the process does not start and end with electoral circuses. More fundamentally a whole series of elected sub-national bodies provides the state with a diffusion of perceived power and control which makes it increasingly difficult to focus on the precise role of the state machine as it acts as "the executive arm of the Bourgeoisie".

As well as helping maintain the poisons of nationalism the new structures will provide extra tiers of the state between which formal responsibility can be passed to and fro, all of which help to disguise where power lies within capitalist society. Such strategies have already been implemented within the public services such as education and health. The inauguration of these new assemblies, parliaments, directly elected London mayors etc. shows the same approach.

In the case of Northern Ireland a new assembly fits neatly into this extension of the democratic facade. On the other hand, any suggestion of a transnational "Council of the British Isles" (CotBI) potentially links in to another element in the bourgeois strategy. That element can be seen in Europe, particularly the European Union, where powers which have classically been performed by nation-states are transferred, at least superficially, to transnational bodies. If successful, the financial institutions linked to European Monetary Union would be one of the most obvious examples.

CotBI, drawing together the state apparatuses within Great Britain and the two states in Ireland, could bring a sharing of power between the national bourgeoisies for specific purposes and to their mutual advantage. It would, at the very least, be another forum where the local bourgeoisies could co-ordinate the defence of their own power bases.

### The future of the nation state

The nation state was the formation which best suited the rise of capital and provided it with a springboard to spread across the globe. During the imperialist phase not only did the existing nation states dominate the political economy of the world system but they also spawned dozens of new offspring to their local agents as the process of de-colonisation took place. The collapse of the Soviet bloc opened the way to an upsurge in would-be national bourgeoisies, each keen to claim their own state power (ex-Soviet Union, ex-Yugoslavia, Czech-Slovak split plus tensions within Georgia, Moldova etc.). Just like their "third world" counterparts these new national bourgeoisies are destined to be no more than pawns in the imperialist game.

Parallel to the birth of new states there has also been the move towards sharing of sovereignty, within specified parameters, between states. We have already mentioned the European Union. In the case of Bosnia the bourgeoisie is prepared to tolerate, if only in the space before the next blood bath, the existence of a number of "entities" within a bizarre and clearly unworkable confederal structure. The original Vance-Owen plan would have meant a somewhat different state structure based on the concept of cantons.

Despite the growth of the transnational European Union, and the ad-hoc entities in areas such as Bosnia, Chechnya or Georgia the power of capitalism remains unaltered. Even so the growth of these non-traditional (in terms of capitalism) state forms does pose certain questions for Communists. In the context of the growth in transnational corporations and multi-national companies the current stage of capitalism may require power structures which transcend national

boundaries. Here is not the place to delve into that topic, other than to say that Blair's Lilliputian (in world historical terms) schemes are not unique in terms of bourgeois strategies to manage the crisis.

The next step in the Anglo-American "normalisation" of Northern Ireland will interlock with these strategies. Without knowing the full details of the proposals, the general communist response is already evident.

Workers in Northern Ireland have no class interest in defending the current constitutional framework but neither have they any reason to support the schemes which may emerge over the coming months. The longing for peace and normality which is undoubtedly shared by all sections of the working class in Northern Ireland does not alter the fact that any solution the bourgeoisie may find to "the troubles" will be a solution in the interests of capital. If successful it will only strengthen the power of the capitalist state.

As everywhere today workers in Northern Ireland, whatever their political or confessional loyalties are facing the most severe attacks in terms of cuts in jobs, wages and general living standards since at least the 1930s. The idea that an influx in foreign investment in a newly pacified Ireland can essentially alter the situation is an illusion. The only way workers have any possibility of real change for the better is acting in solidarity with each other on their own account - across national, religious, ethnic and whatever other irrelevant difference the capitalists emphasise to divide us. So long as the rule of capital continues all of the democratic variants - national, federal, confederal etc. etc. are only variations on the bosses' theme of exploitation. KT

# Parliamentarism and Communism

## Part 2: The Struggle inside Social Democracy before World War One

In the first article in this series (in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6) we attempted to lay the foundations for the examination of the question of parliament and the tactics of internationalist communists by looking at the groundwork laid down by Marx and Engels. Far from being either absolutely for or against parliamentary democracy Marx and Engels treated in its real historical light. Parliamentary democracy is the general form of the rule of the capitalist class hence

*[workers] know that their own struggle with the bourgeoisie can only break out on the day the bourgeoisie triumphs... They can and must take part in the middle-class revolution as a condition preliminary to the Labour revolution. But they cannot for one moment regard it as their objective...*

Marx, *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality*.

The point they were making was that *The best form of polity is that in which the social contradictions are not blurred, not arbitrarily...kept down. The best form of polity is that in which these contradictions reach a stage of open struggle in the course of which they are resolved.*

Marx, *The June Revolution* (1848).

As Lenin was to say later, in a Russia dominated by Tsarist autocracy's police state, *the worker needs the achievement of the general democratic demands only to clear the road to victory over the working people's chief enemy, ... capital...*

### Social democracy

Unfortunately the workers' parties which grew up in the latter half of the 19th century were not completely Marxist parties. They contained strands of all sorts of other sorts of 'socialism' - Proudhonism, Blanquism, Lassalleanism (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6 p.13) anarchism and various national and liberal strands of

thought. Between these non-working class ideologies and a general improvement in workers' standards of living the scene was amply set for a movement away from the revolutionary principles of Marx and Engels. For the latter parliament was clearly marked out as the domain of the capitalist class, but the new conditions of the late 19th century encouraged moves towards varieties of 'evolutionary' socialism, which saw parliament as the key instrument for parties representing workers.

Thus, in France the workers' movement was fractured amongst a number of competing tendencies. Guesde helped to found the Federation of the Party of Socialist Workers which eventually led to the withdrawal of the followers of Paul Brousse who split to form their own Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (later the Socialist Workers' Party). This was hardly a revolutionary party as it was soon known as the 'possibilistes'. It advocated a theory of municipal socialism where city and provincial governments were to nationalise industries and to advance to socialism in gradual evolutionary steps. More importantly it proposed an alliance and election agreements with the middle-classes to secure more representation for 'socialists'. It was precisely these tendencies which were to lead to the major crisis of French social democracy towards the end of the 19th century when Millerand, a lawyer and French Socialist deputy, joined the Waldeck-Rousseau government in 1898. Here he sat beside Gallifet, the butcher of 20,000 Communards in a single "Bloody Week" in May, 1871. Millerand's credo, adhered to the principles echoed by Jaurès

*The working class will come to power not through a sudden upsurge resulting from political agitation, but by methodical and legal organisation under democratic*

*conditions, and by making use of the general right to vote. Our society will gradually develop towards Communism, not through the collapse of capitalism but by the gradual and inexorable growth of the power of the workers.*

Jean Jaurès, *Theorie und Praxis*, 1922.

Millerand's stance led to a congress which condemned the participation of a socialist in a bourgeois government but then allowed it in exceptional circumstances!

### Reform, Revision, Revolution

German social democracy although notionally dominated by Marxists was not free of such problems either. Rosa Luxemburg was forced to defend the revolutionary position against her own "parliamentarians"

*Parliamentarism is far removed from being the absolute programme of democratic development, of human progress, or any such noble thing; it is rather the particular historical form of the class rule of the bourgeoisie*

quoted in Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p.61, from her *Collected Works*.

She was one of those who mounted a defence of Marxism against the revisions perpetrated by Bernstein and later the reformism of the party centre around Kautsky. Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878 allowed the SPD only a legal existence as regards their deputies in the Reichstag. No other existence was legal, thus this reinforced the notion that parliamentarism was radical as was the programme of the liberal bourgeoisie along with it. The Erfurt Programme<sup>1</sup>, of 1891, was a programme a world apart from the first SPD programme of 1875 (the Gotha Programme) but reformists and revisionists could still pay lip service to 'Marxist ideals' while denying the revolutionary aspects of Marxism. In 1882 Georg von Vollmar had stated

*the existing state and from the present order becomes continually more complete; the gulf between ourselves and our enemies grows constantly wider, more and more insurmountable.... Today Socialism is no longer a matter of theory but simply a question of power, which cannot be solved in any parliamentary situation, but only on the streets and on the field of battle...to our enemies.... Yes, we are a danger to the state because we intend to destroy you. We are certainly the enemies of your property, your values, your entire order... We shall meet force with force.*

Sozialdemokrat, 12th August 1882

Like Bebel and many others he thought that it was only a matter of a few years before the final struggle for socialism was underway. Once the repressive laws were repealed by parliamentary means von Vollmar was converted to the cause of democratic socialism and the use of parliament for co-opting allies from other classes to progressively enact reforms [See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6 p.15. for more on von Vollmar]

The treatment of Engels was also an indicator of the drift to reformism in Social Democracy. Whilst Engels appreciated the strides the SPD had made in the Erfurt Programme, he vigorously denounced what they had done to his 1895 introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*. To his intense anger, the German Social Democrat leaders were careful to leave in his praise for the acquisition of legal status by the SPD and to cut out his reminder that violence would still be required to wrest power away from the class enemy[see "The Indispensable Engels" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 1]. Luxemburg carried on Engels' fight when she upheld against the revisionist social democrats like Bernstein the necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois power. For her although there remained a usefulness to be gained from parliament it was not to be all and end all of the working class fight for power.

*bourgeois legality (and parliamentarism as legality in the process of development) is itself only a particular social form expressing the political violence of the bourgeoisie*

Luxemburg, *Collected Works*

For Bernstein and his allies the ground upon which Marxism as a revolutionary doctrine was based had changed, and it had changed

absolutely. The period of relative boom of the last years of the 19th century he (and others) took as being the new norm for capitalism. He wished "to make Marxism conform to reality" thinking that the rise of the middle-classes and the expansion of capitalism giving rise to a better standard of living for workers. From his time in Britain in which he was much influenced by the Fabians<sup>2</sup> he brought back a gradualist notion of socialism, seeing class conflict as having been modified. For him socialism was an ideal, a moral and cultural idea, not a question of objective historical need hence he would say

*What is generally referred to as the ultimate aim of "socialism means nothing to me; it is the movement which means everything*

In 1882 Bebel had already rejected these



*bourgeois legality is itself only a particular social form expressing the political violence of the bourgeoisie*

ideas in a letter to Auer

*The difference does not lie in whether a revolution will start in the next five years. One might discuss this but it would hardly give rise to a split, and it would be foolish to make it into the cause of a split. The real difference lies rather in the entire conception of the movement as the movement of a class which has and must have the great aim of transforming the world and can therefore accept no compromise with the existing society. If the movement were to reject this standpoint, it would simply perish and subsequently revive in a new form, freed from its present leadership.*

Auer was more succinct writing to Bernstein

*My dear Eddie, the sort of thing you ask is not done by passing a resolution. One does not say it - one does it!*

For both the revisionists (Bernstein et al) and the reformists (von Vollmar, Jaurès et al) parliament was central.

They thought that all that was required was the winning over of a majority via democracy. The question of revisionism (but not reformism) was to occupy the SPD at the congresses of Hanover (1898) and Dresden (1903). Quite rightly the revisionists were marked down as wishful-thinkers, if they could imagine first of all that winning a parliamentary majority was possible in a Germany dominated by a Prussia which retained the three tier system of voting (an inbuilt majority for the forces of capital and the Junkers), and secondly that it would be possible to enforce that majority where there were regular threats of coups so as to destroy the socialists and prevent any possible progress, where the right to strike was continually under threat and also the organisations which used and promulgated such tactics<sup>3</sup>. But the social democrats in fighting off revisionism made their socialism more a question of faith, Wilhelm Liebknecht making the comparison between Islam as a conquering force and socialism, than a question of class struggle. Indeed, Kautsky who had been a great critic of revisionism became the champion of what he was to term the party 'centre' and at the Paris congress of the International set the seal on just how far all but the left of the party had moved away from Marxism. There, in discussion of the Millerand affair, he opposed the notion of an absolute prohibition of participation in bourgeois governments because of a need to preserve

*the necessary elasticity for the unfathomable future*

and that conditions for participation were such events as - the threat to 'fundamental democratic institutions, or in the case of a 'people's war' with Germany invaded by autocratic Russia. The theoretical basis for abandoning class positions in the First World War had thus already been stated.

### Active Boycott and Revolutionary Opposition

Lenin saw clearly that the participation of Social Democrats in a provisional government would be a variety of Millerandism that it is impermissible in principle, as sanctifying the bourgeois order

*Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, 1905.*

He had stated in *Marxism and Revisionism* that revisionism and Millerandism, 'ministerial socialism',

was an inevitable part of the development of the social democratic movement. As capitalism grew it would inevitably place non-working class elements side by side with workers and that it would inevitably lead to liberal bourgeois views being imported into the workers' movement. *The ideological struggle waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the 19th century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat, which is marching forward to the complete victory of its cause despite all the waverings and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie*

Lenin, *Marxism and Revisionism*, 1908.

Lenin from very early recognised the nature of relationship between socialism and parliamentarism *to call upon the worker to fight for political liberty would be equivalent to calling upon him to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the progressive bourgeoisie, for it cannot be denied ... that political liberty will primarily serve the interests of the bourgeoisie* quoted in Liebmann, *Leninism under Lenin*, p.63.

The whole question of political rights and any alliance with other class forces on the road to achieving them were merely clearing the way for the real question - the revolution and the contest for political power between worker and capitalist. In 1906 Lenin warned against 'constitutional illusions', and concerning the elections of 1906 he said

*Bolsheviks and Mensheviks are agreed that the present Duma is a miserable travesty of popular representation, that it is necessary to fight against this deception ... The Mensheviks say: our party must take part in the election of delegates and electors. The Bolsheviks advocate an active boycott of the Duma ... Boycott means refusal to take part in the elections... Active boycott does not mean abstaining from voting; it means also making extensive use of election meetings for Social Democratic agitation and organisation ...*

Lenin, *Should We Boycott the State Duma?*, 1906

The Mensheviks like many self-styled socialists nowadays adopted a confused attitude towards parliament. They saw it as a useless institution and yet still wanted to take part in its rigmarole. The Bolsheviks with Lenin at their head took a quite different view seeking to use the elections for the purpose of furthering the working class

movement with the Bolsheviks at their head. Consequently for the first round of elections in 1906 an active boycott was called for and so

*Under such conditions our work of agitation and organisation is far better served by our making revolutionary use of meetings without elections than by taking part in meetings for legal elections.*

The Mensheviks were perfectly happy to provide vindications of the capitalist democratic lie. Lenin was to declare, once there was a body of Bolshevik deputies elected under different circumstances, that *those seats [in the Duma] are important only because and in so far as they can serve to develop the consciousness of the masses* the tasks of the deputies was to carry on a work of *criticism, propaganda, agitation and organisation*

and so there should be no contact between socialist deputies and the representatives of the bourgeoisie, whether liberal or otherwise. The Mensheviks thought otherwise and continued to attempt deals with the Cadets, the representatives of the bourgeoisie. Lenin and the Bolsheviks realised that the Duma (the Russian parliament) had for them a specific purpose, that where there were no other legal means at their disposal elections could be used as a way of propagandising amongst the masses and where necessary that parliament could be used as a tribune, which, of course, is not the case now.

### Social Democracy goes to war

**M**any workers, under the influence of their social democratic parties, accepted a gradualist approach to the arrival of socialism. Like Kautsky they thought that power would come *as the culmination of a prolonged and complex task of political and economic organisation on the part of workers, together with its physical and moral regeneration, and the gradual increase in seats held by the party in local councils and central parliaments.*

This increasingly tied workers and their parties to the cause of each nation and the false notion that a majority was achievable in a bourgeois parliament. So came the day in 1914 when despite the resolutions of the Stuttgart and Basle congresses the First World War was supported by the social democrats. As Luxemburg foresaw

*If social democracy were really to accept the opportunist standpoint - to renounce once and for all the use of violence and to pledge the working masses to follow the path of bourgeois legality - then its whole parliamentary activity and general political struggle would sooner or later collapse miserably, leaving the field to the unbounded rule of reactionary violence.* Luxemburg, *Collected Works*.

The capitulation of social democracy in 1914 to the cause of social patriotism, the defence of each country in the First Great Imperialist slaughter proved her right. The working class witnessed a series of great betrayals. In France the Union Sacrée meant the loyal entry of the socialists into the service of the state, a loyalty often marked by a braying xenophobia. In Germany the Burgfrieden or "the civil peace" ended the class war. The SPD dragooned members and deputies into support for the national defence against 'reactionary' Russia all in the name of defending civilisation. Even in Russia Lenin soon realised he was correct about the corrupting influence of bourgeois parliaments. He fumed at the trial of the Bolshevik deputies who did not use their trial to oppose the war clearly. He was even more disgusted by Kamenev's cowardly failure to take the opportunity to use that stage as a means of denouncing the war and spreading the slogan of socialists on the war - **Turn the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war! CDE**

*to be continued*

### Footnotes

1. From the Erfurt programme-

The number of proletarians is increasing all the time, the army of redundant workers is swelling, the difference between the exploiters and the exploited are becoming ever sharper, the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is growing more embittered: it divides modern society into two hostile camps, and it is the hallmark of all industrial countries.

2. Reactionary so-called socialists who were to promulgate paternalistic ideas and even eugenics, seeing the working class as too socially and intellectually frail to be able to achieve socialism for themselves. Their leading members included Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw.

3. Kaiser Wilhelm II - "The Republicans are revolutionaries by nature and are therefore treated as people who deserve shooting and hanging", letter to Tsar Nicholas II, 1895, and in a speech to recruits in 1891 - "Lack of faith and demoralisation are more than ever raising their heads in the Fatherland, and it is possible that you will be called upon to shoot and bayonet your own relatives, brothers and even parents."

# The German November Revolution - A Class Unready

## Bourgeois Germany shakes but doesn't fall!

The sailors' reply to the Admiralty's demand that they sacrifice their lives for nothing in a final, suicidal battle to save the honour of the German Navy was a second mutiny. On the 30th October, the sailors took over the cruisers *Thüringen* and *Helgoland*. The next day, Admiral von Hipper sent torpedo boats and a submarine against them. The 400 mutineers surrendered and were taken prisoner. On the 1st November, a mass assembly of sailors demanded the release of the prisoners, but an assembly for the following day was banned by the military authorities. Instead of a mass meeting, the sailors met in small groups and decided on a demonstration for the 3rd November. That day, the authorities arrested mutineers on the *Markgraf* and sent out patrols warning the sailors and soldiers to return to barracks, but the demonstration went ahead. Despite the speeches by SPD and USPD orators urging caution, the sailors began disarming officers and the patrols. A larger patrol opened fire on the mutinous sailors. Tension mounted.

On 4th November, the government sent Gustav Noske to Kiel as its representative, alongside Secretary of State Haussmann. The mutiny was still growing and now had the support of the vast majority of the mutineers, who had organised themselves into the first soldiers' council of the German revolution. The military governor of Kiel, Admiral Souchon, had no alternative but to negotiate with this council, as his forces were dwarfed by those of the revolution. He accepted the council's demands for the release of the prisoners, the withdrawal of the forces of repression and the improvement of conditions of service, but stalled on their demand for the Emperor's

abdication. The revolutionäre *Obleute* called a general strike in Kiel. At the start of 5th November, only the flagship *König* refused to fly the red banner, and had machine-gunned delegations which had demanded she do so. By the end of 5th November, her captain and another officer were dead and she flew the red flag.

Noske's mission was to persuade the mutineers to return to their ships or barracks and to surrender their arms, in exchange for an amnesty. But, faced with a city completely under the control of the workers' and soldiers' council, he instead put himself at the head of the movement, naming himself the governor of Kiel, in order to ensure that this movement remained dominated by sentiments compatible with bourgeois order.

This is a glowing example of one of the tactics employed by the German bourgeoisie: utilising the proletariat's persistent belief that the SPD was a workers' party to place it at the head of the movement so that this movement could be diverted into safe channels. In this way it was ensured that the revolution remained a purely formal semi-revolution, overthrowing the monarchical facade behind which the bourgeoisie had ruled for decades, without overthrowing the bourgeoisie itself. The objective role of the USPD was, in the name of "proletarian unity", to aid the maintenance of the SPD's proletarian credentials and, so long as the Spartacists remained within the USPD, they too helped this reactionary role, in contradiction to the overall revolutionary thrust of their activity.

In the meantime, revolution continued to spread. In Hamburg on 6th November 70,000 workers and soldiers met, decided to disperse the General Staff, which was located in Antona, a nearby town, and successfully carried

out this plan. Workers' and soldiers' councils were also formed and became the de facto power in Bremen, Hanover, Brunswick and Cologne on the 6th or 7th November. In Munich, a workers' and soldiers' council dismissed the King of Bavaria and his government. On 8th November, Leipzig, Dresden, Chemnitz, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and other places formed their workers' and soldiers' councils. In Berlin, Ebert warned the Kaiser:

*If the Emperor does not abdicate, social revolution is inevitable. But I do not want that, I hate it like sin.*

In Munich, in the name of "proletarian unity", the USPD president of the workers' and soldiers' council, Kurt Eisner, appointed a cabinet containing SPD war "socialists".

On 9th November, following the preparations of the revolutionäre *Obleute*, the revolution broke out in Berlin. In the morning, masses of workers streamed towards the city centre. The police abandoned their arms to the workers. Most barracks emptied and the soldiers were either neutral or joined the workers. A few officers fired on the workers, killing three of them, but most officers realised that military resistance to the revolution was hopeless. At midday, the Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, announced the Kaiser's abdication.

Faced with this revolutionary situation, the SPD abandoned its overtly bourgeois allies and coalition partners and placed themselves at the head of the movement. Together with a dozen revolutionäre *Obleute*, a group of SPD functionaries formed the "workers' and soldiers' council of Berlin" in the offices of *Vorwärts*. Feeling that they needed to cover themselves against eventual and well-founded accusations that they were usurping a revolution that was not theirs, they called on the Berlin



workers to send delegates to an assembly the next day, so they could use their superior organisation to freeze working class consciousness at the point it had reached. They also moved towards an understanding with the USPD. Ledebour was astounded at the brass faces of these "Kaiser's socialists" who wished to be seen as revolutionaries, but the USPD

on the basis of universal male and female suffrage, to take over from the workers' councils, that is, to replace the first steps towards proletarian democracy by bourgeois democracy.

At this point, the bourgeoisie was at its lowest ebb. Much of its military machine had gone over to the revolution, and, if the remainder had

and one component of it, the Spartakusbund, was tied by the umbilical cord of the USPD to the reactionary SPD for the first month of that revolution. This could only confuse workers faced with the need to tear off the pseudo-revolutionary mask the SPD used to camouflage its defence of the bourgeois order.

At 2pm on 9th November, Scheidemann declared the German Republic before the Reichstag. At 4pm, Liebknecht announced the Free Socialist Republic of Germany from the balcony of Berlin castle. Revolutionary workers demanded the inclusion of Liebknecht on the RVB. Instead of rejecting this proposal outright, Liebknecht posed conditions which the SPD found unacceptable. Although these conditions were deliberately unacceptable, this conduct must have strengthened the idea of a continuum, and not a chasm, between socialists and war "socialists".

In the afternoon, the Spartakusbund took over the plant of the *Lokal-Anzeiger* (Local Advertiser) newspaper, and in the evening the first number of the *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag) appeared. The USPD also took over reactionary newspapers.

On 10th November Wilhelm II fled to the Netherlands, and, on the following day a cabinet was formed, with most ministers maintaining their places or being replaced by other reactionaries. Each minister was given two under-secretaries, one each from the SPD and the USPD. The same day the armistice with the Entente powers was signed and miners' strikes started. Over the next few days the double tactic of the SPD was demonstrated: do everything to restore both their own proletarian image and the unchallenged rule of the bourgeoisie: on the 12th, civil liberties were guaranteed, and the 8-hour day (from the 1st January), measures against unemployment and a social policy were promised; on the 14th, a decree confirmed the validity of all previously existing laws and on the 15th, an offer of flour as a gesture of solidarity from Soviet Russia was rebuffed.

On the 16th November, the *Freie Gewerkschaften* (Free - i.e., Social



Berlin Nov. 1918. Workers, already influenced by the Russian Revolution, end the war.

eventually accepted the SPD overtures. The SPD obtained the willing resignation of Prince Max of Baden (he had already told the Kaiser that only the SPD could "save Germany"). Ebert became Chancellor. Then a *Rat der Volksbeauftragten* (Council of People's Representatives - RVB), consisting of three members of the SPD (Ebert, Scheidemann and Landsberg) and three from the USPD (Haase, Dittmann and Barth), was formed to act as the government. 3000 delegates in the Berlin assembly endorsed the RVB, which formally recognised that power was in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils, which were instructed to send delegates to a national assembly. In reality, the RVB itself, together with the still intact bourgeois state apparatus, wielded power, and it set about using it against the working class. Ebert, who, as well as being Chancellor, was named head of the RVB, made a pact of mutual support with General Groener of the general staff in order to fight against "bolshevism" (i.e., the idea that the working class take power). An important part of this fight was the proposal to elect a National Assembly,

not been completely smashed. It was disorganised to the extent that it did not know which parts it could rely on. If the working class had decided to take power from the hands of its enemies, it would have had to systematically arm itself and disarm and suppress counter-revolutionary forces, which would never again be so weak. But the working class could not decide to take power without being conscious of the need to do so, without knowing who its enemies were. Quite naturally, at the start of the German revolution, the proletariat only had a weak consciousness of the historic tasks it needed to fulfil in order to deliver itself from capitalist exploitation and oppression. These natural weaknesses of a class which had just entered a new phase of the material negation of capitalist domination, could be overcome by a process of self-education in the course of the revolution itself, provided the class had given itself the necessary tool for the organisation of consciousness - the class party.

The problem of the German revolution was that the class party was still being born when the revolution broke out

Democratic - Trades Unions, FG's) and the larger employers entered into the Stinnes-Legien agreement (named after the coal and steel boss Hugo Stinnes and the trades unionist Carl Legien). Under the terms of this agreement, the FG's dropped their historic demand for the immediate socialisation of German industry, and the bosses recognised the FG's as the legitimate representatives of the workers and disbanded their company unions. To sell the agreement to the workers as a triumph of reformism, the bosses gave a democratic shine to their domination of the productive process by recognising works committees in the larger factories. In public, they also conceded the 8-hour day without loss of pay, but a secret clause made this conditional on Germany's competitor countries also accepting this provision. The most important part of the agreement was the creation of the Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft ("Central Working Community", ZAG), which was to oversee demobilisation and cooperation on economic and social issues between the FG's and the employers. This confirmed the integration of the FG's into the political apparatus of the bourgeois which had been achieved during the war and signalled the consciousness of the big bourgeoisie of their need for unions both for the smooth running of industry and as a bulwark against the revolution.

On 17th November, the Württemberg section of the USPD showed their discontent at their leaders' policy of collaboration with the SPD by demanding a national congress in terms close to the position of the Spartacists.

On 22th November, the soldiers' council of Hamburg declared its support for the new government and was followed in this by many workers' and, especially, soldiers' councils. What they were supporting was made clear by the government's reaction to the miners' strike in Upper Silesia, which broke out the next day. Barth, of the USPD, declared that "if the workers reduce the revolution to a great movement for wages, we are lost". This was echoed by his Party colleague, Dittmann, who claimed that every strike during the course of the

revolution could only rebound on the workers. As for Ebert, he declared that "Socialism means hard work", a sentiment endorsed by the newly "socialist" employers!

A national conference of the governments of the individual German states took place on 25th November (the Reich had been an empire uniting, but not abolishing, the myriad German states prior to its formation. These states persisted after the November revolution). August Merges, the Spartacist leader of the Brunswick workers' council, declared for the dictatorship of the proletariat, against the National Assembly, but the majority supported the National Assembly. Eisner, at the same conference, demanded changes in the RVB, and broke off relations with Berlin the next day when these changes were not made.

In Berlin, posters demanding the assassination of Liebknecht appeared at the end of November. This was a



*Karl Liebknecht*

reflection of the renewed confidence of the bourgeoisie, which had lost no time in beginning to reorganise its military power, making use of the space created for it by the failure of the proletariat to comprehensively crush its enemies at the time when it would have been easiest. This failure was due to the influence of the SPD, which actually cooperated with the bourgeois reorganisation of its forces, and of the right and centre of the USPD, which either emulated the SPD or were so infected with pacifism that they thought it was unnecessary to disarm the revolution's enemies. In this way,

the bourgeois left, the SPD and the right of the USPD acted in concert with the bourgeois right. The left made sure the proletariat did not fully arm itself and the right gathered up the military forces to take advantage of the work of the left. Although this process certainly contained elements of a conspiracy, it was also a natural outcome of the reformist, and thus pro-bourgeois politics of the SPD and the nostalgia of the right for the old order. That this was so was demonstrated by the many conflicts between these bourgeois forces in the course of the revolution.

On 6th December, the date for elections to the National Assembly was set for 15th February 1919. Also on the 6th December, a right-wing putsch was attempted in Berlin, but was defeated at the cost of 18 revolutionaries' lives.

On the 7th and 8th December, the Spartakusbund called the first of their own demonstrations, which were protected by force of arms. After the first of these demonstrations, Liebknecht, who had spoken, was arrested but immediately released. On the 9th, the offices of the *Rote Fahne* were taken over on the orders of the Social Democratic commandant of the city of Berlin, Wels. The commission on socialisation, which had been formed on the 11th November, called for nationalisations to be carried out with compensation, on the 10th December, and this was followed the day after by a RVB decree calling for a National Volunteer Guard, laying the basis for the proto-fascist Freikorps.

With each new day, the reactionary nature of the RVB "revolutionary" government was demonstrated by its own actions, and with each new day, the "reactionary" reactionaries grew stronger. Only the Spartacists and more advanced elements were calling for the necessary action against the right. The RVB, on the other hand, issued a decree on the 14th December aimed at disarming the workers, punishing the unauthorised retention of arms by five years' prison. The very same day, General Märcker made his first appeal for the formation of the Freikorps. The "unofficial" nature of this Freikorps was necessary because

it enabled the SPD government to spill blood and display clean hands.

Also on 14th December, the *Rote Fahne* published the Spartacist programme, written by Luxemburg, which (finally!) called for a split with the USPD and for unity between the Spartacists and the radical left groups of Hamburg, Bremen, Berlin, Dresden and elsewhere.

On 15th December, two revolutionaries were killed by the police in Dresden.

The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany was held from 16th to 21st December. Of 489 delegates (405 from workers' councils and 84 from soldiers' councils), 288 were from the SPD, 90 from the USPD (including 10 Spartacists), 11 were "united revolutionaries" (but it was the somewhat dubious character Laufenberg who had brought them together), 25 were democrats, 25 were from the "soldiers fraction" and the remainder were without party affiliation. Over half of the SPD delegates and over a third of the USPD delegates were professional party or union activists. The Spartacists, supported by the left of the USPD and the united revolutionaries, twice attempted to get Luxemburg and Liebknecht admitted to the Congress with speaking, but not voting, rights, but the SPD and the USPD right (such as Kautsky, Hilferding, Dittmann and Haase) easily defeated the notion that the Spartacist leaders be allowed to speak from the platform of the Congress. Nevertheless, the Spartacists and USPD lefts present did manage to denounce the counter-revolutionary plots of the Ebert government and the military. Moreover, the Spartakusbund put pressure on the Congress by holding demonstrations and sending delegations from these to the Congress. One of these delegations put forward the Spartacist demands:

Germany is a unitary socialist republic;  
All power to workers' and soldiers' councils;

The executive council of the workers' and soldiers' councils, elected by the congress of councils, the supreme legislative and governmental organ, nominates and dismisses the peoples' representatives and the central organs;  
Dissolution of the RVB presided over by Ebert;

Adoption and immediate and energetic execution of all the necessary measures for the protection of the revolution, above all: disarming the counter-revolution, the arming of the proletariat and the formation of a Red Guard;

An immediate appeal by the executive council to the proletarians of all countries for the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils for the accomplishment of the common tasks of the world socialist revolution.

These demands were not even discussed by the Congress, which instead handed power over to the RVB, until the National Assembly was elected. The only power it reserved for its executive council was that of surveillance, like the old, ineffectual parliamentary surveillance over the executive. And the executive council of the workers' and soldiers' councils was even weaker because it was composed exclusively of SPD nominees, after the USPD rejected the SPD offer of one third of the seats on it.

Meanwhile, a delegate assembly of soldiers was held on the 17th. This was radical in terms of the transformation of military discipline and of the army into an instrument for the defence of the revolution, but, on the more important question of the content of the revolution it rejected (by 344 votes to 98) the USPDer Däumig's resolution making the councils the base of Germany's constitution. It also called for the elections for the National Assembly to be brought forward to 19th January.

Over the next few days, the organisations the bourgeois had created for their defence killed several workers in various parts of Germany. On the 21st, the revolutionäre Obleute of Berlin demanded that the USPD leave the RVB and hold a party congress.

In November, the Volksmarinedivision (marines) had occupied Berlin castle on the orders of the government. But now, as the Volksmarinedivision was heavily influenced by the USPD left, the government was uncomfortable at the strong position held by the division. Under threat of not being

paid, they demonstrated in front of the offices of the Commandant of Berlin, Wels, on the morning of 23rd. On hearing that counter-revolutionary troops were on their way from Potsdam to Berlin, they invaded the Chancellery, the seat of government, barred the doors and cut the telephone wires, thus preventing communication with the troops. In the afternoon, while their leader Dorrenbach was negotiating with Wels, an armoured car fired on a second demonstration, killing three. The sailors took Wels and other Social Democrats hostage, and Dorrenbach and some members of the soldiers' council of Berlin went to negotiate with the government. On their arrival at the Chancellery, they found it occupied by the reactionary Potsdam troops under General Lequis. These troops had taken the USPD member of the RVB Barth prisoner and refused to take orders except from Ebert. Ebert ordered the retreat of the marines and of Lequis' troops. The marines released their hostages with the exception of Wels, and then discovered that they had been tricked, as the Potsdam troops continued to guard the Chancellery. On top of this, they were given an ultimatum: leave the castle or suffer bombardment. They called the government's bluff: in the fighting, 11 marines and 56 of Lequis' soldiers were killed. The government climbed down, the marines were paid, and Wels and Lequis were used as scapegoats in the affair and resigned, the latter being replaced by von Lüttwitz.

At this point, then, the military forces of the bourgeoisie were still too weak to take on a working class which was still under the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie, even if that domination was being challenged. But the military situation was clearly shifting to the bourgeoisie's advantage, and the most advanced sections of the working class were only now reaching the point of giving their class a party which clearly posed a proletarian programme against the various bourgeois programmes for the conservation of capitalism.

### **The Party is born - at last!**

**O**n December 24th, the "International Communists" held a conference. Johann

Knieff of the Bremen left and Leo Jogiches of the Spartakusbund were fairly hostile to a fusion of their forces, but, in both factions the force of facts was being felt, and this force found a focus in Radek, who declared that a failure to fuse would be prejudicial to the revolution. On the question of participation in the forthcoming elections to the National Assembly, a bare majority was opposed to taking part. The conference ended with the intention of consulting the membership of the various organisations before the founding congress of a new party five days later.

Between the conference and the founding congress, a crisis broke out in the government as the rank and file of the USPD became dissatisfied with the counter-revolutionary acts of the RVB. The workers' and soldiers' council in Bremen decided to arm the workers and the workers' council in Munich rejected the plan of the Social Democrat Auer for a civil guard. On the 29th December, the USPD left the government.

The founding congress of the new party took place between 29th December and 1st January. The formality of announcing the separation from the USPD was immediately disposed of and the party was baptised the *Kommunistischer Partei Deutschlands* (Spartakusbund) (Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League), KPD). Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Jogiches were for participation in the elections for the National Assembly, but in the congress 62 out of 85 delegates rejected it. A Party Programme containing measures necessary for the suppression of the counter-revolution, the transfer of political power to the councils, the socialisation of the economy and the establishment of strong international contacts was adopted. The *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* (the International Communists of Germany, IKD) met on the 30th December and decided to join the KPD. The Reichzentrale (National Central Committee) contained Hermann Duncker, Kaete Duncker, Eberlein, Froehlich (from the IKD), Jogiches, Lange, Paul Levi, Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck and Thalheimer.

The consequences of the late formation of the Party had been maturing for a long time, but they showed themselves almost immediately.

### The "Spartacus" Uprising...

The bourgeoisie celebrated the New Year by disarming the 75th Infantry Regiment in Bremen. This regiment had been known, even during the war, for the great influence the left had over it. On the 3rd January, 22 strikers were killed in Upper Silesia. But this was only the prelude.

In a continuation of the tactic of proceeding by trial and error provocations against the revolution, on 4th, the Interior Ministry sacked the left USPDer Eichhorn, the police chief of Berlin. Leon Dupuis describes him as running a "sort of revolutionary police". Unlikely as this may be, the sacking was clearly intended as a provocation, as Ebert and Noske met with the main inspiration of the Freikorps, General Märcker, in preparation for what was to come.

On the evening of the 4th, the revolutionäre Obleute, the USPD and the KPD met and issued an appeal to the workers of Berlin to demonstrate and "Show those that presently hold power your strength, show that the revolutionary spirit of November is not yet extinct in you".

The next day, masses of workers thronged the streets of Berlin and prevented the Social Democrat Eugen Ernst from taking over Eichhorn's office. Eichhorn was supported by the USPD-dominated Workers' Council of Greater Berlin. That evening, a meeting to discuss the further conduct of the struggle was held between the revolutionäre Obleute, the Greater Berlin USPD and the KPD. It was decided to resist Eichhorn's dismissal and, against the votes of the KPD, to form a widely-based Revolution-Ausschuss (revolutionary committee), to co-ordinate an attempt to overthrow the Ebert government. This Revolution-Ausschuss was headed by Ledebour, Liebknecht and Scholze

The KPD's opposition to the attempt to take power was based on their evaluation of the balance of class forces

(and this opposition makes it ironic that the uprising has gone down in history as the "Spartacus" revolt). A contributory factor must have been their distrust of the USPD, whose vague politics did not exclude the possibility of revolutionary enthusiasm, nor of treating with the SPD enemy, but did exclude clarity about the purpose of the revolution. A communist revolution, perhaps, could take power and know how to keep it and use it to create socialism, but while the USPD dominated the masses, a communist revolution was not possible.

However, the newly-formed KPD had not sunk roots deeply enough into the proletariat to be able to pull back the working class from a premature conflict with the class enemy, nor could it stand back while the workers entered that conflict.

While the meeting which formed the Revolution-Ausschuss was in progress, the masses spontaneously took over the offices of *Vorwärts*, and of other reactionary papers. During the night, the Revolution-Ausschuss proclaimed a general strike and the struggle for power and called for a mass demonstration for the morning of 6th January. That morning there appeared a Social-Democratic leaflet which incited "workers, soldiers and citizens" against "the Spartacus bandits", and called on all good citizens to assemble in front of the Chancellery. According to Noske's memoirs, the government meeting was paralyzed because the revolutionaries had taken almost all of the newspaper offices and the meeting believed the troops were not to be trusted. But help was at hand. Noske (he says) declared "someone must be the bloody dog of the police. I am not afraid of the responsibility."<sup>2</sup> He was given complete power on the spot.

Street fighting began, and, overnight, the leaders of the USPD entered into negotiations with the government, deserting the workers they had led into struggle. Noske wrote: "If the masses possessed leaders who knew what they wanted, instead of good talkers, they would have been masters of Berlin before midday".

The Berlin events had echoes

elsewhere. In Bremen and Bremerhaven, the Council Republic was declared and Düsseldorf too fell to the workers. Other actions took place, but did not go as far or were repressed.

In Berlin, on the 11th, a decisive battle was fought in front of the *Vorwärts* offices, which were occupied by revolutionaries. The 300 defenders of the building had to surrender, and after, Noske held a victory parade through Berlin with his troops.

The fighting persisted until 14th January, but the numerous solidarity actions throughout the rest of Germany could not save the Berlin workers from defeat in a battle they might have won if they had had a plan, but could not win without one. On 15th, after the fighting had stopped, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered by government troops.

In the wake of its victory in Berlin, the government took measures to reestablish discipline in the army, and in that greater part of Germany where the workers hadn't taken over, harsh repression was utilised, with workers' demonstrations being fired upon and participants killed. The *Rote Fahne* was outlawed. The bourgeoisie sensed that Berlin was the watershed in the German revolution. Before the "Spartacus" uprising was crushed, it did not know if it could trust its own troops sufficiently to fight against workers' revolts. After, it knew that the tide of events was now in its favour. This did not mean the revolution was yet lost, but that it had to turn this tide.

### ... and after

**B**remen fell to the reaction in the form of General Gerstenberg's troops on the 4th February. The day after, the workers of Kiel sought to arm themselves, followed by the workers of Hamburg. But this delayed resistance was relatively easily coped with by the reaction: the soldiers' council in Hamburg decided to disarm the workers on the 7th and, on the 9th, Gerstenberg conquered Bremerhaven.

In the meantime, the elections to National Assembly had produced 22 USPD, 163 SPD, 4 Democrat, 89 Catholic Centre, 42 Deutschnationaler

Volkspartei and 22 Volkspartei representatives. This Assembly met in Weimar, under the "protection" of General Märcker's Freikorps, and it proceeded to vote on the constitution.

Typically, the USPD launched an appeal to this collection of reactionaries, asking that the workers' and soldiers' councils be incorporated in the constitution, i.e., that the proletariat be invited to share the responsibility of running capitalism. This was ignored.

On 13th February, the Reich government, a coalition between the SPD, the Catholics and the Democrats, was formed under SPD Chancellor Scheidemann. Noske was the Minister of War. The War he waged was against the revolutionary working class, and his weapon was the Freikorps. He was the real father of "national" socialism. The famous "class difference" between Social Democrats and fascism was to prove very subtle in the next few years.

Over these years, the class struggle often took on a violent form, with revolutionary, but local, uprisings being crushed, one after the other, through the agency of the Freikorps or of more regular government forces. These sporadic acts of resistance to bourgeois normalisation amply demonstrated the workers' courage and capacity for rebellion, but also the need for a party which was trusted enough by the working class to be able to argue for restraint where this was necessary for the co-ordination of the struggle, without it being suspected of being against the revolution itself.

Demonstrating that they had not yet been tamed, the workers of Berlin launched a general strike on the 3rd March. They demanded:

The recognition of workers' and soldiers' councils;  
The relaxation of discipline in the army;  
The liberation of all political prisoners, in particular Ledebour, the abandonment of all political trials, the lifting of martial law and the arrest of everyone who had participated in the murders after the end of the "Spartacus" uprising;  
The formation of a revolutionary workers' guard;  
The immediate dissolution of all

Freikorps units;

The immediate entry into political and economic relations with the Soviet Union.

The government declared a state of siege in Berlin. This was to last until December. The offices of the *Rote Fahne* were sacked. On the 5th, fighting broke out between the Volksmarinedivision and the Freikorps. Noske's troops were victorious, and, on the 10th, Jogiches was shot "whilst trying to escape". The fighting continued, but ended on the 12th, with 1,200 workers and sailors killed in mass executions.

In the aftermath of these events, the Second Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Germany took place in Berlin, and showed itself to be completely politically dependent on the government which had just massacred so many workers.

### The Munich Soviet

**A**fter the rupture of relations between Munich and Berlin at the end of November 1918, events in Bavaria had to some extent followed their own course. In February, elections had put Eisner into a minority in the council, and, as he was about to present his resignation, he was assassinated by a rightist fanatic, Count Arco. A state of emergency had been declared following the assassination.

This was interrupted by the declaration of the Council Republic of Bavaria on the 7th April. The leadership of this republic was held by the anarchistic elements Mühsam, Landaür and Toller, with the Communists Leviné and Levien refusing to take a leadership role until such time as the council accepted the basis of the Communist programme. This "first" Council Republic lasted until 13th April, when the "second" Council Republic accepted the politics of Leviné and Levien.

The second Council Republic was put down by force of arms. The Freikorps took Augsburg on the 21st April, Nuremberg on the 26th, and entered Munich on 1st May. By the 4th, it was all over. Landaür, Leviné, Levien and dozens of others were summarily

executed, and the repression lasted for months.

### Political Developments<sup>3</sup>

After the murders of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and, later, Jogiches, the conditions were such that the KPD Reichzentrale had to resort to co-optation instead of election to keep up its numbers. At the foundation of the Party, the leadership had been to the right of the membership (as demonstrated by the vote on participation in the elections to the National Assembly). Naturally, the leadership under Levi co-opted those sympathetic to themselves, and so co-optation was one of the factors which accentuated the drift of the leadership further to the right, while the bulk of the membership was moving to the left, under the pressure of events which demonstrated the combativity of the German working class. A further factor was the influence exercised by Radek, who acted as a conduit for the pressure suffered by the Russian Bolsheviks to find the means of survival at any cost, though the KPD leadership went far further than the Russians wanted.

The Reichzentrale first began to ignore conference decisions on parliamentary, work and, openly acted against them when Klara Zetkin was instructed, in August 1919, by her Greater Berlin section to resign from the seat she held in the regional parliament of Württemberg. The Reichzentrale supported her when she refused. Moreover, it began to cut off funds to

those sections carrying out anti-parliamentary agitation.

With the experience of the counter-revolutionary activity of the unions since November 1918, the working class had moved to form Betriebsorganisationen (workplace organisations, BO's). Up until late summer, the Reichzentrale had enthusiastically supported the BO's, but then abruptly changed to supporting unions against them.

At the illegal national KPD conference at Frankfurt-am-Main in August 1919, the left of the Party, led by Hamburg's Laufenberg and Wolffheim, Dresden's Rühle and Berlin's Schröder and Wendel, opposed the Reichzentrale on the basis of anti-parliamentarism, rejection of work in unions and the general passivity of the Reichzentrale's policies. Unfortunately, this opposition was marked by the weakness of being against centralism in general, and thus being tolerant of Laufenberg and Wolffheim's National Bolshevism, on which there will be more later.

This was followed by the Reichzentrale's actions at the Heidelberg Congress in October. They presented documents which had not been made available for prior discussion and on the basis of the opposition's rejection, expelled them, despite the fact that the opposition, although a minority at the conference, represented the majority of the membership. Of 107,000 members, the opposition had 60,000. Initially, the

opposition did not proceed to form a new party, but instead operated as the KPD (Opposition) - KPD(O).

In November 1919, the USPD held a Congress. It is worth repeating what Crispian of the USPD right said, as it reflects the atmosphere of the time, where the working class had suffered many physical defeats, but had learnt something of the nature of its enemies. He said:

*No union with the traitors! A union between the party of Noske's socialists and the conscious proletariat is impossible! There is an entire world of principles which separates us from Noske's socialists. Noske's socialists stand on the terrain of bourgeois democracy. We stand on the terrain of the proletarian revolution. No more than we can unite with the capitalists and the agricultural landowners, can we unite with their lackies, their servants, the traitors to the working class!"*

Of course, the USPD was incapable of sticking to its "entire world of principles", but the truth sometimes comes from unlikely sources. EDL

*To be continued*

#### Notes

1 The major source for this section is the chronology written by Leon Dupuis, reproduced in *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin (1918-1919)*, Andre and Dori Prudhommeaux.

2 Noske was later granted a pension by the Nazis in recognition of his role in ensuring the victory of the counter-revolution.

3 An additional source for this subsection is *Towards a history of the German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD)*, Bernhard Reichenbach, Grundberg Archiv für Geschichte des Sozialismus XIII (1928).

## Israel

*continued from page 9*

visit to Turkey by the Israeli defence minister in December and centres around trade in military technology and military training. Joint naval manoeuvres in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey, Israel and the USA are planned for the early part of this year. The strategic purpose of this agreement is to bolster the pro-US alliance against Syrian ambitions in the Kurdish territories as well as further south in Lebanon.

### Glimpse of a Workers Response

We have always argued that the only force capable of challenging imperialism and the rule of capital it

represents is the working class. By struggling against capital the working class carries within it the potential to overthrow the capitalist order and its relentless regime of wars, poverty and exploitation. Some of imperialism's most vicious and cynical games are played out in the Middle East but all too often, the class struggle has largely been absent from the picture. A glimmer of hope was seen in Israel in early December when 700,000 workers joined a 5 day general strike against cuts in pensions and privatisation. Admittedly the strike was completely dominated by the manoeuvring of the Histradut trade union federation, but the fact that the unions found it necessary to channel class anger into a controlled strike, reflects a mounting discontent within the working class

against the attacks against it by the Israeli state in attempt make the workers pay for its growing economic crisis. This discontent will be further fuelled by the recent austerity budget forced through by Likud despite the resignation of the right wing populist foreign minister David Levy.

No doubt the majority of striking Israeli workers do not link their immediate situation with the need to forge international solidarity with, in the first instance, the Palestinian workers. However this shows the necessity of building communist organisations in all countries which can demonstrate the crucial nature of these links for the future of the class struggle against international capital. PBD

## United States 1943 - 1944

# Wildcat strikes against the Second World War

*This article comes from Internationalist Notes no. 9 September 1st 1997 and is rewritten version of the article of the same title from The Internationalist no.1 Its purpose is to underline three fundamental points. The first is that the fight against fascism was just one more capitalist excuse to get workers to support "their country" in imperialist war. The war not only brought about the ultimate capitalist attack on the working class (massacring one another in the name of rival capitalist ideologies) but also allowed the state an unprecedented growth of control over the working class as this study of events in the USA clearly demonstrates. Second it shows how in the present period of decadence of capitalist society, the trades union is called upon to be an essential tool in the politics of preserving capitalism, and therefore to assume the precise function of a State organ.*

*[P.C Internazionalista, Conference on the Trades Unions 1947]*

*However despite the enormous stitch-up between the unions and the state the working class did resist and this is the third point our US comrade makes. The hidden history of the working class is one of combat and struggle despite often lacking a clear goal for that struggle. But that is to pose the question of revolutionary organisation...*

The period of the Second World War was one of great demoralisation for both revolutionaries and the working class. It was during this time that the state told workers that they were all in it together, that all social classes were fighting a holy war against a common enemy - fascism. During the war the unions made an agreement with the government called the no-strike pledge. The government set up the National War Labor Board to investigate breaches of 'labor discipline'. It was under these conditions that a large yet widely scattered number of workers resisted without any union support and without the presence of a revolutionary party.

The struggles against the no-strike pledge started in the summer of '42 and continued through V] day [August 15th 1945 - CWO]. With the coming of the imperialist bloodbath the separation between the unions and workers was complete. This was not something that happened overnight but was a process that had developed from the very beginnings of the union movement. According to J. Brecher in his book 'Strike', Philip Murray of the CIO told workers to "Work! work! work! Produce! produce! produce!"

Those unions led by the Stalinists

carried this policy to extremes. Brecher quotes *Business Week* since the Russians involvement in the war, the leadership in these unions has moved from the extreme left-wing to the extreme right-wing in the American Labor movement.

The War Labor Board set up maintenance of membership schemes in workplaces where union members were not allowed to quit for the duration of their contract. It was meant to protect unions from new employees who did not want to join and from older employees who no longer wanted any part of the unions. If you stopped paying dues you could lose your job.

In a *New York Times* article from 1942, the War Labor Board ruled that *So long as the War Labor Board functions there is neither need nor justification for strikes. Certainly it must be clear to everyone that the War Labor Board as an agency of the federal government and acting under executive order should not and will not be swayed by economic pressure brought to bear either by management or labor.* (NYT, August '42, p.1)

The NWLB had an investigative

apparatus to give information on all strikes and report on union officials' efforts to prevent their occurrence. These investigators were required to make recommendations for the prevention of wildcat strikes. According to another statement by the NWLB

*Workers must realize that no grievance no matter how great justifies an interruption in war production* (NYT, October '42, p. 43)

By May 1943, wildcat strikes started to increase. May first began with wildcat strikes in Detroit where 2,850 black workers walked out. (NYT, May 1st '43, p.25)

On May 4th 1,200 workers at the Air Reduction Sales Co., a manufacturer of oxy-acetylene equipment, went on strike. The workers' spokesman stated that they were not on strike against the company but that they were on strike against the War Labor Board. The union, as usual, denounced it as unauthorized (NYT May 4th '43, p. 11). These strikes were followed by congressional calls for greater federal powers in seizing all "strike-bound plants and mines". They were reminded that the executive already had these powers (NYT May 4th '43 p.1).

On May 5th the Wright Aeronautical Co. and CIO union officials denounced another walkout of 300 workers. This clearly set the tone for the rest of the month.

By May 24th a rubber strike started in Akron where 52,000 workers went on strike leaving the union leaders Sherman T. Dalrymple and James P. Mitchell whining about workers' patriotic duty to continue production. The workers stated that they were tired of 'needless delays' by the War Labor Board (NYT May 24th p.1, May 25th p.44). At the same time 10,000 workers at the Willys-Overland jeep assembly line in Toledo went on strike along with 2,000 more workers at the Electric Auto-Lite plant. In Pittsburgh 230 workers went on strike. In Cleveland 200 workers walked out of US Steel's American Wire and Steel Company plant. In Baltimore transit workers went on strike shutting down about

80% of Baltimore's transit system. Twelve hundred people walked out of the Timken roller bearing Co. in Canton, Ohio. In Jamestown NY 500 workers walked off their jobs at the Marlon-Rockwell Corp. plant. Throughout the month of May 1943 workers all over the country went on strike.

According to the Bureau of the Census statistical abstracts of 1948, for the year 1942 there were 2,968 work stoppages involving some 840,000 workers. By 1943 this number increased to 3,752 work stoppages with 198,000 workers involved. In 1944 these numbers jumped to 4,956 strikes with 2,120,000 taking action. For the years of 1943 and 1944 around 7% of the entire workforce was on strike at any given time. It was the largest number of strikes to occur in the history of the US up to that point. The number of days lost to strikes in 1943 totalled around 13,500,529 days. In 1944 the number of days lost to strikes dropped to 8,721,079. Throughout the entire period there was an increase in the number of workers on strike and a decrease in the average number of days for the duration of the strikes. Industries particularly hard hit by the wildcat strikes were the Iron and Steel industries with Mining and Transportation close behind.

The fact that these strikes often were very large and involved great numbers of people, belies traditional misconceptions about wildcat strikes. These strikes showed a large degree of organisation just to mobilize that many people. One example is the Akron rubber blockade which forced an entire local industry to shut down.

The end of May 1944 saw R.J. Thomas saying that the union must stop these strikes or it would cease to exist. He stated that

*There could be no such thing as legitimate picket lines and anybody who set one up was acting like an anarchist.*  
(NYT May 28th '44, p.1)

The United Auto Workers union clearly saw these strikes as a threat to their existence as did other union leaders. Their fear of even greater unrest after the war was over were well founded. This wave of strikes was greater than during any period of the same length

in US history. These strikes continued through VJ day when the unions began to reassert their control over a rebellious working class.

During the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact [June 1939 - June 1941] the Communist Party supported strikes that interfered with war production at Allis-Chalmers and North American Aviation. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact ended, Communist Party support for the no-strike pledge was so strong that Harry Bridge's Longshoreman's union broke a strike against Montgomery Ward Co. The Communist Party lost a great deal of support among workers because of these policy changes. Their membership dropped from 1100 members in the auto industry in Michigan in 1939 to 629 members in 1942. The Trotskyists gave lip service to the right to strike, while at the same time supporting the imperialist war. Only the Workers' Party maintained an internationalist position against the war and in support of the strikes. These wildcat strikes led the Workers' Party to state that

*the economic conditions, the class interests, the rich traditions, the glorious opportunities for expansion, and the growing political consciousness of American workers, indicate that labor has for itself, in a groping, unclear fashion at present, to be sure, a different perspective*  
(Glberman *Wartime Strikes* pp. 11-13)

UAW leaders, such as Walter Reuther, Wyndham Mortimer and Homer Martin, cut a deal with GM to curtail wildcats. The 1941 UAW constitution required all strikes to be approved by the executive or be 'wildcat'. The deal was like many other deals that were made by the unions, but wildcat strikes were a festering problem in the auto industry before the war and during the war they increased dramatically (Glberman pp. 11-13).

Glberman in his book, *Wartime Strikes*, states that though most unionized auto workers who voted in the union elections voted to sustain the no-strike pledge, most workers in the auto industry went on strike (Glberman pp. 121-122).

The draft boards pressured employers to draft all militants and have them sent

to war. The newspapers voiced their propagandistic fury against the strikers, while employers continued to fire shop stewards and union committeemen who violated the no-strike pledge. Through all of this the strikes continued to increase, particularly in the spring of 1944, after workers started to experience the first round of post-war lay-offs. These layoffs reduced the effectiveness of the no-strike pledge and pro-war propaganda.

As a known fascist, Harry Bennett ran Ford's Dearborn plant. He had his own secret police and he supported many pro-Nazi groups like the 'Silver Shirts' and the German-American Bund. Cornelius Thomas makes much of this in his 1993 work, *Black Workers at the Point of Production*. There was nothing particularly unique to Harry Bennett's brutality, many employers have routinely done such things, from having their own secret police forces to torturing and killing workers. Bennett made liberals and trades unionists angry, but he did nothing that was not done by other bosses before him. Another article from the summer of 1996 by Stephen Norwood, entitled 'Ford's brass knuckles Harry Bennett, the Cult of Masculinity, and the anti-labour terror', treats Harry Bennett as if he were a monster, unique in the history of American labour.

The black workers were supposed to be docile strike breakers when Ford initially started to hire them. By the time that the war came around, they had gone from being Ford's docile strike breakers to starting wildcat strikes against discrimination on the job (Thomas pp. 24-5).

The absence of material written on the subject of the wildcat strikes during the war is particularly conspicuous when considering the scale of the strikes that took place during the period. Of the three things I found written on the subject, two deal exclusively with the auto industry. The third deals exclusively with black workers. Strikes are rarely viewed in their whole context and are seen as the struggle against a particular industry or as the struggle of an oppressed racial minority. The scope of these strikes is too large to be



dealt with in this manner. Jeremy Brecher in his book 'Strike!', went into some helpful detail about the true scope of the strikes but his view is still hampered by a syndicalist view of workers' organisation. No one has dealt with the nature of these strikes together as a whole and written it down. Cornelius Thomas wrote on the subject in passing when discussing black workers but his treatment of black exclusively in the Michigan auto industry misses the common impetus that all the strikes had and seems like an attempt to separate the history of black workers from the history of white workers. Schachtman's Worker's Party really missed out on the biggest wave of strikes to hit this country in this century because they were too caught up in their ideas of social democracy and trades unions to notice that something was going on that could have put them on the map. Schachtman always believed in the primacy of the trade union movement in a democratic socialist party. By the nineteen sixties he started working in the Democratic party. It shows just how far removed the left was from the most militant workers.

To illustrate the role of the unions today, the President's Commission on Coal, headed by Governor John "Attica" D. Rockefeller himself, stated that

*The international union ... is also concerned about reducing strikes. Union stability and maturity give the local leadership the ability to keep the men working while simultaneously communicating with management about the problems that are creating tension. (p. 4)*

They wrote these words in the late seventies about a smaller wave of unrest that spread throughout the coal industry at that time. It is a fundamental role unions play that they act like trouble shooters, as a management tool. It is not a question of getting the right leaders in power but the taking of that power itself.

After the war the unions purged the leftists who had supported the no-strike pledge. It was a definitive time in the United States that marked the total absorption of the labour movement into the management

apparatus of the ruling class.

The approaches that the other writers on the subject have taken give a mistaken impression of the period and the international context. To one it is merely a footnote in the history of black labour, for others it is a footnote in the history of auto workers. The wildcat strikes took place in all of the heavy industries, some strikes also took place in service industries and education. It bears a clear relationship to other strikes of the period in Europe and this is precisely what academics miss when dealing with this topic, they miss the reality of the working class as an international entity with its own class interests. These interests which

workers as individuals share, express themselves today in ways that the unions and the state-capitalist left can not possibly begin to address. The current task of revolutionaries is to express these interests and give them a focus so we can be better able to face future struggles. asm

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## **Revolutionary Perspectives**

*Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation*

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# The Bourgeois Campaign Against the October Revolution

In our last issue we celebrated the Eightieth Anniversary of the October Revolution. We were, of course not the only ones to take note of this famous occasion. The capitalists of both left and right have gone in for their own "commemorations". The state capitalists who think that Stalinism was "socialism minus Trotsky" have generally gone in for re-issuing classic old texts (Ten Days that Shook the World has just been re-issued in a glossy new illustrated format) with little attempt to understand what was revolutionary or not about the event. Perhaps they might have some uncomfortable questions to answer.

On the other hand the currently ascendant forces of free market capitalism might have ignored it. After all, since 1990, they have been telling us that "communism is dead" so there is nothing more to be said. Interestingly though they have not done this. They have instead piled lie upon lie in producing "revisionist histories" in the form of both books and TV programmes. In France the historian Stéphane Courtois has edited the *Black Book of Communism* (Robert Laffont, Paris 1997). This has "estimated that "communism" (by

which we would mean Stalinism) has killed 100 million people this century. Pol Pot, Mao Tse Tung, Castro, Enver Hoxha and Stalin are all in there. This has had a huge coverage in the French press of on average 4 pages per daily devoted to it (the magazine *L'Express* gave it 14). Perhaps it should have been called the Black Book of State Capitalism but then the ruling class want us to equate Stalinism with communism. Similarly in Britain we have had the publication of a book which has been well-reviewed by such luminaries as the right wing Norman Stone but also the repentant Stalinist Eric Hobsbawm. This is *A People's Tragedy* by Orlando Figes. As a piece of fiction it is a rattling good read but it is above all precisely that - a set of opinions which have little foundation even in the facts that Figes cites. We are told that Lenin is a tyrant. Why? Because he deliberately refuses to call Kamenev and Zinoviev "comrades" when they have betrayed the Party by publicly announcing that the Bolsheviks are debating the seizure of power by the working class!. The same attempt to discredit Lenin (who, naturally, the bourgeoisie claim as the only instigator of the October Revolution) also took place in a recent

*Timewatch* programme which promised to reveal new documents which would show that Lenin was a "womanising tyrant" who actually did enjoy killing his enemies. The programme actually showed what a serious effect the assassination attempts of 1918 had on Lenin's health rather than anything else (to the annoyance of one Guardian reviewer who complained about Lenin being treated too fairly).

But this campaign against a supposedly dead ideology reveals that the ruling class are still aware that the idea of communism has not been crushed. And as long as it requires a class of wage slaves for it to exploit it never will. As Marx said capitalism creates above all "its own gravediggers". The two meeting reports that follow demonstrate the united work that the CWO and the ICC, the two main groups of the Communist Left in Britain carried out to defend the October Revolution, not only from Stalinist caricature and bourgeois lies, but also against the confusions of those who subjectively would like to operate on a working class terrain but all too often succumb to the weight of the very bourgeois lies we need to combat.

## JOINT MEETING OF THE COMMUNIST LEFT

# In Defence of the October Revolution

On November 8th 1997 the Communist Workers Organisation and the International Communist Current organised a joint public meeting in London to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The two organisations realised that a common front was needed to provide the strongest possible rebuttal of the attacks that the bourgeoisie are presently heaping on this period of the workers' movement. The October

Revolution, the seizure of political power by the working class, was the highest achievement of proletarian struggle up till now in history. But it wasn't just the importance of the event that led the CWO and ICC to call a joint public meeting. The organisations of the Communist Left are uniquely equipped to provide the counter-weight to the bourgeoisie's denigration of October. It has been the only political current during the last 70 years to defend the October

Revolution while defining the real causes of its degeneration in order to prepare for the revolution of the future.

This joint meeting of the main groups of the Communist Left in the UK attracted a greater number of people than have the respective meetings of the two organisations. Here was the first justification for the common policy adopted: a greater echo for the positions of the Communist Left. The joint meeting's main vindication

was that it permitted the class line on October and the Bolshevik Party to be drawn with great clarity. The proceedings were launched by a jointly prepared presentation that defended the proletarian acquisitions of 1917 against the bourgeoisie's 'official' detractors of October as well as all its unofficial denigrators like the anarchists, and its left wing false friends like the Stalinists, maoists, and trotskysts. These points were developed fully in an article in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 8<sup>1</sup>).

**A**fter the presentation a clear separation developed between those supporting the politics and approach of the communist left and those who questioned it, even though no one at the meeting was openly defending the campaigns of the bourgeoisie. The two questioners were sympathisers of the publications 'Radical Chains' and 'Aufheben' although they spoke in an individual capacity. While claiming to 'like the communist left approach to the revolution', these elements argued that the Bolsheviks had come to power already armed with a capitalist programme intending to install a dictatorship over the working class.

**S**uch criticisms lend support to the openly bourgeois view that the October revolution was a coup d'état by a power hungry clique led by Lenin, and the ensuing regime a dictatorship. The questioners could show no alternative to the role of the Bolsheviks among the working class political forces at the time, although their approach inevitably led them to sympathise with the Men-sheviks who joined forces with the bourgeoisie in 1917 to try and sabotage the revolution. As one comrade pointed out the logic of the questioners was to say October should never have happened!

The criticisms of the questioners were supposedly made from an independent point of view. They were concerned to develop a new revolutionary politics to 'escape the 20th century', like a leaflet distributed at the meeting entitled 'Beyond Kronstadt'. The comrades of the communist left however insisted that

the mistakes of the Bolsheviks can only be understood from within the revolutionary tradition that the Bolsheviks represented. In a society of class struggle there is no neutral ground in academia or elsewhere from which to make 'independent' criticisms: you are either for or against the history of the working class and its political heritage. The 'neutral' position is often behind enemy lines.

The communist left argued that there was a deep unity between the Bolsheviks and the whole of the working class rather than the enmity alleged by the questioners. In April 1917 the Bolsheviks altered their programme to express the revolutionary movement of the working class: the world war had put the international socialist revolution on the historical agenda, and only the soviets could be its instrument. The Bolsheviks were the political vanguard of the working class that not only decisively influenced the proletariat but was in turn influenced by it.

**T**he actual overthrow of the bourgeoisie in October was taken in hand by the Military Revolutionary Committee delegated by the Soviets; it was not the private work of the class party. Likewise the Bolsheviks, foremost among them Lenin, realised that socialism could only be brought about by the workers themselves, through their class creativity.

The fundamental reasons for the degeneration of the Russian Revolution lie not in the myth of a Bolshevik thirst for power over the workers but in its international isolation. The Bolsheviks saw October only as a stepping stone to the world revolution, and thus inspired the birth of the Communist International in 1919. Socialism in one country, contrary to what the Stalinist counter-revolution proclaimed, was impossible. The failure of the revolution to spread quickly to other European countries, particularly Germany, coupled with the counter-revolution launched by the imperialist powers on Russian territory made it very difficult for the proletarian dictatorship to even hold out. There could be no possibility of

beginning to create new social relationships when the old ones were held in place by world capitalism. The communist left was the first current within the Communist International to resist the degeneration of the Russian Revolution which allowed it to ultimately develop a clear conception of the lessons for the future. Some of these were laid out in the presentation and taken up in the discussion: such as the need for the revolutionary party to be internationally centralised and not to administer the proletarian power that emerges after the smashing of the bourgeois state.

Our questioners however, despite waving the banner of modernity, were unable to distinguish themselves clearly from the political tendencies that proved reactionary 80 years ago.

**T**he validity of the 'Bolshevik model' for the new millennium was further put in doubt by another participant in the meeting. The communist left replied: on certain fundamental questions revolutionaries must indeed defend the 'Bolshevik model' into the next century. In 1914 the Bolsheviks called for the imperialist world war to be turned into a civil war. Today revolutionaries must have the same approach to the imperialist barbarism of the present. Only proletarian revolution can bring peace to the modern world as it could - and did - in 1917. The Bolsheviks rejected the arguments of the parliamentary socialists who wanted the workers to submit to bourgeois democracy and war. They called instead for all power to the soviets. In the coming revolutionary battles communists will take up the same slogan against the lure of parliamentarism (2). The public meeting brought out the real harmony of opinion in the communist left on the fundamental questions of the proletarian seizure of power in 1917. This was shown not only by the common presentation and conclusion but also in the similar arguments and method of reply employed by the militants of the ICC and the CWO in the ensuing debate. Equally the sympathisers of both organisations gave vocal support to

the position of the communist left. The united intervention by our two organisations and our sympathisers on this occasion enabled the communist left to fulfil a task that only it can accomplish: the defence of the proletarian experience of October 1917, of its workers' councils and its class party, in order to prepare for the communist revolution of tomorrow.

**Communist Workers Organisation/  
International Communist Current.**  
29.11.97

#### Footnotes

- 1) Quarterly journal of the CWO
- 2) Ironically this questioner with the concern for modernity turned out to be a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, an organisation that envisages a peaceful transition to socialism through bourgeois parliaments, institutions that were out of date eighty years ago, having been superseded by the workers' councils!

The main publication of the ICC in Britain is *World Revolution*. This report appears in their December/January issue, number 210. It also includes more information on the campaign of the ruling class against "communism".

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## *Beyond Confusionism*

# *Defending the October Revolution*

On December 6th some CWO and ICC comrades went to a meeting called by the author(s) of a text entitled "Beyond Kronstadt" which had been circulated for a few months before the meeting. The CWO had already replied to the text in an article entitled "The October Revolution and the Working Class Today" in *Revolutionary Perspectives 8* but this meeting appeared to give further opportunity to develop some of the issues.

Besides ourselves and the ICC, present at the meeting were a small collection of self-confessedly "ex-Trotskyists", a representative of the Anarchist-Communist Federation, and various individuals, some of whom who seemed to have only an academic interest in the subject. Bizarrely the author of the text did not announce who was holding the meeting or give any resume of the key issues as he saw them but merely stated that there were a lot of different views on "the Left" and that he was attempting to get people to re-examine them. He himself said that he worked with the Haringey Solidarity Group which was an amalgam of "trades unionist activists, anarchists" etc. All this took about ninety seconds. The meeting was then thrown open and not surprisingly no-one said anything.

So to start the meeting off one of our comrades replied to the original text.

He began by stating that "Beyond Kronstadt" was a serious text which required a serious response. We agreed with its aim of going beyond vacuous libertarianism and reactionary Trotskyism but pointed out that the speaker had failed to recognise that there were more than two interpretations (Trotskyist and libertarian). There was a third alternative which had existed for decades and this was our political current which has been known as the Communist Left. Not only did the original text fail to mention this but neither did the meeting's organiser mention that there had been one response in print to his text (ours).

This is not a small political point. The desire to avoid direct debate with the Communist Left is a characteristic of the confusionist politics of the grouplets which inhabit the area of *Radical Chains, Aufheben*, etc. This led us to question how far the writer who talks of "preventions of communism" was really searching for a new insight into working class history (since in fact "preventions of communism" is a perfect description of an activity which presents mouldy Trotskyist fronts (like *Critique*) as if they had something to say for today).

As we wrote in *Revolutionary Perspectives 8*, the text "Beyond Kronstadt" had no real critique of either libertarianism or Trotskyism. In the first place revolutionaries today cannot place Trotskyism within the communist movement. On the contrary today's Trotskyists area neo-reformist barrier to the revival of the working class movement. Whilst it is true that our ancestors in the 1920s opposed Stalin's hounding Trotsky out of the Third International, and from Russia itself, they did not follow the trajectory of his increasingly unrevolutionary thinking. One example was Trotsky's view that Russia under Stalin was "socialist" (however deformed the political apparatus of the state). The idea that nationalisation plus a bit of workers control equals socialism is the formula of his Trotsky's descendants to this very day. But nationalisation, as both Lenin and Engels noted, does not get rid of commodity production and this is the essence of capitalism. Lenin well knew that commodity production in Russia had never been abolished and could not be until the world revolution came to the aid of the revolution. Trotskyism is counter-revolutionary today not because it bases itself on a partyist idea of communism but because it sees state capitalism as socialism.

However we also maintained that the "Beyond Kronstadt" article was also unreliable because it is methodologically flawed in other ways. In the first place it used a "scissors and paste" method towards its sources. This allowed the author to (a) omit passages in which the sources actually defended the proletarian character of October and (b) rip events from their context. (Confusing the chronology is a classic method of obscuring the fact that the decline of the October Revolution was a process and not something which directly followed from the "nasty Bolsheviks" taking over). This is the weakness of the anarchist/libertarian critique. Although we should be careful how we use them, Lenin's views are almost like a barometer of revolutionary hopes and failures in the years 1917-21. If we look carefully at the revolution we can see that Lenin had different views at different times. Some, when the revolution was moving forward under the direct involvement of the masses of the working class sound extremely libertarian but after the Spring of 1918 when imperialism implacably attacks soviet power, when all other parties have deserted it, and when a campaign of terror is being waged against Bolshevik militants the situation begins to change. By 1920 the discussion is really only about how the production question can be solved (with such horrors as militarisation of labour being put forward by Trotsky amongst others).

**W**e concluded our brief response by saying that the October Revolution was the only proletarian revolution in history. Its failures are our failures as a class. Their inexperience then is the basis of our clarity now. We listed these in our article in RP8. They are not the councilist/libertarian ones which deny that a clear politically organised and internationally centralised leadership of the working class is essential for our emancipation. To conclude in such a fashion is to disown our own class history and is to repeat the lies of the bourgeoisie who have spent a great deal of time and money orchestrating

a campaign to wipe out the very memory of the proletarian content of the October Revolution.

**T**hese criticisms merited no serious response from the assembled company. An ICC comrade underlined the important point that we first had to be clear about whether the Bolshevik Revolution was proletarian or not before we could then criticise it. Various contributors made what can only be described as irrelevant statements. We were told that the Bolsheviks were reactionary because of their position on women (a "fact" which conveniently ignored the point that the Bolsheviks were part of a class movement which was not noted for its advances at that time - the Bolsheviks certainly published as much by women as any organisation at the time). Some retreated into academicism and criticised the Communist left for continuing to debate such issues as Brest-Litovsk (as if our present programme is not based on the understanding we have of our own history). Others took the openly bourgeois line that the Bolsheviks only committed atrocities, or repeated the lies of Brinton et al. that the Bolsheviks "suppressed" the factory committees. Yet, throughout it all, not one contributor could find better representatives of the revolutionary working class at the time that the Bolshevik Party were leading soviet power.

**A**gainst the Bolshevik atrocities argument we accepted that many things were done which we wish had not happened but we pointed out that the Bolsheviks had not started the terror of the civil war (In fact they let their enemies go at first). Red Terror was a response to White terror. Ten millions died in Russia in a civil war forced on Russia by Allied imperialism in its desperate attempt to overthrow the first proletarian power. Bizarrely and sadly, the representative of the ACF had sat silently throughout all this two and half hour discussion, but then announced that he was going home to make his tea. However before he left he told the meeting that he was one of the "vacuous libertarians" mentioned by the CWO

comrade at the beginning of the meeting. He then repeated every single error of the anarchist milieu. The October Revolution was proletarian but the Bolsheviks were not and he was not having the "weasel words" of the CWO pointing out his illogicality. Lenin wasn't a barometer of the revolution but its opponent etc. etc.. At this point it was suggested that the Bolsheviks who split as the party declined after 1920 (like Miasnikov) represented the real revolutionary heart of the working class. Here an ICC comrade reminded the meeting that it was Miasnikov and his comrades who were supporters of the October Revolution but who wanted to maintain its internationalist roots who were the Russian Communist Left i.e. our ancestors and it was a bit of cheek for anarchists and ex-Trotskyists to come eighty years later and claim them for their own!

**T**he meeting demonstrated two things. The first was the clarity and consistency by which the two groups of the Communist Left defended elementary proletarian positions (despite our serious divergences). The second was that amongst the expanding swamp of confusion there are few genuine seekers of truth and light. In the main we were dealing with discredited old ideas rehashed as novelties. As such they only aid the preservation of the capitalist system.

## Meetings

**The CWO meets at 8.00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month at Cortonwood Miners' Welfare, Brampton and the third Tuesday of each month in Sheffield.**

**For details of venue as well as contact with other sections throughout the country write to the CWO address.**

## Salute to a Communist Fighter

It is our sad duty to report the premature death of Ian, a former member and constant sympathiser of the International Communist Current in Britain. He was only 46 years old but had suffered a series of heart attacks in the few weeks prior to his death on November 23rd. Ironically the first of these heart attacks was just before the joint meeting of the ICC and CWO in London (see report in this issue) in defence of the October Revolution. No-one could have wished harder for such a joint meeting than Ian. In a letter to the CWO in July 1995 he wrote about his research into the Communist Left in Russia who had tried to fight the degeneration of the revolution in the 1920s with many of them ending up in Stalin's gulags in the 1930s. In this letter he wrote

*My interest in not merely archival (but an attempt to continue my political clarification). I remain an ex-ICC member and current sympathiser and a continued militant working for the construction of the world communist party: I believe the only groups that can contribute to this process are the ICC, the IBRP and possibly some Bordigists - i.e. the communist groups linked to the Italian Left whose organic continuity and unity was shattered by the Second World War. None of these groups are the party or its nucleus, but only these groups have the political and material ability to contribute to the new elements emerging today, not through a sentimental or opportunist basis .. but through the confrontation of fractions/groups and tendencies involving splits and regroupments.*

We obviously agree with this broad sentiment of the need for principled debate to help clarify the basis of the future world communist party. Later in the same letter he goes on to explain that he remained a sympathiser of the ICC as an antidote to isolation and academicism which so many potential communists have fallen victim to over the years. The letter led to the suggestion that Ian should speak to an education meeting of the CWO's members, sympathisers and contacts in Sheffield in January 1996 on the topic of the Communist Left in Russia. This turned out to be an illuminating and well-attended event which even the most distant of our contacts remembered with pleasure afterwards. It was on behalf of those at the meeting as well as the CWO and the IBRP that

we sent a letter to Ian after his first heart attack urging him to take it easy to speed his recovery. We were told by his partner H, that this gave him great pleasure and that he was looking forward to replying.

The IBRP also sent a delegation to Ian's funeral. Here we were able to convey not only our desire to honour his life and struggle but also our sincere commiserations to his partner, their son and his comrades in World Revolution (British section of the ICC). After statements by H (who remains a member of the ICC) and a comrade of the ICC, a CWO comrade read out a brief message on behalf of the IBRP which stated, amongst other things that

*Despite our political differences we had known him as a sincere and devoted class militant whose death was a great loss to the communist movement.*

One of the material losses was the fact that the book he was writing on the Communist Left in Russia was not finished. It will have to be completed by his comrades in the ICC. We have already offered to give what help we can to the realisation of this project. It is something that is not only essential to the future struggle for communism but would also be a fitting monument to the first comrade of our generation, the generation which brought communist ideas to Britain and gave them organisational form in the 1970s, to die. Ian's death has occurred at a time when a new generation of revolutionaries is emerging in the land of the October Revolution. Following the death of Stalinism they are beginning to understand that what collapsed in the USSR was not communism but an inefficient form of state capitalism. They are also beginning to see that Stalin was the gravedigger of the ideals of October not its offspring. The publication of Ian's work could not come at a better time to ensure that humanity takes another step towards the society for which he struggled.

Read

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# Internationalist Communist

*Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

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