communist bulletin

30p

* **Capitalist Axe falls on Central Scotland**

* **GCHQ : Unions and State against the Workers**

* **Debates on : Class Consciousness the U.C.M.**

* **Middle East the Carnage Continues**

The Bulletin March 1984 No 6

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Central Scotland — The Front Line

One of the most telling signs of the depth and seriousness of the capitalist crisis is the way that even the most insubstantial, almost invisible hiccoughs in any of the economic indices, produces instant euphoria in the ranks of the bourgeoisie's "experts". A barely detectable slow-down in their rate of increase of unemployment, inflation failing to rise as fast as feared; production figures rising in the US; the slightest wiggle over even a single month and the air is full of confident assertions that the recession has "bottomed out", "turned the corner", "the worst is over", etc. It might be enough to hearten the odd stockbroker and leaderwriter, but in the ranks of the working class it provokes nothing but disbelief and disgust. It takes more than the chantings of soothsayers to hide the day to day reality of capitalism's inexorable breakdown from those who bear the brunt of it.

Two things are clear: the world-wide crisis of capital is deepening and in the West, the Trade Unions are in the forefront of implementing its effects on the working class and are instrumental in trying to destroy the class response to it. Nowhere is this clearer than in Central Scotland where the collapse of capitalism's traditional heavy industries - shipbuilding, steel, car plants and mining - is creating a wasteland. Unfortunately for the credibility of the bourgeoisie's economic witch-doctors, their New Year optimism about the future of the economy coincided with a massive wave of closures and redundancies, striking throughout Britain, but concentrated most catastrophically in Central Scotland., an area already harbouring pockets of unemployment reaching 30-40% in districts like Inverclyde.

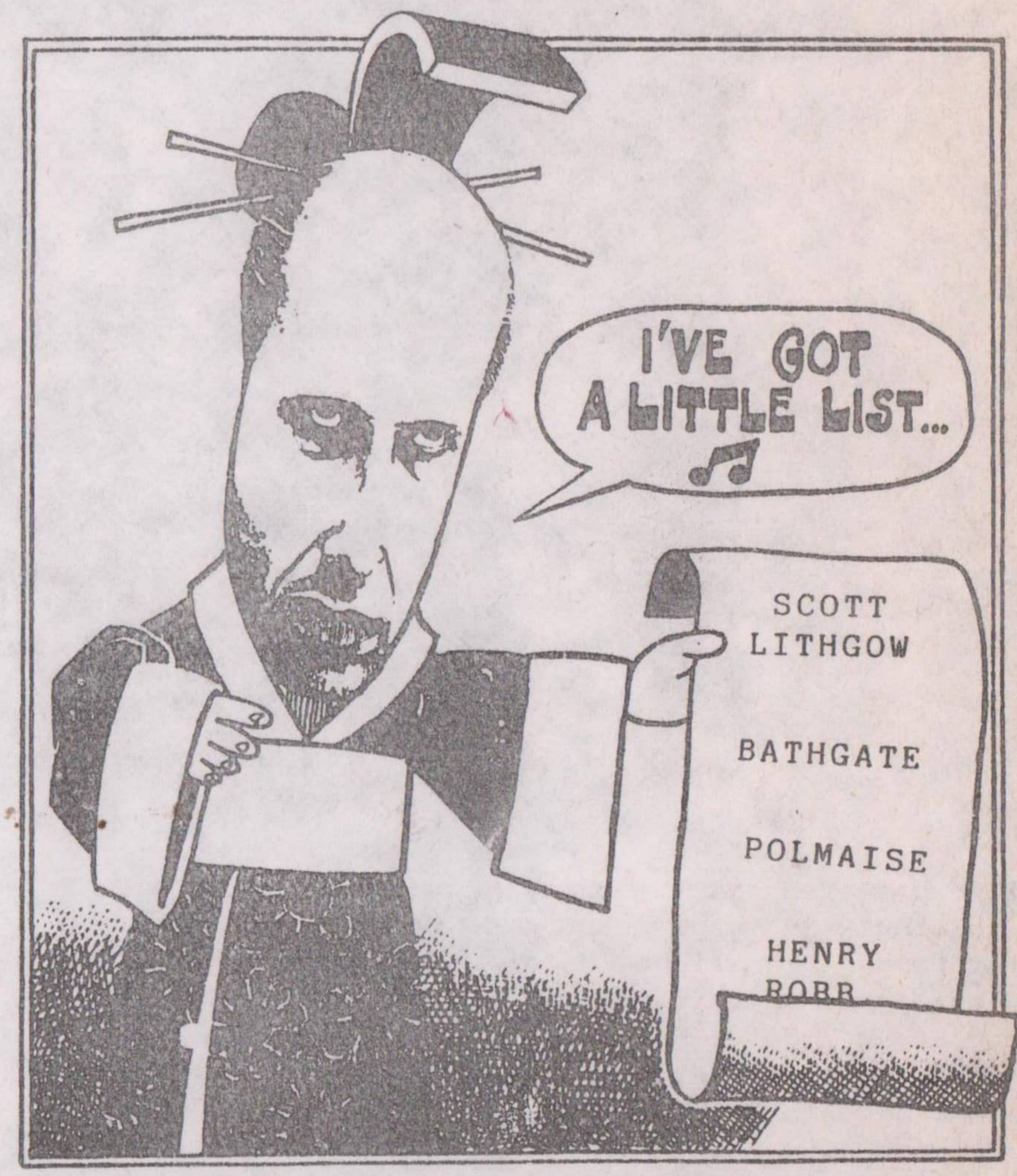
B.L.: Bathgate and Albion

The announcement in January of 400 redundancies at the Albion axle plant in Glasgow was followed almost immediately by the "leaking" of a corporate plan for the closure of the Bathgate BL plant near Edinburgh with the loss of over 2000 jobs and the possible sale of the remnants of Albion to a mystery private buyer. The information hardly came as a surprise - the two plants together have lost over 5000 jobs since 1980 as the world market for trucks, particularly in the Third World where BL found the bulk of their sales, has been squeezed to a fraction of its former peak by the development of the crisis. The capacity for producing 20000 trucks for export turned in practice to half that in 1980 and finally shrunk to 2500 in 1983. The spectacular collapse of the Nigerian economy (BL's biggest remaining overseas market) finally put the lid on Bathgate's future. The promises of the BL management about a secure future finally crumbled with their formal suspension in November of their ambitious £35 million development programme which they had embarked upon in collaboration with the American company, Cummins.

One of the clearest lessons to be drawn from the experience of the Bathgate workers is the stark truth that no amount of sacrifices will safeguard jobs. In recent years the Bathgate workers, taken in by Union and management lies, have tried to remain aloof from the struggles that have rocked BL and have been so amenable to the raising of the rate of exploitation that the Secretary of State for Scotland has been able to crow about the improved productivity achieved by the "hard work and cooperation of the labour force." Sacrifices cant stop the crisis - they can only divide the class and serve to weaken the capacity for future struggles.

The Mines

At the beginning of the year the NCB announced the closure of the Polmaise pit in Stirlingshire because of "geological difficulties". This was followed very quickly by the decision to close the Bogside pit after flooding caused by the overtime ban. This meant that in only 13 months, the total of Scottish pits had been reduced from 15 to 9. The adoption of an aggressive management policy signalled by the appointment of Ian MacGregor has been followed through in Scotland very vigorously. The result has been an inexorable build-up of anger and combativity in the ranks of the miners punctuated by fierce and spontaneous flare-ups and a rash of wildcats involving pit after pit. In September alone almost 20,000 miners were involved in separate walk-outs providing the unions with clear warning that the job losses, speed-ups and weeding-out of troublemakers would not be met passively.

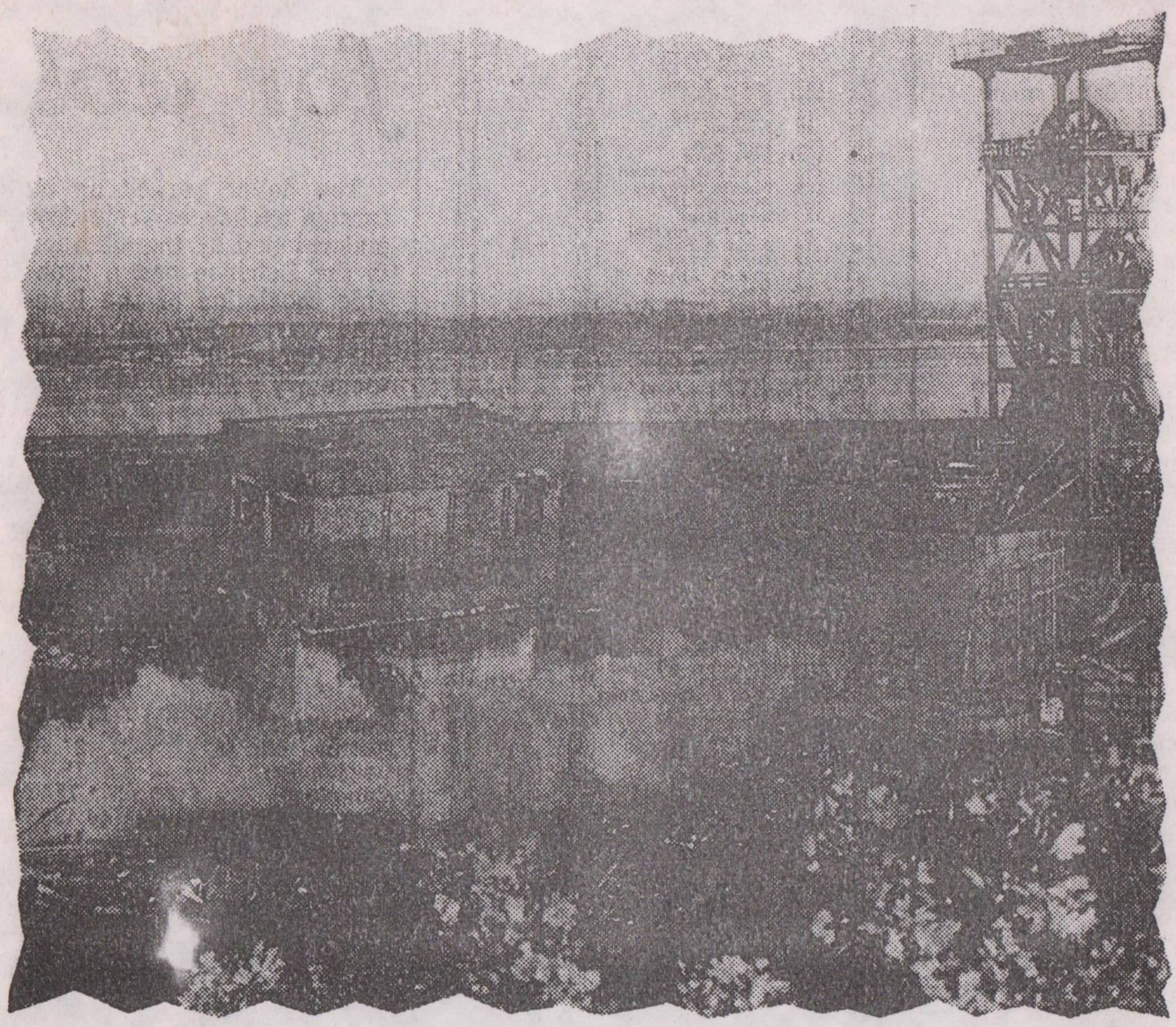


Taking the hint, the unions have expended prodigious efforts to firstly, head off and divert the militancy and secondly, where it broke through their grip, to ensure that it remained isolated. The imposition of a national overtime ban, which to date has dragged on for more than four months, has served to sap the willingness to fight and, more importantly, has

crucially divided the workforce, since only 30% of miners get regular overtime: (namely the winders who do one regular overtime shift per week which has become accepted as part of their basic). The result has been the well-publicised strikes by miners against the overtime ban, which, although it is against the useless and destructive union action, has undoubtedly served to damage the miners sense of collectivity and solidarity.

The closure of the Polmaise pit, following closely after the Cardowan closure, brought the anger to

Forty thousand jobs have been lost in the last ten years including 7000 in the last 12 months alone and British Shipbuilders have published plans for a further loss of 9000 out of the 60,000 jobs which remain. After a wage freeze of two years, in November the unions agreed to a management plan scrapping demarcation practices, (ie. a massive screwing-up of the rate of exploitation) in exchange for a £7.00 a week rise entirely linked to productivity. In response to the overwhelming rejection of this scheme by the shopfloor and to forestall immediate, spontaneous walkouts, the unions reluctantly



Kinneil Mine is demolished

the boil and saw the delaying tactics of the union culminate in large numbers of incensed Polmaise men storming the national delegate meeting, angrily jostling such "militant" stalwarts as McGahey to shouts of "We've been sold down the river". After weeks of 'testing the water' the union finally announced that there was a "lack of support" for all-out action and accordingly called the Polmaise men out ALONE on official strike. This took place to a background of continuous walk-outs throughout Scotland - at Solsgirth, at Comrie and at Seafield where 1600 have struck twice in one month alone - in response to a suspension and the introduction of a new shift. This was in addition to the ballot results which produced what The Scotsman called

" a very substantial number of miners prepared to strike."

So much for lack of support!
The reality is that the unions are pulling out all the stops to stop the linking up of each pit, of each issue and of each strike in an effort to destroy solidarity before it can appear.

The Shipyards

All the features found in the pits - an aggressive management policy accompanied by divisive and unremitting union attacks on the steady bulid-up of shop-floor anger - are duplicated in the shipyards.

announced plans for a strike set for 6th January - well in the future to allow feeling to subside. In the eventuality even this action was called off at the last minute after the management agreed to a plan put forward by the unions which was virtually identical in every major respect to the original one rejected by the workforce.

Since then there has been widespread opposition to the plan throughout the industry - 1600 struck at Sunderland despite threat of closure, the men at Yarrow rejected it overwhelmingly, 1200 walked out in protest at Southampton and the boilermakers at Govan are still refusing to accept it.

This strong opposition to the management and union attacks forms the background to the latest closures announced at the start of 1984. The Henry Robb yard at Leith was closed with the loss of 380 jobs, 300 jobs are to go at Govan, with further closures at, Clelands, Goole and, most catastrophically of all with the cancellation of an £88 million contract by Britoil, the Scott Lithgow yard at Greenock faced shutdown with the loss of 4200 men. The closure of the latter yard in particular would have devastating consequences on Clydeside. Greenock already has an unemployment rate of 17% with youth unemployment standing at a staggering 80%. The loss of the Scott Lithgow jobs would immediately put the overall rate

leaflet

henry robb

SPREAD THE STRUGGLE!

Henry Robb goes down the drain!

After workers had accepted flexibility and rejected strike calls, adopted increased productivity and wage 'rises' below inflation, there is still no future.

But there are lessons here!

1. The Bosses aren't lying when they say that such jobs can't be kept. In this world, desperate though people are for goods and the means to transport them, only profitability counts - and profitability is getting scarcer every day. Accept that world and its lunacy and workers must accept they have no future other than the hell of Social Security pittances, wives on tranquilizers and kids growing up in despair. No amount of kneeling before bosses and promising to work harder will stop the crisis.

2. The Unions, far from fighting for jobs have been at the front of the attacks on workers. In workplace after workplace they have pushed wage-cuts, speed-ups and job losses to 'save jobs'. Time and time again they have isolated workers in separate yards, factories and mines so that the bosses can pick them off easily. When closure finally comes they act to head off workers' anger by pushing work-ins, work-ons, sit-ins and occupations - all guaranteed to keep workers just where the bosses want them - isolated and cooped up.

The Unions actively prevent real solidarity by:
- smoke screens of phoney solidarity - wordy resolutions and petitions of support that are useless!
- loud attacks on the Tories to hide the fact that its the whole system thats rotten and bankrupt, not just one party.
- channeling the sympathies of other workers into whiprounds - which again are useless since behind the BS bosses, and all bosses, stands the capitalist state which can starve out any isolated group of workers.

LINK UP THE STRUGGLES

Henry Robb Workers, like Scott Lithgow, BL Bathgate and Albion workers, Polmaise miners and the thousands of workers throughout the country facing the scrap-heap have only one real way to fight back - to JOIN TOGETHER! Organise mass work meetings outside union control, elect your own strike committees not union ones and elect ypur own delegates and put them in cars and buses and send them to other work places in struggle like Scott Lithgow, like BL Bathgate and Polmaise mine to plan JOINT strike action.

Only when that happens will the passiveness, fatalism and hopelessness forced on workers by the Union stranglehold disappear.

And make no mistake. In the long run the only struggle which can successfully defend us is the struggle which reaches out to challenge the whole rotten system; which says TO HELL WITH THE NEEDS OF PROFITABILITY!

WHAT ABOUT OUR NEEDS!

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up to 35% rising to 50% as a result of the knock-on effect. Despite the evidence of high feeling on the shop-floor, the unions have been successful in keeping the situation safely locked up in the isolation of each yard

At Henry Robb the men occupied the yard and refused to release a Ministry of Defence submarine. However the loud chorus of union "declarations of support" turned out to be nothing but a policy of imprisonment and wearing down of militancy which resulted in only 14 men and some apprentices being left at the occupation by the end of February accusing the unions of "betrayal".

At Scott Lithgows the call to action was diverted from an all-out strike and occupation to a "work-on" which consisted of the first 300 men laid-off continuing to work whilst being paid out of union funds! The unions declined to explain how such 'frightening' actions would force a management backdown. This was accompanied by union proposals for a'job-sharing' scheme which, when translated, meant that the workers at Yarrows should be made redundant instead! The familiar tactic of wearing down and postponing action whilst the usual parade of mystery buyers, consortiums and Trafalgar House negotiated schemes for "saving" an ever-diminishing number of jobs was enthusiastically endorsed by the unions who announced that they would "agree to anything" and accept any sort of "flexibility" on offer. Even the certain threat of closure wasn't enough to stop the men displaying their disgust at these manoeuvres with a spontaneous walkout on the 9th of February with demands that they be involved in the 'consultations'.

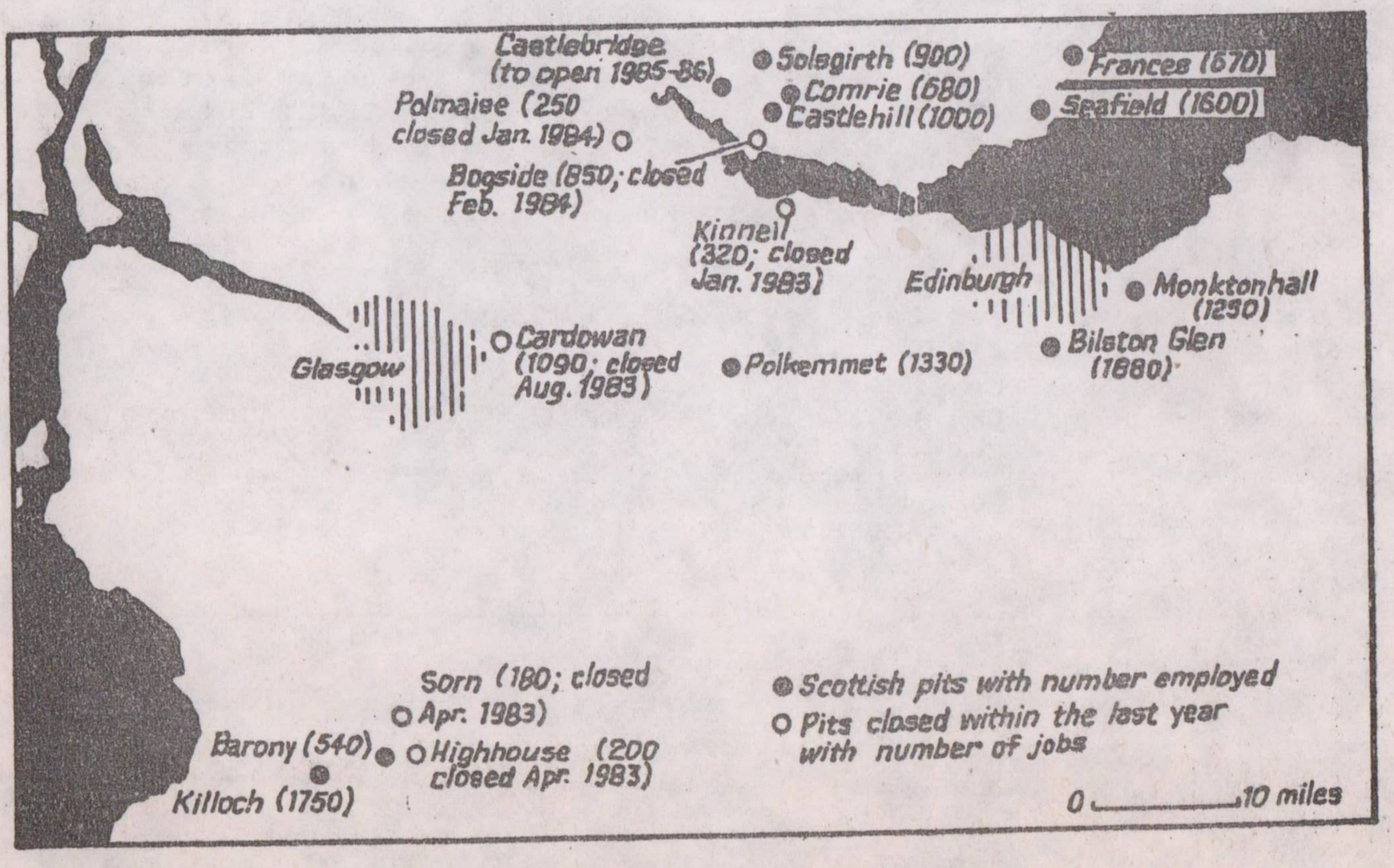
The Way Forward

The unavoidable deepening of the crisis makes it harder and harder for the bourgeoisie to sustain the political and ideological attacks on the working class which accompanies their increasing material attacks. Headlines about "recovery" are confronted with massive closures, spped-ups and falling living standards. Lies about "sacrifices" now, saving jobs later, ring very hollow in the ears of workers surrounded by their comrades on the dole as a result of past "sacrifices". Lies about the crisis being caused by British workers not working hard enough or by restrictive practices etc. are very difficult to sustain when markets globally are shrinking. Shipyard workers can see very clearly, for example, that less ships are being bought and the ones already in use are sailing with 40% of their cargo space unused and that no amount of "flexibility" will change that. The permanent, unceasing and increasingly open attacks by the unions on working class resistance reveals more and more clearly that they defend not workers, but the national interest. They function to divide and destroy workers' struggles, to push through closures, lay-offs, wage-cuts etc. because they accept the logic of the capitalist workplace. They accept that profitability and competitiveness must come before workers' needs.

For the moment, the resistance to the attacks of capital are being relatively easily contained in Central Scotland. But a price is inevitably being paid; slowly but surely the bourgeoisie are confronted with the wearing-out of their ideological defences. As they become less and less credible the real proletarian alternatives are posed ever more sharply.

As a starting point the struggles must become effective. The actions so beloved by the unions - overtime bans, one day strikes, "work-ins" and "work-ons" are clearly no threat to management and the state and serve only to dissipate the desire to fight. Clearly effective action demands all-out strikes and occupations with the seizure and holding of the capital assets.

Secondly, and above all else, the struggles must break out of the 'isolation' imposed on them by the unions. A strike which remains imprisoned in the one locality is a strike which can be worn down and defeated. They must be spread from pit to pit, yard to yard, factory to factory, from one to the other, breaking through the artificial limits imposed by trade, industry and locality. The class' greatest strength is its solidarity and that can only be expressed in sympathy strikes. Resolutions of support and financial collections alone are worse than useless serving only to dissipate fraternal energies. The only way to achieve solidarity is by sending large delegations of workers to speak to other workers. Sending union officials to speak to union officials is a guarantee of defeat. There can be no solidarity through the unions.



The list of closed pits grows

SCOTT LITHGOW: THE ONLY WAY FORWARD IS TO SPREAD THE FIGHT!

In the outrage over the closure of the Scott-Lithgow yard, with the loss of 4,000 jobs, the various capitalist interests have been debating who is 'responsible' for the 'tragedy'... the government, Britoil, British Shipbuilders, the Trades Unions etc. Scott-Lithgow workers must grasp that the root cause of the closure is the WORLD CAPITALIST CRISIS. The days of the oil boom are over, oil prices are falling, and so is the demand for oil equipment, including rigs. This means cut-throat competition and the weaker capitalist units going to the wall.

While BS blames Britoil, who blame the unions, who blame the government, the Scott-Lithgow workers are advised to be "good boys" and "work on" without any fuss while all these outfits look around for a capitalist with a kind heart who will come along and exploit some of the workers if the price is right.

Workers, don't be fooled! The unions are lulling you into a doze, so they can abandon you to your fate once your demoralised. Just as they have accepted 40,000 redundancies in shipbuilding in the last 10 years, just as they called off the national shipbuilding strike in the face of vague promises to "review" the speed of increased productivity. And what hope from the shop stewards committee who have persuaded you to "work-on" - the same committee that produced last year a "rival" to the bosses survival plan you threw out. A rival that the capitalist Glasgow Herald described as "virtually indistinguishable" from the bosses one (the signature on the bottom was different!). The unions are now part of the capitalist system and support the workers the way a rope supports a hanged man. There is no way that a union led campaign, supported by priests, ministers and even local Tory MPs will save the yard. If you lick arses you will only get shat on! Your forefathers would have starved before going cap in hand to the bosses like this.

The workers' fate lies in the workers own hands. There is only one way forward - the road of CLASS STRUGGLE. This means to take the fight to the rest of the working class. Take your example from the shipyard workers in Bremen in Germany who blocked the port with unfinished boats in their fights against redundancies, and so hit the bosses where it hurts, in their pockets. To spread the struggle means taking it out of union hands, and electing a struggle committee, subject to instant recall by the workers at mass assemblies. And to fight for:

- an immediate halt to all work in progress. This puts BS under pressure due to penalty clauses.
- take the struggle to other Greenock plants, e.g. IBM, and call for solidarity action, not just token support.
- call for workers building Britoil headquarters in St Vincent Street in Glasgow to halt work in sympathy.
- a total close down on the Clyde, especially at Yarrows, which is secure due to its naval building. The workers there must be won over to support your cause. A thousand Scott-Lithgow workers at the Yarrow gates would be better employed than kicking their heels in Greenock.

The unions will try to prevent such action. THE WORKERS THEMSELVES MUST TAKE IT. All over workers are threatened with redundancies, and the unions divide them into little pockets, and persuade them that if they behave the bosses might change their minds. It's time the worm turned. The capitalist system in crisis can only offer increasing misery, and eventually its 'final' solution - world war. Today's struggle must become a preparation for the struggle against the whole capitalist system. However hard we fight today, in the longer term the only answer the workers can give to economic crisis and war is the socialist revolution.

COMMUNIST WORKERS ORGANISATION.

I would like to find out more about the CWO ☐
I would like to help in the activity of the CWO ☐

Name.....
Address.....

Send to:
CWO, PO Box 145
Head Post Office
Glasgow.

READ WORKERS VOICE

And finally, a struggle which remains under the control of the union machine is one which will be smothered, isolated, divided, worn down and defeated. Workers must organise themselves, with the day to day running of the struggle in the hands of elected and revokable strike committees responsible to mass meetings held regularly and frequently. Likewise, picketing, to be effective, must take on a mass character and ignore the legal and physical constraints imposed by the state and the unions.

Strike after strike underlines the same lesson - militancy, the desire to fight is useless without a generalisation of the struggle and a self-organisation which takes place outside of and against the unions and the state. And each strike which defies the imperatives of the capitalist crisis points to the only real alternative - the overthrowal of the entire bankrupt system and its replacement with a society based on the satisfaction of human needs.

Cormack

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footnote. Although, as we've just described, it looks as though the struggles in Central Scotland are being relatively easily contained, it seems clear that, given the concentration in time and space of so many closures and lay-offs, the objective possibility for a real generalisation to take place is not inconsiderable. In this situation the widest possible revolutionary intervention becomes an overwhelming necessity. To the best of our knowledge the sum total of revolutionary resources in the area consists of one CBG member in Edinburgh and two or three CWO members in the Glasgow area, and therefore it seemed simple common sense to join forces to maximise a communist intervention. Accordingly we sought a joint intervention with the CWO, but, as we've related elsewhere in this Bulletin, this was rejected out of hand.

We print below the CWO leaflet distributed by them in the West along with our own leaflet distributed at Leith, not just because it is a good intervention in the class struggle but because it clearly demonstrates the existence of a sufficient degree of shared communist clarity within the milieu to form the basis for a practice which can overcome the sectarianism which currently divides and cripples us.

Both our tendencies will doubtless be making further interventions in the area in the near future and we, for our part, will continue to press for political collaboration.

GCHQ : Unions and State against the Workers

In recent weeks the Capitalist press and media have been choc-a-bloc with the long running saga of the Government's attempt to ban Civil Service unions at GCHQ, its secret "listening post" in CHeltenham. As we write it would appear that they have succeeded. Though this success may or may not be, in real terms, a publicity disaster for Thatcher it has been an unqualified success for the Unions. Their 'resolute stand' has allowed them to drum up the kind of support they believed had disappeared in the debacles of 1983. The real losers, of course have been workers, not only in Cheltenham, but everywhere who are being subjected to the Union con-game. During the recent spate of meetings held by the Unions to drum up support the CBG intervened on this issue with a leaflet attempting to explain the real significance of the Government and Union campaigns over GCHQ. We reprint the leaflet here.

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* Communist Bulletin Group
Our Platform

published in Bulletin 4 copies of which are still available from the group address at BOX 85, 43 CANDLEMAKERS ROW.EDINBURGH. SCOTLAND. UNITED KINGDOM.

GCHQ : To Hell With Union Rights

There isnt any doubt that the Tory bid to ban unions at Cheltenham is an open attack on the workers who work there. The alarm bells have been ringing in Government ranks since the first strike there in February 1979 by several hundred low-paid clerical workers who staged a one-day strike in support of a pay claim. The Cheltenham base plays a crucial role in the surveillance operations of the U.S.Bloc in the European theatre and therefore London and Washington are keen to keep the workforce tightly disciplined and prevent any repetition of disruption.

WORKERS RIGHTS NOT UNION RIGHTS

However, the Tory action isnt the only attack that's being mounted against the workers in this situation. Just as deadly is the lie that's being peddled so noisily by the entire left wing of capitalism - from the Labour Party to the Trots - that the ability of workers to defend themselves depends upon union membership. The removal of union "rights" IS NOT the removal of workers' ability to struggle. There are no 'fundamental rights' in our society except the right to work and die for capitalism. The "right" to strike is not given to workers by "democracy" but exists courtesy of their own strength. YOU DON'T NEED A UNION TO STRIKE. And you don't need a union to seek solidarity or to spread the strike to other workers. On the contrary, in struggle after struggle this century, in every country, the unions always play the same role - AGAINST the workers. They always put all their energy into breaking the struggle by diverting it into useless one-day strikes, overtime bans or token, useless marches to lobby parliament. And above all they try to keep struggles isolated, locked up factory by factory, industry by industry, issue by issue, destroying real solidarity by diverting it into useless gestures like financial contributions or fraternal "declarations" of support.

UNIONS AGAINST WORKERS

Look at the way steelworkers and shipyard workers have been carved up as a result of the unions keeping the struggle locked up under their control. Look at the way the mining unions have hammered the living standards of the 30% of miners who do overtime by the four month long useless overtime ban, and set miner against miner as a result. Look at the way they dealt with the Polmaise closure by calling out ONLY the doomed Polmaise pit at a time when wildcat strikes are taking place continually in other pits - at Seafield, at Comrie, at Solsgirth, in Yorkshire. And the unions claimed they couldnt find support!

8. In the GCHQ affair the unions have unashamedly exposed their real role as permanent defenders of the "national interest" - that is, as defenders of British capitalism. Hardly a night has passed without some union bureaucrat popping up on TV to declare how patriotic he is and how workers should be prepared to give up their to defend themselves if the state demands it. The Civil Service unions are willing to sign away all workers "rights" bar one - the "right" to pay union dues! Certainly the unions have their little quarrels with the government and employers about how best to defend the national interest, but in the last analysis they all agree that workers can only help themselves if the national economy is healthy. And to ensure that, they're prepared to push through the endless sacrifices that the crisis demands - closures, lay-offs, speed-ups, wage freezes, no-strike agreements, etc. etc.

This is where the REAL struggle lies. It mustn't be diverted into the false one of defending union rights.

DEFEND YOURSELVES AS WORKERS NOT AS TRADE UNIONISTS

SAY NO TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST !

SAY NO TO THE DIVISIONS IMPOSED BY THE UNIONS !

SAY NO TO THE SACRIFICES DEMANDED BY CAPITALISM !

SAY NO TO USELESS HALF-DAY FARCES !

We must defend ourselves and we can only do that if we organise our own struggles outside of and against the unions and seek real solidarity by spreading the strikes against the attacks of capitalism. The Polmaise and Bogside pits closed down; BL Bathgate to be shut; the 400 redundancies at the Albion axle plant in Glasgow; the 4000 sackings at the Hi-Fab yard at Nigg; 4000 jobs to be lost at Scott Lithgow; the Henry Robb yard closed down. All this is happenning now. This is the real fight. The struggle must be fought on these issues and must be linked up and controlled by our own elected and revokable strike committees and not by the capitalist hacks of the union bureaucracy.

This leaflet is published by the Communist Bulletin Group.

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BRING THE BATTLE TO FLEET STREET


A BETTER FRIEND THAN EVER

FIRST EXT

Manchester Evening News

35,614 WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1983 15p

RADIO & TV GUIDE CENTRE PAGES BRITAIN'S BIGGEST REGIONAL NEWSPAPER WEATHER PAGE 2

73 ARRESTS, MANY INJURED IN SIEGE

WARRINGTON & LEIGH MESSENGER

5,000 PICKETS—BUT PAPERS GET PAST

The battle of Warrington

By ANDREW NOTT

A MASSIVE demonstration by 5,000 pickets failed today to halt the Messenger group of newspapers at the centre of the bitter print workers' dispute.

The first lorry load of 60,000 copies ran a gauntlet of abuse and missiles as it left the besieged Warrington plant at 5 am. Its path was cleared by hundreds of police, some in riot gear.

It followed a night of violence during which more than ... with the pickets for ...

Print workers are in dispute at Park Royal and Richmond, and recent events in Warrington have shown that print workers are prepared to take militant action to defend their fellow workers against victimisation.

Last Tuesday night at Warrington, the police foolishly smashed-up the NGA control van, causing union officials to lose control of the picketing workers. The picket then defended itself against police with bricks and bottles, barricades were set up, and local unemployed workers joined in the fight with the police.

This class violence was condemned by the union leaders, who made it clear that their aim was to pacify the working class. But this isn't the whole story.

PHONEY WAR-RINGTON

Why were so many print workers taken off to Warrington when so many of them had shown that they were prepared to take strike action on Fleet Street? And it must have been obvious that the government's Industrial Relations legislation could only be defeated by an all-out strike in the printing industry. 4,000 pickets could have closed down Fleet Street with probably less effort than it took to fail to stop Shah's lorries. Even just from the point of view of defending six printers sacked by Shah, this would be the appropriate course of action. In the event of large-scale strike action, the other print bosses and the government would probably put pressure on Shah to avoid further escalation. Action which remains confined to a small industrial estate on the outskirts of a town can always be defeated by sheer physical force – at Warrington there were even police road-blocks on the motorway approaches to stop pickets getting through.

Worse still, even when the workers were at Warrington, they were called away to Manchester on the Wednesday evening for a lecture by union bureaucrats, even though it was known that Shah had brought his production schedule forward, and that the lorries could emerge at any time. The pickets were then taken back to Warrington, leaving the Manchester papers working as normal. Even the industrial estate where Shah's works was, kept working as normal, even though the workers on the estate had shown solidarity with the pickets by providing them with barricade materials.

Recent events (the sequestration of funds) have shown that the NGA can't even defend its own interests; never mind those of its members, and that the TUC can't defend its unions – POEU, NUJ, NGA, etc. Why is this?

UNIONS

The role of all trade unions is to negotiate with bosses. This is the basis on which they recruit and group workers. This inevitably involves holding back and dividing struggles which workers are engaged in, so that 'orderly negotiations' can take place. This was particularly clearly shown in the farce of the NHS dispute last year, where all the strike actions were subordinated to the ebb and flow of deals being cooked-up by the inter-union negotiating committee.

The print unions have held back the class struggle just like any other union. This can be seen, for example, in the way that unions have always vigourously suppressed strikes at the Press Association, an organisation particularly important to Fleet Street's bosses.

Fleet Street workers have defended their wages and conditions in spite of craft unionism, because of their powerful position within the production process, and willingness to take strike action. By comparison, many print workers outside Fleet Street earn less than the average wage.

FIGHT THE TEBBIT LAW?

This law is not so much an *attack* on the unions, as an attempt to make the unions take a harder line in controlling the workers. It tells them to hold a ballot before officialising a strike, which could cause the strike to fizzle out in defeat if the workers accept this manoeuvre. But where they don't accept it, the actual effect may be to increase the level of wildcat strikes outside union control.

As Len Murray asked of Tebbit :

"Is he trying to stir up unofficial strikes? He must know that every union tries everything in its power to control a strike. If this goes through, it will simply encourage unions to turn a blind eye every time there is a strike."

However, this law is also genuinely anti-working class. In the event of secondary action, any worker can be fined, and any strike committee (union-controlled or not) can have its funds confiscated.

THE CRISIS

World capitalism is in mortal crisis. The only way that the bosses (East and West) can maintain their profits is by ruthlessly increasing the exploitation of workers. As a result of this, even the most militant struggles can only result in temporary gains, as can be seen from the vicious suppression of struggles in Poland which followed the concessions which the rulers had been forced to make.

As far as Fleet Street is concerned, the effect is that the

bosses will have to introduce the New Technology as quickly as possible. But all this doesn't mean that we have to passively accept it – workers at the Nigg oil-rig construction yard recently won a victory against deterioration in working conditions by staying on strike against the advice of their union, and against the bosses' plea that the company would go bankrupt, forcing the boss to seek a government loan.

However much we fight back, the bosses' attacks will keep coming, and eventually the working class will have to take power to defend itself.

In the short-term, the capitalist system obliges workers to defend things which are ridiculous, like skills which are no longer needed and demarcation lines – but if we are going to get anywhere, we've got to start uniting across the divisions of trade and craft. In practise, this will mean setting up mass strike committees composed of delegates that can be revoked at any time. These will have to be developed into bodies uniting whole sections of the working class to take power internationally – that is, into workers councils.

NO NEGOTIATION

The basis of these struggle organisations must be the refusal to negotiate. Their aim must be to spread the strike (or other) action as widely as possible – NOT to negotiate with the bosses as alternative trade unions. The demands that they put forward should be those which unite the working class (e.g. opposition to all redundancies), rather than simply sectional demands relevant to one group of workers, which then require 'sympathetic' action.

Workers have to start organising to defend themselves now. To this end, they need to set up independent ('autonomous') workers groups to fight the attacks of the bosses and the unions. In print, these groups might well emerge amongst workers in the same Chapel, but they must resist any temptation to become simply pressure groups within their Chapels, trying instead to unite with other workers across craft divisions.

Of course, these groups would have to tread carefully at first to avoid expulsion from their unions, but eventually they've got to be in a position to openly challenge the leadership and whole union apparatus.

When the NGA withdrew the pickets from Warrington, Joe Wade said "If we give an instruction our members are very loyal ... I'm quite sure that they will accept the advice we give them." This is the sort of loyalty that we can live without.

Let's not be conned. The struggle isn't just against 'renegade' bosses like Eddy Shah, , or even Rupert Murdoch, but all the bosses, and all the unions that defend them !

This leaflet is produced by some members of London Workers Group. The LWG is open to anyone interested in workplace struggle from a revolutionary point of view. It produces a free occasional bulletin and a bimonthly journal, Workers Playtime, which has included reports on print struggles and an analysis of the NGA in recent issues. It costs 20p.

Meetings are every Tuesday, upstairs at the Metropolitan, junction of Clerkenwell Rd/Farringdon Rd. All meetings are open, and regular discussions on a particular subject or struggle are advertised in Time Out and City Limits. No party recruiters should bother, however.

Box LWG, C1 Metropolitan Wharf, Wapping Wall, E1.

The Lessons of Warrington

C.B.G. Introduction

The events at Warrington towards the end of 1983 took on the appearance of being a direct confrontation between a section of the working class, fighting for its own particular interests, and the forces of the state. The situation, however, was not as clear cut as this, involving as it did the machinery of the trade unions, the Labour Party and Leftism generally. Violence directed against the police does not necessarily entail a breaking from the ideological fetters of trade unionism.

We publish below two responses to the events at Warrington. One is a leaflet, produced by the loosely organised libertarian London Workers Group, handed out in Fleet Street. We have particular reservations about the political impact of the leaflet, and had we intervened we would have given greater emphasis to the recuperative nature of the struggle irrespective of open violence on the picket line. The second response is a brief article written by a comrade who participated in the LWG's intervention. This article more forcefully indicates the reactionary role of the unions at Warrington and in Fleet Street. However, again, we take issue with describing the flare-up of violence on the picket line as the struggle "getting out of control" if what is meant by that is workers breaking from the stranglehold of unionism. Indeed the anger of workers over attacks carried out by the police upon them can be successfully used by the unions to buttress their claim to be the defenders of workers' interests. In the event Leftism used the violence to illustrate the irrational nature of anti-strike leguslation and the anti-working class nature of the Tories. And they claimed that the solution was the implementation of "socialism" via the Labour Party. It seems obvious to us that the violence did not reach a situation where the Left's fetters upon the class were "out of control". Having said all this, nonetheless it is important that these two contributions on Warrington be published and we welcome the opportunity to do so.

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The dispute in the printing industry before Christmas directly confirms the Communist Bulletin Group's position on Unions - that they no longer defend working class interests but those of the bosses.

The NGA and the TUC divided the workforce, made the issue the closed shop rather than the real issue confronting the working class - wage cuts - and diverted militant printworkers into an attack on 'renegade' boss Eddie Shah rather than the only thing which could have reinstated the sacked NGA workers at Warrington - a strike on Fleet Street.

The background to the dispute on the 'Stockport Messenger' briefly, is the introduction of computerised typsetting and printing into the provincial papers. This enables more papers to flourish, employing a lower-paid workforce than hitherto - school-leavers can be trained to operate word-processors, journalists can type copy straight onto the typsetters, thus the skilled workers can be laid off.

The only way the working class can fight this process is to unite across craft boundaries, not to preserve the closed shop, but on the basis of class demands like no redundancies and no wage cuts. The reason the NGA kept the issue to the closed shop was simply that Shah was introducing the by-passing of skilled typsetting faster than was compatible with the NGA's continued existence. Its not that the NGA has taken a stand against new technology - in fact they have agreed to its experimental introduction on some papers - but that Shah was introducing it against an agreement to stick to the pre-entry closed shop. If Shah was allowed to get away with it, there was the danger that NGA members would be thrown out of work up and down the country so quickly that the NGA would find its role in 'negotiating' this process bypassed, and its existence imperrilled.

Even so, as a trade union, it cannot organise the only kind of action which could defend printworkers against redundancies - organised mass class action. In the first place craft unions are particularly suited to preventing united action even in their own industry, since they try to maintain differentials between themselves and other workers, creating the feeling among the majority of print workers that NGA members are an elite. This is reinforced when the NGA instructs its members to scab on other printworkers as it did during the SOGAT strike at Maxwell's Park Royal press in London during March and April 1983. Secondly as a negotiating body, it is inherently against the class violence which workers have to use to defend themselves against the violence of the ruling class.

This is why, on the night of the 29th November 1983 the picket only got out of control after the police stupidly smashed up the union control van. Until that point, NGA leaders had been using the van to call for calm and responsible action- that is, ineffective demonstrations of moral support. Although technically, the unions are sometimes prepared to break the law, they are not prepared to break it to the extent that the workers need in order to win even temporary victories against the bosses. Warrington's unemployed felt differently. Hundreds of them saw the picket as an opportunity to fight the police - they saw little point in standing around the factory when it was clear that the whole thing was a set-piece union demonstration bound not to achieve even its limited objective of stopping the 'Stockport Messenger' leaving the factory.

It must be amphasised that Warrington was a diversion, arranged by the NGA to drag workers away from the places where their action might have some effect, eg. Fleet Street and the Manchester papers. When Fleet Street workers did strike NGA shop stewards made sure there were no picket lines on the pretext that the TUC werent supporting the strike, so they had to call it off to maintain trade union discipline. I observed an 'anti-picket' of NGA shop stewards keeping guard over the entrances to the Fleet Street papers, making sure their members returned to work.

The fact that the TUC arranged with the NGA to 'stab it in the back' enabled the NGA to pose as an aggrieved militant fighting union let down by its allies. Thus the NGA could prevent any further action, calling it off on Fleet Street and at Warrington safeguarding its funds and at the same time hoping to maintain its radical credibility.

Revolutionaries from the London Workers Group and Wildcat intervened on the picket line at Warrington, but not in a sufficiently co-ordinated manner to get across the message clearly to the hundreds of militant workers bussed there by the unions that were being led up the garden path. On the afternoon of the 30th November, the pickets were bussed to a rally in Manchester Free Trade Hall at the same time as Shah was producing the last copies of his paper. The workers were thwn taken back to Warrington, though the local radio clearly reported the departure of the last van some hour and a half earlier.

The workers should have closed down the Manchester papers. Better still united action by Fleet Street workers would have forced their bosses to tell Shah to reinstate the sacked workers. To do this in future struggles, workers will have to find a way of organising outside of the union structure. The intervention of revolutionaries is crucial to the process by which workers will become conscious of the need to break the union stranglehold.

Eric Mav

A Joint Intervention

The following leaflet was written by the Communist Workers Organisation, produced by the Communist Bulleting Group and distributed by members of both organisations at a NALGO march in Leeds. On the face of it this joint work would appear to be a good example of the type of sensible, fraternal collaboration that we have argued for in every issue of the Bulletin. Unfortunately, upon closer examination, what is revealed is the sheer depth of sectarianism which grips the CWO. The initiative for the joint leaflet came from the CWO themselves who asked if we would produce it since they lacked the local resources for this) and sign it. We readily assented to this and went ahead with its production. However, almost immediately the CWO, perhaps taken aback by our ready agreement, announced that since the leaflet contained reference to 'workers groups' a position not defended by the CBG, the CBG signature would have to be removed to "prevent us from mortgaging our politics". Readers will note the gap in the leaflet near the end which originally contained the names of the two organisations, the CWO and the CBG, now blotted out.

Given the long history of the CWO's 'principled' refusal of political collaboration with us, perhaps we can be forgiven for thinking that this latest action owes more to their deeply seated sectarianism than it does to any concern for our political health. The briefest of looks at our past relations should be sufficient to dispel any notions that our assessment is an uncharitable one.

We first sought collaboration with the CWO during the Falklands war (before we had formally declared ourselves an organisation) and were told that this was impossible because the CWO considered that it would be impermissably "opportunistic" of them to collaborate with a group of individuals. The strength of this "principle" was revealed snortly afterwards when the CWO asked individuals present at one of their public forums to sign a joint leaflet on the Iran-Iraq war. We asked once again after we had formally constituted ourselves as the CBG and were told that this was impossible because we were now a "pseudo-group" (see account in Bulletin 4). This was put in doubt momentarily after a CBG intervention at a CWO Public Forum caused them to think (mistakenly) that we were moving towards CWO politics. After this was dispelled at a subsequent meeting with the CWO it was 'back to square one' This was followed by the NALGO leaflet when, as we have seen, full collaboration was ruled out because it might compromise us. In recent weeks we have suggested to the CWO that we make a joint intervention in the massive wave of lay-offs in Central Scotland - at Scott Lithgows, Albion, Bathgate BL, Polmaise Mine and Henry Robb. This seemed sensible given a CWO presence in Glasgow and a CBG one in Edinburgh. However after deliberation this was turned down by the CWO for yet another new "principle" - that by publishing the splitting text of one of their ex-members (see Bulletin 5) and not publishing their response to this we had been guilty of an 'attack' on the CWO and, therefore, collaboration was now impossible. We also reproduce the leaflet subsequently produced by the CWO themselves about Scott Lithgow. And yet, despite this bewildering array of shifting "principles" the CWO still manage to claim that their position on collaboration with us "has always been absolutely clear"! Unfortunately the only thing that is absolutely clear in their behaviour is the unswerving opportunism with which they pursue their devotion to sectarianism. The only "steadfast principle" which can be discerned is an absolute refusal to work with, or even mention, the Communist Bulletin Group.

It must be clear to everyone, except for the CWO themselves, that there is something badly wrong with the sense of revolutionary responsibility of any organisation which invents a "principle" which forbids it to even publically mention, let alone collaborate with, another communist organisation. We have said many times before, and we repeat here again, that the revolutionary milieu is too tiny, too fragile and too important for such sectarian games.

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leaflet

nalgo's day of inaction

NALGO is asking its members to strike for 24 hours in support of the residential social workers' parity claim. Many council workers are wondering how this action will benefit either themselves or the social workers.

The answer is that it won't. This strike has shown yet again the role of the trade unions in sabotaging workers' struggle. Not only has NALGO refused all along to call an all-out strike of residential social workers, but they are collaborating with management to employ "suitably qualified temporary staff" as scab labour. And NALGO leaflets demanding "an end to the exploitation of the social workers" say that this means "the same working conditions as other local government staff". There are however a lot of local authority workers around who would deny that their working conditions represent an end to exploitation!

The fact is that all workers are exploited, and as the crisis of capitalism deepens we are being forced to accept lower wages and worsening conditions. As the pool of unemployment deepens, we are told we should be grateful to have a job at all. Here once again we see the trade unions attempting to divide the workers section by section. We must reject all notions that any sector (social workers, nurses, toothbrush makers perhaps) are a special deserving case whose claim we can support whilst neglecting our own.

Trade Union "solidarity" means empty gestures. The "Days of Action" in the health workers strike served only to confuse and demoralise the workers involved. Real working class solidarity however was recently demonstrated by 20,000 Barnsley miners who spontaneously walked out in support of a victimised colleague, while the union apparatus did all it could to get them back to work.

The way to show solidarity with the social workers is not to accept NALGO's dictates, but to refuse to accept the poor pay and conditions in our own sections. We must not listen to management and the unions when they say that our interests are the same as those of the company or government body we work for. Their aim is to get as much work as possible for as little pay as possible. Their interests are totally opposed to ours.

Management tells us they cannot afford to pay us more. That is not our concern. We must show that we are not preparedt© make sacrifices for their collapsing system. The working class must break out of capitalist logic and pose its own revolutionary communist alternative.

The trade unions act as the first line of capitalism's defence. They operate completely within the system. Originally, trade unions were set up to sell labour to the bosses on the most favourable terms for the workers. Today however it is a buyer's market and in bankrupt capitalism the unions can only negotiate austerity. Through operating within the system they have become part of it. This is why they sabotage strike after strike - remember the steel strike, the railwaymen's strike, the civil servants' strike etc etc? The unions support the bosses interests, not the workers. Whereas Thatcer openly confronts the working class, the trade unionists use fake militancy to crush workers' attempts to forge effective solidarity. The shop steward on the picket line who urges his members to go back to work and negotiate a settlement is objectively defending the same politics as the police who beat him up.

Workers must break out of the trade union stranglehold and conduct a real struggle. This means real solidarity not token support such as this NALGO action. Out of such a struggle the working class solution to the crisis will be posed. Only by the working class posing its own solution - world revolution - can the capitalists of the USA and USSR be prevented from imposing for the third time this century their solution - world war.

As the crisis deepens, so must the working class response. Our struggles must become political and revolutionary. The international communist party has an indispensable role to play in this process. The Communist Workers Organisation and its fraternal organisations are dedicated to building such a party that will place itself in the vanguard of the struggles to come.

In the meantime workers can arm themselves politically for the struggle ahead by forming groups of international communists in the workplaces. If you are interested in what we say, contact us by writing to

CWO, PO Box145, Head Post Office, Glasgow.

RIOTS AGAINST IMF AUSTERITY

There was hardly a month in 1983 when the rulers of several 'third world' countries weren't to be seen jetting around the globe in increasingly desperate attempts to raise money to help pay off their massive debts and to borrow even more to prevent their collapsing economies going immediately to the wall. As the year wore on with a series of re-scheduling of debts we were regaled with the sight of the IMF and the World Bank imposing conditions on their debtors of extreme economic stringency. The bourgeoisies of these nations were faced with the task of even further reducing the living standards of their poverty-stricken peoples to a level which would lead to social and political unrest.

The effects of the crisis of capitalism on the industrialised nations have been massive lay-offs, wage freezes and a general fall in the living standards of the working class. In the poverty-stricken marginal areas of world capitalism where the economies are at best only kept ticking over thanks to massive transfusions of capital the effect has been catastrophic. In areas where the majority of the population are living on or below atarvation level, any further collapse means real starvation and death. When the bourgeois press presents us with images of starving children and statistics which show that people are dying in their hundreds every minute they fail to tell us that this is the reality and consequence of the capitalist crisis as it affects millions on the periphery of capitalism's world empire.

Thus the populations of these areas had no recourse but to fight back against the imposition of brutal IMF-inspired cuts and towards the end of the year the press was full of news of riots throughout the third world.

In Tunisia the government raised basic food prices and the price of petrol, setting off a wave of rioting which only ceased when Bourgiba managed to divert the peoples anger with the sacking of the minister responsible for imposing the rises. In neighbouring Morocco the same sort of increases in basic foodstuffs at the end of 1983 sparked off riots in Tetuan where 100 people were killed after 5000 troops surrounded the town. The rioting spread quickly to other cities in a country where 40% of the population lives permanently below the poverty line. In early 1984 the cities of Marrakesh,Agadir, Casablanca and Rabat saw violent rioting and looting which forced King Hassan to cancel the price rises- for the moment.

Over on the other side of Africa the Sudan had, during 1983 been subjected to a sucession of riots, army rebellions and massacres with open rebellion in the south of the country in the wake of the removal of subsidies on petrol and sugar ordered by the IMF.

But the effects of the IMF tactics were not found only in Africa. They were to be duplicated throughout the third world and especially spectacularly in that most debt ridden of continents - South America. In Surinam the I.M.F. demanded price and tax increases of the leftist junta, despite the fact that similar actions in 1982 had led to huge strikes among the miners and the execution of many opposition figures. This time around 5ooo employees of the Bauxite mines, who produce over 80% of Surinam's foreign earnings,struck in protest and occupied the mines. The government surrounded them with troops and only after a month of brutal repression did the the miners agree to go back to work.

Even the more industrialised of third world states are not immune and part of the urgency with which the leaders of Mexico, Argentina, bolivia and Brazil sought to reschedule their debt was their terror that the events of Morocco,Tunisia and Surinam would be duplicated in their countries. For while the rioting of dispossessed peasants, the marginal masses who congregate round the cities and the strcken petit bourgeoisie is relatively easily contained, as events in Iran and Nigeria show, the effect of the working class such as in Surinam, with their capacity for self organisation, was a far greater danger. The bourgeoisies of such as Mexico and Brazil were rightly afraid. In Brazil, for example with a foreign debt of $94.9 billion in a country where half the population already earns less than a subsistence wage and massive permanent inflation, any social unrest in response to the austerity measures demanded by the bankers could mean catastrophe. As Brasil's Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider said:

" If economic policies are not altered,
a social revolution is inevitable."

While such tactics as sacking ministers (in a rerun of the GOOD TSAR tactic), calling on the religious fervour of the peasants (as in Iran) or sheer brutal repression (as everywhere) may halt the uncoordinated attacks of the dispossessed masses, an assault on the living standards of the working class, as similar events in Poland so dramatically showed in 1980) is a much more dangerous affair.

The working class, because of the very conditions of its existence under capitalism, is the only force existing which has the necessary ability for self-organisation and the capacity to not only destroy capitalism, but to replace it with an entirely new mode of production - communism. The bourgeoisie are right to be worried.

Yet though they might isolate working class iscontent in one country as in Surinam they cannot do so throughout the globe. For the crisis is not restricted to the third world. As it deepens it moves closer and closer to the heartland of world capitalism.

And in the heartlands the bourgeoisie's attempts to impose austerity are already provoking surges of class anger. As the crisis deepens and the attacks grow stronger so too must the response of workers until it leads to the overthrow of a system which cheerfully consigns millions to the grave in the name of profit.

Ingram

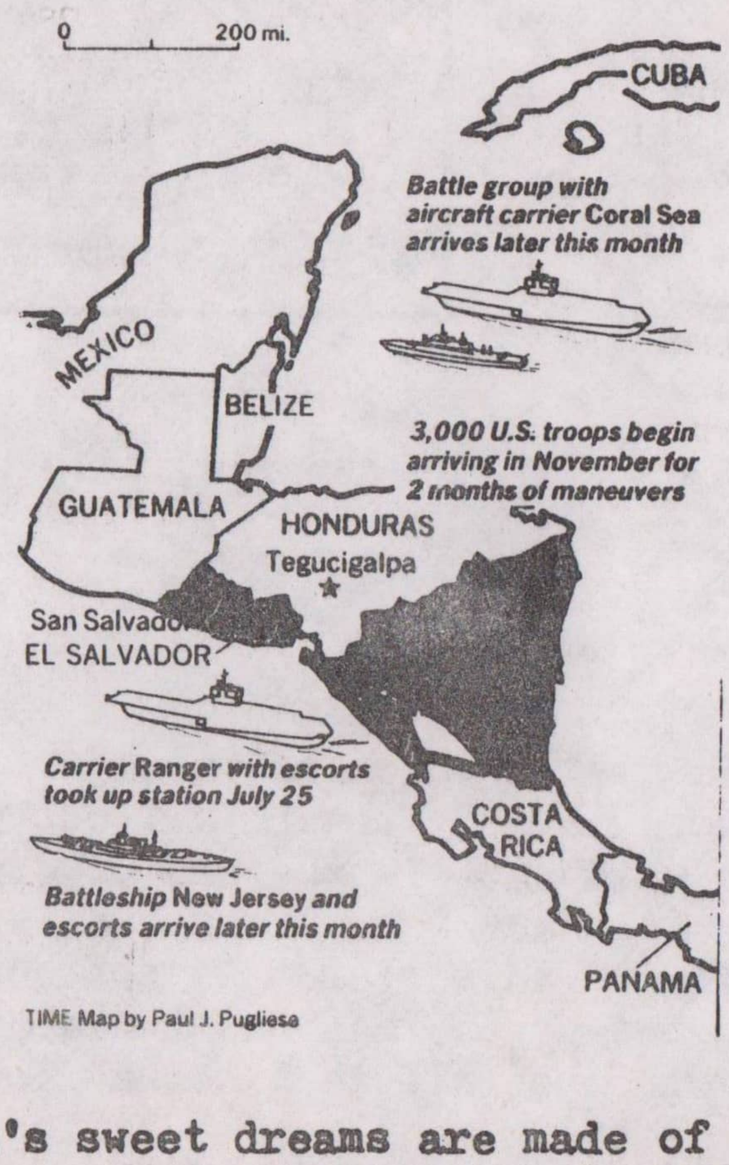
leaflet

NO!!! TO BOTH BLOCS, EAST AND WEST

Hundreds of new SS-20 nuclear missles on the western perimeter of Russia. Over 500 Pershing II and Cruise missles going into five Western European countries. Government and black market trade in modern weapons and munitions across the globe at an all time high -- billions of dollars worth of the business of death.

Crazed national wars being fought on every continent -- Ethiopia, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Cambodia, Iraq-Iran, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Chad. The South Korean Boeing 747 jet shot down over "Russian air-space". The U.S. Naval armada off the coast of Central America, then on to Lebanon, the Persian Gulf, and now again to Lebanon. An "international peace-keeping force" of Western combat troops sent to Beirut, more savage fighting, and then 230 U.S. marines blown up. Next, an American invasion of the Soviet-oriented island of Grenada in the southern Caribbean.

What the hell does it all mean?



Reagan's sweet dreams are made of this
Military power is Weinberger's bliss.

It means simply this: in our precarious world there are two giant-power formations -- the Western bloc led by the U.S., and the Eastern one headed by Russia. Each of these is hell-bent on crushing the military, economic, and political power of the other. The escalating rivalry and violence of these two equally aggressive sides is shoving us -- humanity -- closer and closer to total war, to nuclear war which now, after the Sagan report, means the extinction of our planet.

But why? And Why now? What is causing the new levels of military tensions and clashes? What ever happened to "detente" To "peaceful coexistence" and "friendly competition"? The American and Russian blocs are going after each other because the internal systems of each -- generally speaking, private capitalism in the West and state-capitalism in the East -- are experiencing a severe breakdown. The economic crisis being felt by all nation-states, regardless of its spoken claims about itself -- "Democratic", "Socialist", "Non-aligned" -- is further being converted into political and social discord ... and military aggression. History has shown in the 20th century that the only way that the rulers of the world can resolve the dilemma of their national systems is by suppressing other nation-states, that is, by WAR!!!

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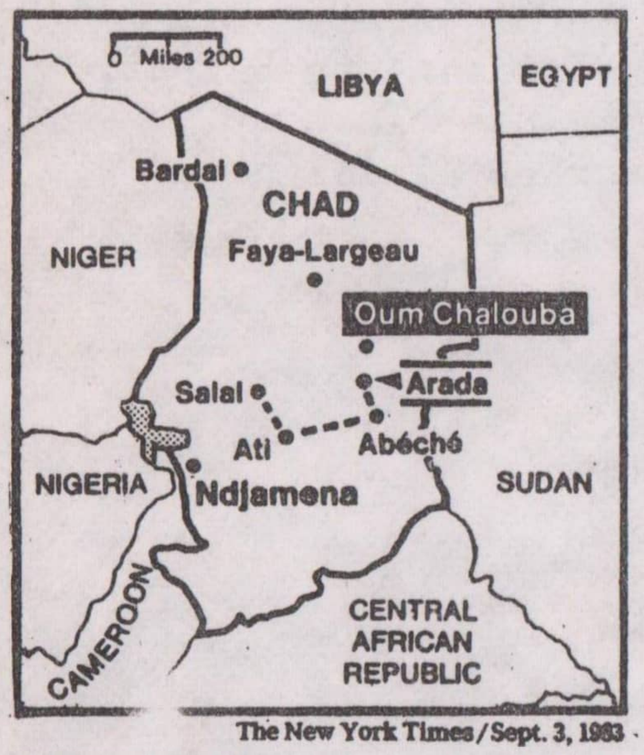
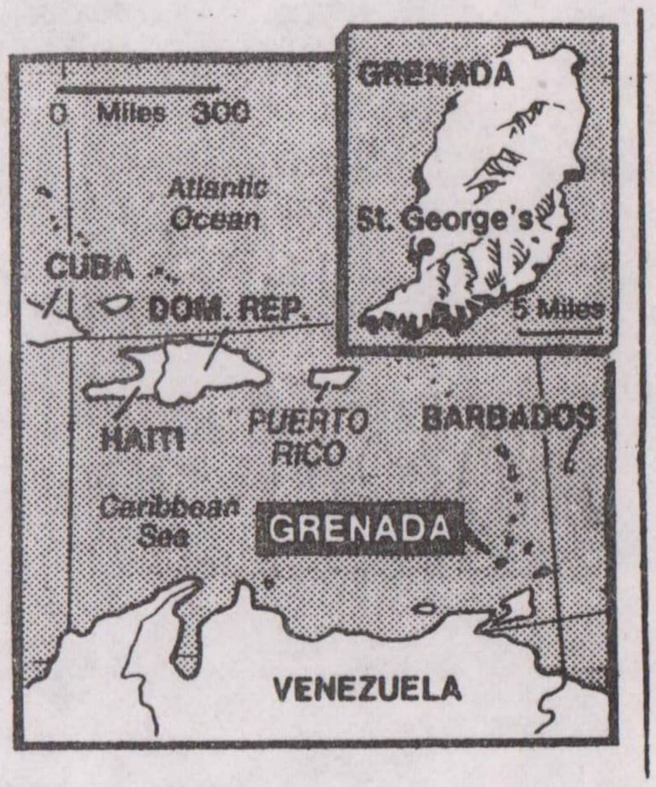


The New York Times / Sept. 3, 1983

Heavy fighting was reported at Oum Chalouba. The nearest French forces were reported at Arada. Broken line indicates line of French deployment in Chad.



No cameras, only corpses.

But what exactly is this system which is in major crisis, and is carrying us ever more rapidly toward all-out war, toward a nuclear exchange which spells the end of everything? It is called CAPITALISM. It means that the social system by which we sustain human life on this planet is not consciously and democratically determined by the mass of individuals who labor daily, who actually produce all that we use for survival and enhancement -- food, clothing, shelter, medicine, machinery, tools -- but by blind and dumb market forces.

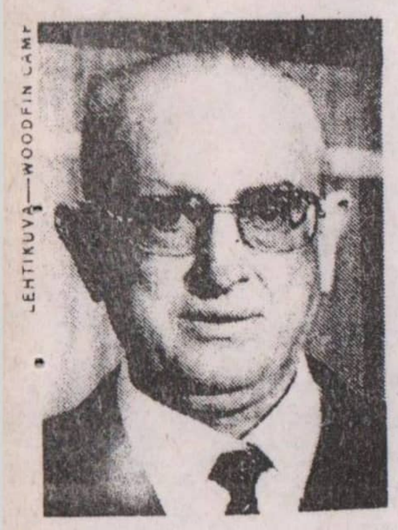
These market forces hinge on human beings making commodities to be sold for a profit by and for others -- the bosses -- in exchange for a money-wage. Under this system, we don't make anything for our own direct use, or the direct use of others, but for a commercial market, a mindless mechanism whereby goods and services are allocated only where a profit

(from our unpaid labor) can be realized -- either by private owners or state bureaucrats.

This is what CAPITALISM is all about: wages-labor, commodities, the market, profit, competition, the nation-state. The workers produce and activate everything but the owners run everything! The managers can only gain a profit or capital by hiring workers for less than the real value of their work. In a word, one class -- the Big Shits -- lords over another class -- the workers. Just as long as this system of exploitation and domination exists, just as long as humanity does not exercise globally coordinated and democratic decision-making about the production and distribution of the means of life, we will have national economic competition, patriotic political propaganda, armed aggression, suffering and WAR.

Young & old,
Black & white
Screw the bosses who
Go bump in the nigh

DORK # 1

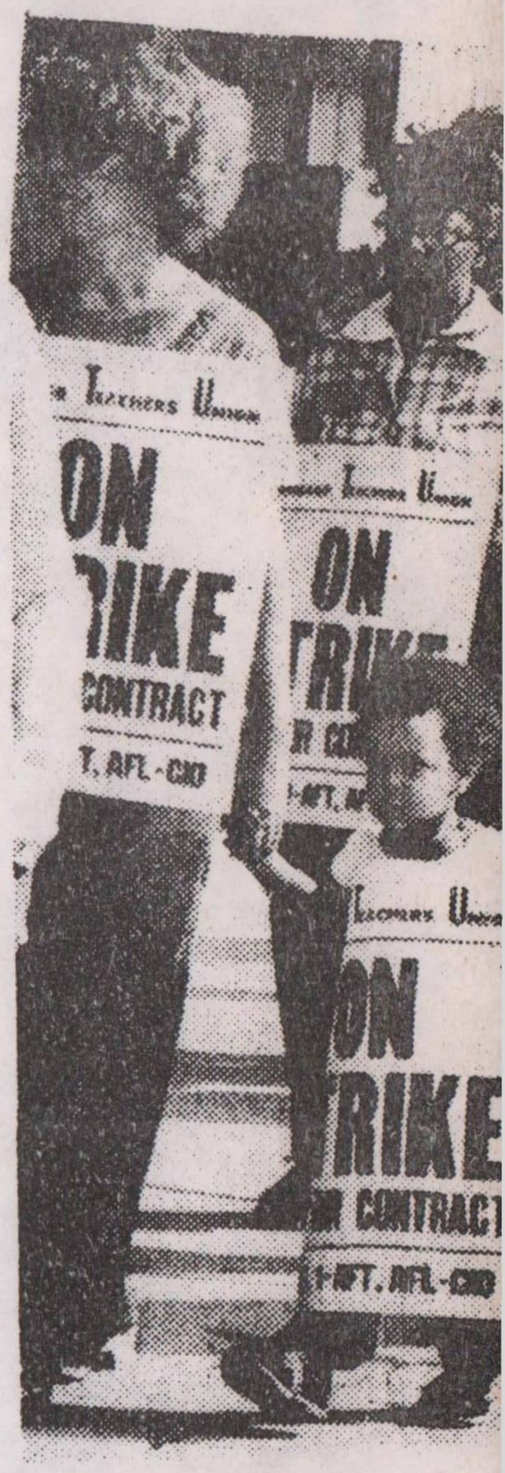


DORK # 2

Do we, the workers of the world, take sides as the two blocs confront each other more openly and violently? NO!!! Absolutely Not!!! We are the Third Force -- the international working-class -- whose subjugated condition is the same across all national frontiers, and who must oppose both the lunatic system of Reagan as well as Andropov, because these two are in essence one -- CAPITALISM.

We must give a resounding NO!!! not just to the main stooges Reagan and Andropov, but to all of their cronies too:

Castro - Eat a Big One! ¿Tu sabes?
Thatcher - Kiss me arse, Ma'am!
Khadafy - Put your army where the sun don't shine!
Mitterand - Get Lost! ... and in the Sahara!
The P.L.O. - Shove it! AK-47 and all!
Felipe González - This finger's for you, Señor Slick!
Marcos - Croak, you A-hole!
The Sandinistas - No Way, José! Am-scra!
The Pope - We ain't buying that Holy Joe slop, Fahdah!



To hell with the Left & the same to the Rig
Workers of the World
Rise up & Unite!

But can we simply shout at (not to mention the stupidity of lying down limp before) our masters? Again, NO!!! We must use our class power, the only social weight which can check the hand of the political and military elite, and draw us back from the brink. Our greatest weapon is this: the spontaneous general strike, a universal strike for our own well-being against the crisis of the system -- lay-offs, wage and benefit roll-backs, speed-up, tighter boss control, indebtedness. Mass strikes -- like the one in Poland in August, 1980 -- outside all union and political party control, permit us to see our latent social power, to see possibilities to change drastically all political, economic and cultural relations, to alter the course away from nuclear war and death toward a New World of truly free and democratic human association and life.

The Third Force is a workers' democracy where all who produce and service decide the what, how and where of their work (and play), and exchange goods and services with others on the basis of mutual need. Such a New World can be organized through an international association of Workers' Councils based on the open and democratic agreements of general assemblies of all workers, starting at the factory and shop level and moving up to a global scale. These Workers' Councils

are no ideal phantoms: they have come into existence many times before -- the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, in Germany and Hungary, in 1919, in Spain, 1936-37, again in Hungary in 1956, and, most recently, in France, 1968 and Poland, 1980. The <u>international Workers' Councils</u> are the real, practical vehicle whereby humanity can finally liberate itself from the want, neurosis and destruction of the market system. Brute force by the old order has always been used to tear down these Councils. Now, for the sake not only of workers' self-emancipation from servitude and misery, but for the safeguarding of <u>All Planetary Life</u>, we, the international proletariat -- those of us who are the pawns and chattel of this world and know it -- must <u>move and strike</u> on behalf of Freedom and Life.

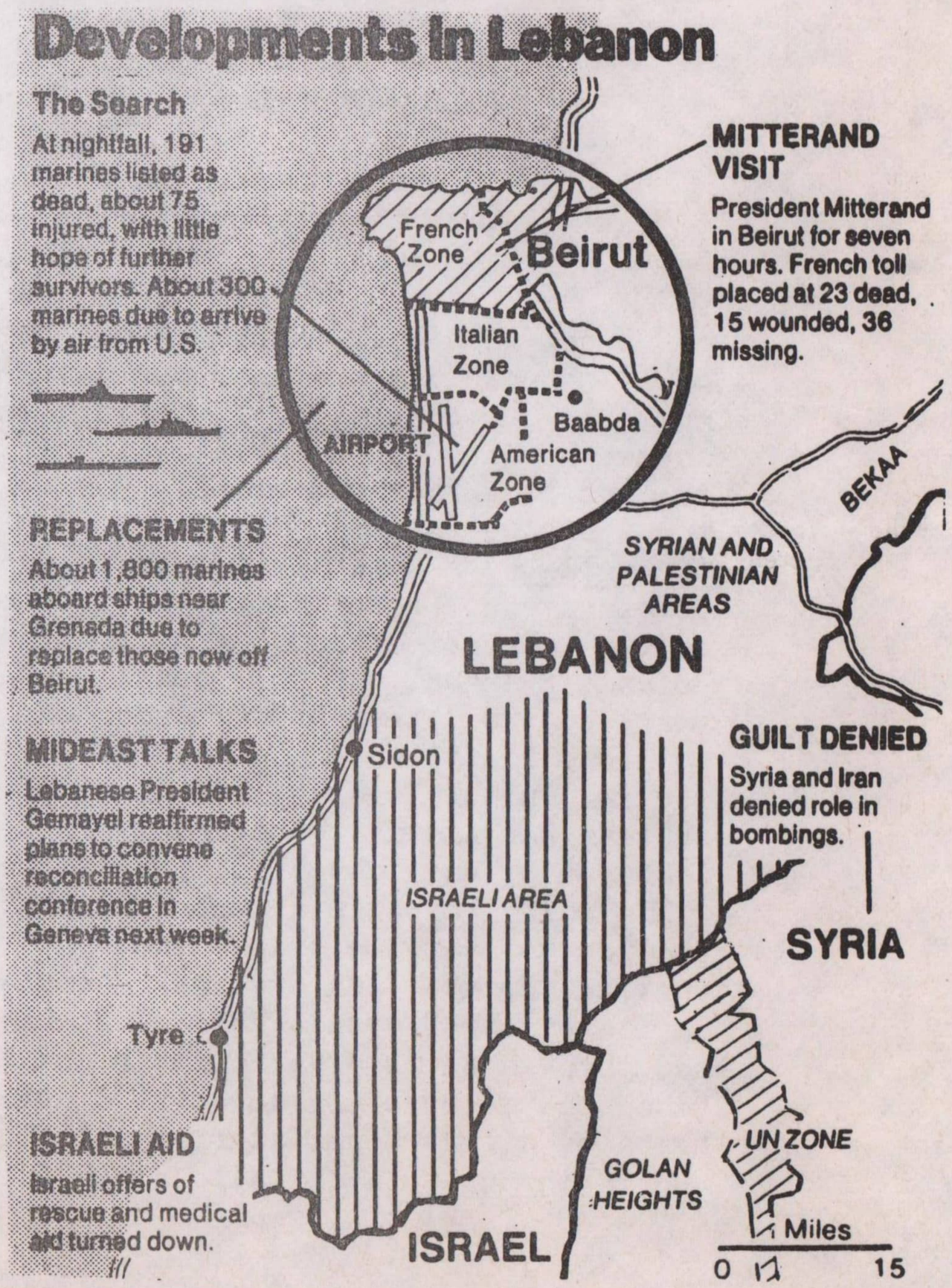
MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS OF ALL LANDS AND RACES:

UNITE IN CLASS STRUGGLE AGAINST ALL BOSSES

AND THEIR MORBID SYSTEM!

TAMPA WORKERS' AFFINITY GROUP
November, 1983.

TAMPA WORKERS AFFINITY GROUP
P. O. Box 16000 SG
Tampa, Fla. 33687



Back Issues

Issues 1. and 2. of The Bulletin are sold out and thus no longer available

Issue 3

A New Regroupment Introduction, texts and letters which ended with the formation of the Bulletin group

Capitalism - One Way Ticket to Atlantis. A text from Tampa.

Letter on the Aberdeen/CWO meeting.

Intercom. A post mortem.

Issue 4

About the Communist Bulletin Group. An introduction to our new organisation

Platform of the Communist Bulletin Group.

After the Election. The significance of the British General Election of June 1983 and what workers and revolutionaries can learn from it.

Beware of Election Fever. A leaflet produced and distributed by the Bulletin Group during the election.

Blast from the Past. The Futility of Parliamentary Power: a text from the Socialist Labour Party of 1921.

Aire Valley Yarns. Class Struggle at a small factory in Britain.

Leaflet. Distributed in Leeds at the so-called "Peoples March for Jobs."

ICC + Marxist Contradictions. An analysis of the Conspiracy theories of the ICC.

Correspondence with comrades, the ICC and the CWO.

"Unity of Communist Militants" Breaking from Leftism or Leftist Brake. An examination of this Iranian group shows it clearly to be merely another bourgeois group.

Bulletin 5.

Class Struggle in Scotland. Two bitter struggles in Easter Ross and Fife.

Union Negotiation Means Defeat. Leaflet produced for the HiFab Dispute.

Tebbit and TUC: In Tandem.

Grenada. "A Lovely Little War, Short, Sharp and Cheap"

Split in the CWO. Text of a comrade splitting from the CWO.

Is the ICC tending towards Monolithism. Text From Hong Kong.

Aire Valley Yarns. A short postcript.

Correspondence with the ICC, the CWO, and our response to the ICC's Address.

Carnage in the Middle East. The first part of an article on this Region.

Copies can be obtained from the Group address for 50p each.

TAMPA LEAFLET

We publish below a leaflet which was produced by the American Tampa Workers Affinity Group. It illustrates to some extent the breadth of the international responses which are to be found in the proletarian movement. The style adopted in the leaflet would probably not be found in those of the CBG, however its general concerns overlap with ours: stating the global nature of capitalism; the ever-present drive of capitalism towards war and the need for an international response by the working class to destroy capitalism and replace it with a humane socialist society, the only alternative to nuclear war. In stating this the Tampa group show themselves to have no illusions about the nature Leftism as part of the bourgeoisie.

We do think however that the comrades underestimate the role of the political organisation in the development of the proletarian revolution. For example, Tampa say that the "greatest weapon" available to the working class is the "spontaneous general strike" and go on to stress the role of the Workers Councils. Undoubtedly these are central elements of the revolution; without them capitalism will not be destroyed. But what is meant by "spontaneous"? For us the mass struggle is one part of the revolutionary equation. The other, and equally crucial element is that of the organised political minorities of the class. They, especially at times of mass struggle, intervene, bringing to the class preformed, (although not static and rigid) interpretations of struggle, capital and the goal of the proletariat. This cannot be said to be spontaneous. The Tampa group is not a spontaneous product of class struggle nor are its interventions.

As a result of this structured and 'thoughtful' activity it cannot be said that the revolutionary thrust is founded on simple spontaneity. Obviously all this presupposes that we believe that the political fractions of the class have a fundamental role in the development of revolutionary action. This we accept. The fragmentary forces of the capitalist division of labour undermines the tendency for the working class to act as a revolutionary class The global nature of capitalism and all the consequences which flow from this are grasped, not in the daily mass struggle but by the conscious minority. (For a fuller development of what we mean here see the exchange of correspondence on class consciousness with Hong Kong leter in this issue of the Bulletin) The minority has a consciousness not only of the exploitative relations of capital but also of the goal which the proletariat must fight for. The interaction of the conscious minority with the mass struggle coalesces to produce the conditions necessary for an onslaught against capital. Without the minority the mass struggle will founder and, conversely without the "spontaneous general strike" the revolutionary group remains impotent.

Correspondence

On Class Consciousness, The Role of the Party and Organisation

We did not discuss programmatic issues when I was in Aberdeen. I think the most important issue is the role of the party. Having spoken to the ICC, the CWO and Battaglia Communista, I find myself agreeing with none of their conceptions. The ICC's has councilist flavours while the latter two's, Bordigist. Much of the debate on the party between the ICC and the CWO seems to me to be on phantom terms, which never get defined. The CWO says consciousness can only come from the party (which is part of the class), the ICC says workers are capable of it themselves. Neither has ever defined what they mean by "consciousness". Surely, if we are talking about "consciousness" as the embodiment of the communist programme (Marx called it scientific communist consciousness if I recall right), then it can only be possessed by revolutionary minorities, ie the party. Yet, however scientifically conscious the party is, if we do not have at least a significant minority of workers realising the need for revolution, there won't be a revolution. This realisation on the part of the workers themselves, let's call communist consciousness. In decadence, it comes, not accumulatively it must be emphasised, through the slow unfolding of the crisis, during whi workers resist and resist (together with sacrifice after sacrifice hoping for the pie tomorrow) but still find things real bad. This either leads to passive demoralisation (the crushing - idealogical/-political, economic and physical - of their struggles, also plays it part of course), or to the realisation of the bankruptcy of the system. For some workers this realisation brings with it the further realisation that, by themselves, the workers can replace capitalism by building something new themselves which, by its very nature is, and can only be, associated labour. For the majority, however, the first realisation will only bring with it a directionless militancy against the system.

In decadence it is when at least a significant minority of the workers arrive at this communist consciousness (a situation corresponding to the period immediately prior to and the period of dual power itself) that the party plays a truly leading and, towards the later stages, decisive role. Through its intervention, the workers will be given a historical sense or vision, ie the realisation that their struggle has a long history, and has a historic mission (for the less advanced workers, they'll come to realise the way out of the bankrupt system, viz. the communist revolution) given a political lead until (and after) it seizes power. Of course the levels of communist consciousness vary widely, in some cases even in advance of the party's scientific communist consciousness (eg the Paris Commune), or attaining this programmatic level (eg workers nationalised industries in 1918 before the Bolsheviks thought of doing so). Schematic though the above sketch is, I think it's vitally important for the understanding of the role of the party.

I say the ICC's conception has councilist flavours which, of course, is not to say that they are councilists. Let me explain. Some years back, in debating with the CWO, they were of the queer notion that party members "campaign" in workers' councils as individual militants and not on the party's programme. They've now quietly dropped this openly councilist idea, but their vocabulary is still full of ambiguous terms:

*The role of the party is to "fertilize" the class struggle. BC told me that the old Damen once said in one of the international conferences that the party is not the penis! Damen's polemic was misplaced though. If by "fertilize" is meant the party is the penis, then the figure is OK because that means that without the party the class struggle will not be able to produce the revolution. But if by "fertilize" is meant to richen the class struggle (much as fertilizers richen the soil), then it means the same as "accelerating" the class struggle, another favourite ICC term to which I now turn.

*"Accelerate": if something "accelerates" another then it can only "accelerate" the latter which is going on anyway. In the case of the party's role being to "accelerate" the revolutionary tendencies of the working class itself, it means the party is not indispensible.

*The party is a "secretion" of the class; as if the formation of the party is something involuntary and the party is some waste!

If the party provides the class with political leadership, which the ICC affirms some other times, why don't they keep it simple and stay away from such stupid terms? Is there a deeper reason? Their pamphlet "Communist Organisations and Class Consciousness" suggests there is. This most confused work, which mixes up good, valid observations with "idealogical" borrowings

from the New Left is most "apocalyptical" in its equation of all theoretical mediation with idealogy. (It even denies that theory and generally consciousness, class consciousness in either of the above two senses or both, requires mediation, a concept - versus the immediatist, empiricist, experiential view of consciousness and knowledge - which Marx took over from Hegel. See particularly pages 73 to 76 where it refutes BC's attempt to distinguish between scientific communist consciousness and communist consciousness.) If I were to judge by this pamphlet alone I would say the ICC is councilist, though because of its confusedness, it contains a strand of argument in it which contradicts the councilist strand.

In a London ICC public meeting which I attended, there was some discussion of intervention in a third world country. The CWO criticized the ICC for not stressing, in its proposed hypothetical intervention, the need for advanced workers and militants to contact communist currents for the formation of the party. I brought this up later with the ICC and the reply was that if there were advanced workers/militants seeing the need to, the leaflets would have contained the addresses for them to contact communist groups. Realistic attitude? Probably. But it does go to show the "waiting" attitude taken by the ICC instead of seeing for revolutionaries an active, catalysing role.

What about the CWO's? I disagree with their "the party takes power through the councils" formulation. Firstly, as council delegates, party members are answerable to the councils, not the party. Secondly, revoked delegates belonging to the party will be replaced by re-delegation by the councils, not the party. Thirdly, other than the party, there will, I envisage, be a few other communist currents wielding influence in the workers. At certain junctures, these currents may have a clearer and more correct communist view of the junctures than the party (as it happened during the last revolutionary wave), thereby wielding more support in the councils which, at time of delegation, may therefore give them a majority in the council organs. This does not, as the CWO says, mean that the revolutiuon is jeapordised. Moreover, if we view party discipline as above all discipline of the communist programme, we can envisage party members delegated to state/council organs being on occasions convinced by the correctness of the views of delegates from these other communist currents and voting for these views, instead of the party's "majority" (in quotes, because I do not envisage the party taking an organisational position on questions of analyses).

A second disagreement with the CWO's conception is their refusal to recognize, a) the dangers of substitutionism as a cause and not only a consequence of degeneration, and b) that, to a considerable extent it did happen in 1917. In my discussions with two comrades of the CWO in London they both admitted a) and b) but I'm not sure that the CWO as a whole, given their polarisation from the ICC, would in fact change their position. Another CWO comrade also got caught out by me once when he said one of the party's responsibilities would be to emphasize to the workers their vigilance/control of their delegates, which, of course, is to admit the dangers of substitutionism in both the party and the workers.

A third disagreement with the CWO's conception is their term the "organising", role of the party. The term means the party is a centre gathering information from around it on the class struggle, runs through the input in the party's computer (programme) and the output becomes directives issued to various parts of the proletariat for implementation. As I said earlier, historically, the working class has proven itself to be capable of very high levels of consciousness without the party (Paris Commune, 1905, 1918). I can envisage cases where the party will be so embedded in the working class itself - through its members as workers represented on strike committees etc, through party members invited to sit on meetings of strike committees etc, and non-worker party members co-opted onto their executives - throughout the period that the party's political leadership is "complete". But since revolutionaries are part of the class, it is still the class organising itself and not the party organising the class a la a convention organiser in relation to whom the participants need only be informed to attend. That the party's leadership itself is clarified (and fed on generally) by the workers' communist consciousness, and not by itself alone, is amply testified by, to name just one example, Lenin's "April Theses". I can also envisage cases where the insurrection breaks out even in the absence of the party (cf the early days in Poland - the party's subsequent presence is, of course, indispensible if the revolution is to proceed). The term "organising" therefore both has substitutionist connotations and ignores the communist consciousness of the workers themselves.

The CWO accuses the ICC as a mere bunch of propagandists. At first I thought they meant the ICC sees the role of the party remaining on general, abstract, sloganistic levels, instead of seeing the party's political leadership becoming increasingly concrete as the struggle intensifies (eg making tactical proposals in strikes such as proposing the election of flying pickets, proposing which industry/factory they go to have a greater impact or, during the transitional period, proposing how to make use of engineers hostile to the revolution in

socialized production, etc) When I told the CWO that the ICC comrades whom I had spoken to on the topic all agreed on an increasingly concrete political leadership for the party as the struggle intensifies, they didn't believe it, saying that if I had spoken to more ICCers my conclusions would have been different. However, after speaking to BC, I understood why it regards the ICC as councilist and how little in fact the CWO (at least some of its members) understood what BC meant.

If I got BC right, it regards the ICC as councilist, not because it refuses to see an increasingly concrete political leadership as the struggle intensifies, but for its refusal to work inside the working class. More specifically, its refusal to try to solve the problem of the necessity of communists to work where workers are given the impossiblity of taking over the existing unions or building new ones. I think this is a valid criticism : as you say, the present isolation of revolutionaries from the class is a real problem requiring solution. The ICC's solution/answer is: our day will come when the class picks up the struggle. In a sense that is true. But again the "waiting" attitude is obvious. Morevover, if we want to live up to our tasks when our day comes, we need to literally train ourselves in struggling shoulder to shoulder in the middle of the workers. This was never a question for the revolutionaries of the past, the necessity of working inside the proletariat was taken without question. Additionally, the necessity of having party members inside the working class was also accepted without question. It's not a question of these members being a "transmission belt" of the party's orders to the workers (though substitutionist tendencies undeniably existed) but a) this is the most effective and natural way of the party exercising political leadership, and b) the training school of struggle with and inside the class (more precisely, that part other than the party) is indispesible.

BC's solution is the factory group concept. The ICC seems to have misunderstood this idea completely. Factory groups are not unitary workers' organisations. They are groups of militant workers forming on a programmatic basis. What happens is BC requires its members to agitate at their workplace, unless this endangers their jobs, and try to group around them workers (not necessarily industrial workers, but depending on the jobs of the members of the party) having political orientation and are, at least, anti-union. Factory groups do not follow orders of the party. They engage in day to day battle with the unions, trying to reveal to other workers the anti-working class nature of them. Factory groups are orientated towards the party in the sense that through discussion, support from the party, their members will eventually become party members. The party, of course, will call for the formation of factory groups at factories where they do not have members.

This idea is nothing new but the same one practised by revolutionaries in the past (eg Lenin's call for the formation of workers' groups, circles, etc associated with the party). To put it more mundanely in today's language, it is an attempt to establish a more systematic network of an organisation's contacts who are asked to agitate in their work places. BC has no illusions about them in terms of growth and development: in decadence (though I must warn you that BC's conception od decadence is rather primitive, viz the pure Leninist view of imperialism), they won't grow in size or numbers accumulatively but will appear and disappear. They will also attract sundry leftists trying to take them over, but this is only a practical problem. The ICC accuses the CWO's Factory Group Platform as a watered down platform. It is not in the sense of compromising on class positions. We all have the experience that workers (and contacts generally) are not attracted to communist politics on a broad, programme-wide level, but on one or two specific class lines, eg workers fed up with the unions' betrayal, seeing through the veil of war hysteria, etc. The Factory Group Platform, therefore, concentrates on a few class (programmatic) issues which are most likely to attract militant, politically oriented workers. I don't see anything wrong with that. BC criticizes the CWO's Factory Group Platform as too elaborate and formalistic (which to some extent is true). The important thing, BC says, is not to write elaborate platforms, but to work to build factory groups around a few programmatic points, the most important of which is anti-unionism.

An ICC comrade once wrote in World Revolution and repeated twice to me that it's crazy trying to organise factory groups: isn't organising the party itself trouble/problems enough? This is a stupid remark; if factory groups are necessary, organisational problems are a technical, minor detail. The important thing is that factory groups do not follow party orders, though through the latter's members and their contact with the party, the latter will exert influence on them. And what's wrong with that?

I do not agree with some of the tactics BC's factory groups use. Also I think the political climate of Italian workers is much more favourable to their formation than, say, the UK. (That's why the CWO has not had one factory group so far, though BC itself only has two at the moment, if I remember right.) But the conception, which, as I said, is no new

invention of BC, is a worthwhile attempt to solve the dilemma: necesity to work in the proletariat versus impossibility of permanent, unitary workers' organisations. As I said, the ICC simply chooses to ignore the dilemma.[2]

One other point on the party. In places where there is no closed shop, and if by becoming a union member (ie just pay the dues), a communist will be able to attend occasional mass assemblies of workers organised by unions under pressure and intervene there (ie if he doesn't have a union card, though being a worker, he'll be forbidden to attend the assemblies), do you have any objections to its party members paying dues to get the card (note, not participate in its everyday activities like helping to collect dues, going to sundry union meetings, etc)?

1. Workers' circles, etc were, of course, later turned into means through which the Stalinist parties control all levels of the population - the formation of party fractions in all social groupings. It is to be emphasised that factory groups are only a means of communist work in the proletariat.

2. The question can be raised that if factory groups are only a systematic network of contacts of an organisation, why form them into groups with seperate activities? This is I think a more interseting question. What do you see as the possible alternatives of organising a systematic network of worker contacts in factories?

Fraternally, LLM

Our Reply

Class Consciousness and the Role of the Party

To a very large extent we share your criticisms of the CWO's conceptions. As far as it is possible to tell at the moment, it would seem that they have failed to transcend Lenin's position of 1903 and have remained heir to all the inadequacies of "What is to be Done", inadequacies whch the Bolsheviks themselves managed to transcend in their practice at vital moments of the class struggle. We think your metaphor of a computer, absorbing the input of the class struggle , processing it through the program and regurgitating directives is a very apt one and catches the very mechanical flavour of the CWO's conceptions. It's a vision which sees the Party as the head, the brain of the class, the embodiment of the class's consciousness with the class itself cast in the role of the largely unthinking body which will only achieve its goals by following the orders of its thinking element. We think that it's a fundamentally undialectical understanding which necessarily underestimates the capacity of the class's consciousness and its ability for self-organisation whilst, at the same time, overestimating the role and abilities of the Party.

It's a view which reduces class consciousness to something akin to a mental, almost abstract process which can be crystallised simply into a theoretical programme by the reflections of revolutionaries. It's a view which sees only the parts and not the totality. We don't think that class consciousness can be reduced to, or simply equated with, the political clarity defended by revolutionaries (what you call scientific communist consciousness). The political clarity of revolutionaries must be seen, not as the embodiment of the class's consciousness, but simply as part of it, albeit a part which is active and indispensible. Class consciousness can't be understood in terms of what is going on inside the heads of individual workers but in terms of the entire process within which the class collectively acts to defend its interests within capitalism, and through its actions comes to understand itself, the world within which it exists and the tasks confronting it. Of course there are differing and heterogeneous levels of understanding within this process at any given moment in time, but the tendency is towards a striving to transcend the lessons coming from the day to day struggles of the class and to locate its immediate experience within its historical experience.

It is in this fashion that the proletariat produces its political fractions - as the ICC says "secretes" them. We agree with you that it's an unattractive term, but the sense behind it, that revolutionary fractions are a product of the class, a part of the class's actual historical activity is quite correct. The emergence of revolutionary fractions and the creation of the Party can thus be seen as one of the most vital expressions of the process whereby the class comes to consciousness through its struggles.

However, it's true that used baldly and out of context, the term "secrete" might imply an involuntary quality, but we think that if it's situated within the entire framework of the ICC's analysis, then it's clear that there is nothing "automatic" about the appearance of the Party and revolutionary fractions.

They have to be consciously built. (We would refer you to the excellent article in International Review no.7, for example.) In this sense we agree that by intervening in the activities of the class, by using their political clarity to disseminate throughout the class the historical dimension of their struggle, revolutionaries are precisely an active factor in the "acceleration" of this process. Revolutionaries are a product and a part of the historical experience of the class and they react back on the class and by doing so, act to generalise and speed up the emergence of the political organisation of the class. The essential point here is that this is seen as a process taking place within the class and has nothing to do with Lenin's vision of injecting consciousness from without.

However, like the term "secrete", the term "accelerate" if used baldly can be extremely ambiguous. It can be taken to mean that the revolutionary process, the destruction of capitalism and the construction of communism is something which the proletariat undertakes automatically and if revolutionaries happen to emerge, then they will speed up the process. Even within the ICC we were critical of the often loose use of the term. We think it is essential to state not only that revolutionaries are indispensible to this process but why they are. No matter how militant the class are, no matter how thorough-going and advanced their momentary gains might be at high points in the struggle (and we agree with you that these can be momentarily in advance of their political fractions) only the historical overview and programmatic clarity held by revolutionaries can transcend these momentary gains and incorporate them into a clear vision of the way ahead. This overall historical vision is unique to the Party and is the basis for the political leadership which revolutionaries try to exercise. We agree with you also that the CWO's failure to understand this leads them into extremely questionable terrain when they turn to the role of the Party after the seizure of power. The formulation that the Party takes and exercises power, however much "dialectical" gilding is added, is inextricably tied in with notions of substitutionism, which, as you point out, remains an enigma for the CWO.

However, we must point out that our criticisms of the CWO's conceptions of class consciousness and the role of the Party are made with considerable reservations. First of all we are conscious of the fact that under the influence of Battaglia Communista they are still engaged in a process of evolution which is clearly not yet finished. The end result is not yet clear but we understand they are in the process of producing developed texts on the subject so we might see further clarification in the near future. Secondly, given our total isolation from the class, the whole discussion remains very largely abstract. It's not always posssible in this situation to know precisely what comrades mean simply by what they say. Nor is it possible to have any certainty that today's apparently fixed positions will survive the turmoil to come. We have only to look at the milieu of less than a decade ago to see how fleeting were the positions which were then considered to be the dividing lines between the different tendencies - the question of 1921, the state in the period of transition, the question of trade in the period of transition, etc.

Similarly our identification with the analysis of the ICC is made with considerable reservations. On the one hand we think the work they have done on this question, and the general theoretical framework they have developed, is qualitatively more advanced and dialectical than any other contribution we have seen. (It's worth stating that your own formulations, as far as they go, are quite compatible with our understanding of the ICC's position.) But, at the same time, like the CWO's contributions, their analysis has been forced to remain very largely on the abstract, which makes it very hard to tell whether their hesitations and occasional stumblings (like their one-time contention that members campaign as individual militants inside the soviets, or their clear failure to understand the consciousness of the bourgeoisie) are simply the product of the difficult process of trying to apprehend reality or are the results of the co-existence of conflicting theories which will be increasingly revealed as their interventionary work becomes more developed. We think it's important not to jump to conclusions on the basis of isolated statements or single texts, but to look at the totality of their theoretical and interventionary work, and understand it, not as finished dogmas, but as a starting point which will be transcended as the class struggle and our role within it develops.

Intervention

The question of revolutionary intervention is perhaps the clearest example of your correct contention that the debate on the Party has an unfortunate tendency to fixate on phantoms. The CWO have set up a straw man to the effect that the ICC's

"deficiencies" on the Party have led them to reject a leadership role in favour of cheering on the class from the sidelines by means of abstract propaganda. This has become such an article of faith for the CWO that they either ignore the evidence to the contrary or simply refuse to believe it. The fact is, that throughout the ICC's existence, its leaflets and interventions have continuously contained "concrete" demands - they have called for strikes, the election of strike committees, the formation and tactical use of pickets, the generalisation of struggles including concrete proposals for this, ie naming specific factories to approach etc. They have called for the rejection of union proposals, for the taking over of union mass meetings by physically taking over the stage and microphone and ejecting the union officials. All this is either ignored by the CWO or considered to be abstract. Our own most recent leaflet for example, on the strike at a construction yard at Nigg in Scotland, was greeted by the CWO supporters as evidence that we were moving away from the practice of the ICC and towards the CWO because it contained concrete demands. Our contention that it was identical to many leaflets we had already written inside the ICC was met with blank incomprehension.

However, while you are correct that the ICC accept the need for an increasingly concrete political leadership as the struggle intensifies, isolation has meant that they have hardly begun to define what this will mean in the future when revolutionaries are a living part of strikes, etc. Obviously the general approach has been laid down, but a more detailed discussion has hardly been broached in the ICC. The very limited attempts to do this following the Rotterdam dock strikes were not always useful, serving to muddy the waters rather than clear them. Since then the debate seems to have stagnated inside the ICC.

For us, however, what is important isn't the search for detailed "recipes" for intervention, but an understanding that our role can only be carried out effectively from within the class's own activity. However clear we are, however clever our tactics, we can't impose coherence and direction on a movement which does not already exist. We can't create the momentum or the concerns, we can only point the way forward and fight against the cul-de-sacs from within it. In this sense, revolutionary intervention can't simply be derived only from revolutionary clarity, but also depends on the class's own activity. This demands a sensitivity to what the class are actually doing, and the ability to judge what the content of each intervention should be. It is the interventions which ignore that, however formally correct they might be in themselves, that are condemned to "abstraction". Thus the demand to build soviets, for example, although politically correct, is simply an abstract demand when made outside a situation when they are practically on the agenda. Similarly, on another level, the demand for a flat rate £15 increase imposed upon a struggle concerned with something else, is an abstract demand. (We think that this understanding of the need for sensitivity to the class's own activity is what underlies the ICC's approach to the hypothetical intervention in the third world war that you mention. We don't think that there is any question of a "waiting" attitude involved here. It's not a question of waiting for some movement by the class and then tail-ending it, but of judging when an intervention might have a response. We think that is the reasoning behind the ICC's reply, although as we have already stressed, there is no way to be certain at the moment. But there is no question of anyone in the CBG endorsing this "waiting" attitude, nor did we when we were in the ICC. Therefore the worst that can be said about the ICC here is that perhaps there are contradictory conceptions at work.)

We think this is the starting point for responding to the CWO's hot air about "concrete" demands. Their conception of consciousness tends to reduce the problem of intervention to the simple question of finding a "recipe" for getting the class to accept the CWO's clarity. For them it depends on the cleverness of their tactics. It leaves them blinkered to the real movement of the class, and on the odd occasion when they have tried to seperate their interventions from those of the ICC in a "concrete" manner, it has led to some spectacularly bad interventions - their demands for work-sharing, their vacillations over Poland, their call for workplace resolutions during the Falklands war, etc.

Factory Groups

The clearest example of this is the CWO's fixation on factory groups, which, to a large extent, is frequently the only part of their intervention which distinguishes them from the ICC and seems to be tagged on ritualistically to each and every intervention. The CWO argue two things here: one, that factory groups are a mechanism which springs logically from their conceptions of organising the class, and two,

they are a "recipe" for overcoming our isolation from the class. We have already outlined our approach to the first proposition and will not pursue it at length here except to add that we agree there is a very real debate still to be had on what the practical implications are about the differences between the "political leadership" concept and the "organising the class" approach. In this sense, the creation and use of factory groups at a time when we are a living and influential part of the class struggle, is still very much an open question. However, we think you are wrong when you argue that the Battaglia conception is not a new one. To the best of our knowledge, their position is a unique one in revolutionary history and we cannot think of any other example. We do not think there is any comparison with Lenin's position. He was calling for workers' groups and circles at the height of the 1905 revolution when they were appearing in their thousands quite independently of his call for them. What he was doing was responding to something the class were already doing and, most importantly, he called for their incorporation into the party. He fought for them to become party cells with their members holding full membership in the Party. This has nothing whatsoever to do with either the CWO's approach or Battaglia's.

In the period of decadence, the unitary organs of the class cannot exist outside the moments of struggle. The only class organs which can exist on a permanent basis are the political fractions which derive their ability to survive purely and simply on the basis of their political clarity. We think this clarity is a totality and cannot simply be reduced to "one or two specific class lines" which might be animating sections of the class at any given point. Clarity on unions or on this or that aspect of reformism, allied to a desire to fight and act, simply is not sufficient to provide for political survival, with or without the "protection" of the Party outside fending off the attacks of prowling leftists. Their survival is not a practical problem as you say, but a political one and depends on their programmatic foundations. And, as we have said, such foundations are only to be found in the totality of the clarity defended by political fractions. When these groups and circles emerge within the working class, our task is to deepen their partial clarity in order to incorporate them into the organisation.

Turning to the question of Factory Groups as a recipe for overcoming our isolation from the class, it is clear that we all, to a greater or lesser extent, start from the same concerns. We all want to "work where the workers are", to take up our tasks inside the class and take our vital part in the "training school of struggle". However, we do not think that can be acheived simply by calling for it. As we have said in past issues of the Bulletin, we might as well call for thousand-member sections in major cities. It would certainly increase our influence and bridge our isolation, but it is only a fantasy. It does not matter how often we say it, or stick it in our interventions, it will not change the reality we are faced with. We do not think there are any mechanisms or strategies available to revolutionaries which can change that reality. This search for magical solutions is an expression of despair and can only be a barrier to a realistic assessment of how to go about our tasks in a sane and balanced fashion. In this context, we think that it is unfortunate that no-one in the milieu has responded to our analysis of the uniqueness of our current tininess and isolation. Unless that is faced up to openly, the door is wide open to the despair which produces the flight into localism and councilism on the one hand, and the voluntarism of substitutionism on the other.

The search for tactical recipes for overcoming our isolation is not without the dangers of opportunism and the political degeneration which follows. Battaglia's stated desire to "be where the class is" for example, has to be examined very closely. If they mean that we have to strive to physically be where the workers are - on the shopfloor, in assemblies, picket lines, mass meetings, etc - then, of course, we agree with them. (And here we can answer your question about union membership. We have no objection to a communist joining a union to safeguard his job or to gain entry to mass meetings, etc. The KAPD slogan of "Leave the Unions" is politically correct but is to be understood as part of the collective action of the class and not simply as a dogma to be applied to individuals at every point in time.) But from our very limited knowledge of Battaglia, we suspect it means that they are calling for revolutionaries to be where the class are politically, that is to become part of the union structure. We refer you to the text by Battaglia, "The Italian Left, the German Left and the Comintern" where they state:

> "Lenin aimed to drive home the communists' role inside the unions which was that, we repeat, of pushing forward the contradiction between capital and labour-power, of training

> proletarians in the most arduous struggles and fights, of conquering the unions' organs or - and this should be pointed out - the workers within those organs, for communism."

Admittedly, the copy of the text we have is an edited version and is a poor translation, but the argument seems clear enough and is echoed by their position about being inside the Partisans in the last war.

To turn to our position on work in the class, we think one of your footnotes sums it up well. You state:

> "The question can be raised that if factory groups are only a systematic network of contacts of an organisation, why form them into groups with separate activities? (...) What do you see as the possible alternatives of organising a systematic network of worker contacts in factories?"

We do not think there is any alternative to organising such a network of contacts. That aim must always be a major element in the interventions of revolutionaries. We intervene not only to influence the struggle but also to win militants to the organisation. We want to have, and expect to have, members in the workplace where they would operate as a cell and attempt to create a milieu of sympathisers around them. Even where we have no members, we would fight to act as a focal point, a leadership, for those politicised elements of the class who were attempting to organise themselves. We want to do this now, that is one of the major reasons we hand out leaflets and why we always put our address on them. That is why we plan to hold public meetings and why we would discuss with pickets, etc. But we do not think any of this can be achieved simply by calling for it, nor by expending a lot of hot air on non-existent factory groups. If we were in a situation where workers were actually responding to the call for factory groups, surely we would also be in a situation where we could build a network of cells and sympathisers. And in that situation, of course, the debate is about how to exercise political leadership and not about how to overcome our isolation.

One last point on this subject. We should make it clear that the position we've been defending here is not a programmatic plank of the CBG, but is simply a majority position on what is for us a question which is still open and still under discussion. For obvious historical reasons, our analysis is basically that of the ICC, except that we have rejected the rigidity of having it incorporated in our programmatic identity. As a footnote here, much of our critique of the ICC's monolithism and readiness to leap into premature positions is demonstrated by the way that the ICC came to a position on factory groups. It was almost literally conjured out of the air by the central organs in response to the CWO. The discussion in the ICC began and ended with the public statement of the "ICC position".

Organisation

We'll keep this section brief since much of the ground has been covered in the Bulletin. On the questions of the role of central organs, the functioning of minorities, and on the taking up of positions, we think we are in fundamental agreement with you. In fact, on the question of when positions should be taken up and the differing programmatic consequences involved in this process, we think you have given a sharper and more coherent account than our own efforts. There are only two points we want to add here.

Firstly, a minor point, our rejection of monolithism and sectarianism does not derive only from our current tininess and isolation. On the contrary, we made great efforts in the Bolshevik text* to show that even in the last revolutionary wave, when revolutionaries were in a qualitatively different situation from us vis-a-vis their strength and influence in the class, their vitality, their flexibility, and their very ability to act within the class depended upon a practice which was a world removed from the monolithism and sectarianism which racks the current revolutionary movement. Our starting point then, for the positions we've defended on organisational practice, is the actual experience of the last revolutionary wave. Recognition of our current fragility simply reinforces the lessons we've drawn about rejecting monolithism and sectarianism.

* "Another Look at the Organisational Question", Bulletin, no.2

Secondly, the question of how communist discipline and centralism can function whilst allowing the most vigorous debates. If we understand you correctly, you are arguing that the example you give, of the elements around Kommunist during the Brest-Litovsk debates, provides the answer. In other words Party policy and the instructions of the central organs must be carried out despite disagreements, provided the

disagreements can be publically debated. If that is the position you are defending, then we think it's the correct starting point for approaching the issue, but that the complexities of a living organisation, inextricably bound up in the action of the class as a whole, militates against any formalistic application of the position. If we take the action of the Military Organisation during the July Days as an example, when they were opposed to the Central Committee's policy of trying to hold back the class, it's clear that public expression of the opposing opinion - that the class should push ahead - was in itself an intervention in the class. In this situation there is only a formal distinction between public debate and differing interventions.

The real point to grasp is that the resolution of tensions and conflicts within a large, living organisation (with many constituent elements, embedded in the momentum of the class, part of the class and its struggles) is a process within which debate, public or otherwise, is only a part. We saw in our examination of the Bolshevik Party how often the "rank and file" and those elements closest to the class were radicalised by the class and, in turn, dynamised the Party itself. Formal, constitutional guarantees of behaviour are quite inadequate to deal with this. Take, for example, the emergence of the first soviets in 1905. The Party called for their disbanding unless they dopted a Social Democratic programme, and was blithely ignored by the soviets themselves and by the many, many Party members within the soviets. Were the Party members wrong? Should they have left the soviets and simply argued their case inside the Party? We don't think so. The fight for clarity, the process of understanding, wasn't simply a question of debate but of action. It's too easy in our position of tininess and isolation to stop at a formalistic understanding of this question. What we've tried to argue for in the Bulletin is a grasp of the process rather than its constituent parts.

Regroupment

The crux of everything we've argued in the Bulletin, and you've developed in your text and letters, only really begins to take flesh when we turn to the question of how an organisation defines itself, how it seperates itself from other organisations and how it takes up its tasks within the milieu. We think it's important to understand that a Platform isn't just a collection of seperate and isolated positions gathered together into a single document. A Platform only has meaning when it's located within a political practice. It's quite fruitless to try to assess an organisation simply on the number of positions it gets right or wrong - "6 out of 10 for the ICC, 8 out of 10 for the CWO, therefore the CWO is the pole of regroupment" (or vice versa). It's an approach which reduces a Platform to a revolutionary shopping list - "Let's see who's got the most items in stock"!

Everything we've argued, and it seems to us, the logic of your own argument, points to the conclusion that what is important is how the positions are bound together in practice. Therefore, we think it's wrong to argue that we've got the same positions as the CWO on economics, decadence, the Course of History, the state, etc. It's only true in the most formal and academic sense. In reality, for us, these positions are bound together in a political practice which is fundamentally removed from that of the CWO. For us, these positions are not programmatic in the sense that they define the CBG. They are simply majority positions which are open to debate and which don't constitute a barrier to membership. Members are quite free to argue openly and publically the opposing views. And the positions which emerge as majority positions, or organisational positions, are not seen as a sectarian cudgel to be used to "defend" ourselves from the rest of the milieu. All this is quite outside the understanding defended by the CWO (or the ICC).

If we understand that the clarity we have in any given position isn't a finished, static clarity but a living, developing one, then it has to be encompassed in an organisational practice which will allow that development to take place. We think that neither the ICC nor the CWO (however clear they might be on various specifics) have achieved that. In contrast, we think the positions we've argued and you've argued do lay the basis for achieving that. In this sense, we think you're wrong (and inconsistent) to argue that monolithism is non-programmatic and not a basis for splitting. (Although you seem to have contradicted your original statement when you argue in your most recent letter that you're not prepared to join the CWO because it would mean accepting their sectarianism.)

All of this applies with equal force to the question of the Party. Even if we had an identical position to the ICC on this, the fact that we locate it within an entirely different organisational practice demands our

independent political existence. In reality, as we've argued earlier in the letter, it's not at all clear that we do, even formally, share the ICC's position on the Party, although our general approach is obviously similar (as is your own in many respects). But the important point is that clarity on the Party's role in the class is inseperable from an understanding of organisational practice, and in this sense we are quite clearly arguing a different position from the ICC.

However, despite all the difficulties and complexities involved in being precise on an issue which has largely remained abstract, we have no hesitation in committing ourselves organisationally to the position we outlined above in the section on class consciousness. That position is a defining one of the CBG. However, even on this position (in fact, especially on this position given its largely abstract qualities) we think it essential that minority views could be argued from within the CBG. In other words we think it would be possible to integrate a comrade who held the CWO's position, provided that 1) there was an acceptance of our positions on organisation - the taking of positions, centralisation, rejection of monolithism and sectarianism, etc, and 2) acceptance of our interventionary work in the class and the milieu.

We're not implying here that we think there's no connection between the thoery of class consciousness defended by an organisation and its internal and external practice. On the contrary, we think they must form a unity and that our understanding of class consciousness reinforces and underlies our practice. One strengthens and deepens the other. But we don't think the relationship is a rigid, mechanical one, with practice deriving logically and inevitably from theory in the way that the ICC and the CWO insist. We think they have their own sectarian reasons for erecting hard and fast connections and for exaggerating the differences between themselves. As we've said, in the current period it's difficult to take the different theories at face value and know what people mean simply by what they say. While it remains abstract it's conceivable that different theories are being used to defend a similar practice. And in the last analysis, it's only practice which will reveal the reality of the theory.

Again, what's important here is an organisational framework which will not freeze the debate, but allow both the defence of clarity and the elaboration and development of that clarity. We think that what we have argued on the oganisational question begins to provide that. In this sense, we do consider ourselves to be both "another pole and an active force in working towards the formation of the world party". We are not a ginger group to the ICC but an organisation which is attempting to take on the full range of revolutionary responsibilities - ie, an active fraction within the milieu and the class, attempting to deepen revolutionary theory and to intervene on that basis in order to influence the struggle of the class and to regroup revolutionary elements. You're quite right to point out the role of the Party is a vital part of this activity, but as we've pointed out, it can't just be confined to the question of agreement or disagreement on the level of theory. For example, however clear some aspects of the ICC's theory might be, in practice they are failing to fulfil that role because they've been unable to overcome their sectarian and monolithic practice.

(...)

Cormack

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On the Class Nature of the U.C.M.

Among the correspondence received following our text UCM: Breaking from Leftism or Leftist Brake in Bulletin 4 was one from a correspondent who sought to examine the seeming evolution of the SUCM as distinct from the UCM itself towards proletarian political positions as expressed in the SUCM's English language publication Bolshevik Message. He wrote:

"Another failing of the text in my opinion is its failure to distinguish between the UCM and the SUCM The latter have clearly been influenced by communists.

Take this passage for example:

"The degeneration of the Communist Party of Russiaand its transformation into a bourgeois party which was advocating class conciliation in the name of united political fronts, and the latter completion of this opportunistic outlook, with the aid of the ruling party in China - claiming to be Communist - as far as the popular fronts and popular states; the Stalinism and Trotskyism which caused the complete plunge of the communist parties of Europe into social chauvinism under the guise

of anti-fascist fronts - which pushed the proletariat of Europe and other countries to refrain from struggling against their "own" bourgeoisie in the Second World War (with the exception of the revolutionary minorities which detatched themselves from the degenerating International, most notably the Italian Left) and the influence of of populist guerrilla movements in Latin America; all played their roles in allowing "marxism" to be taken up as a cover for petty-bourgeois democratism. (BM 2)

Is the above just a cynical manoeuvre on the part of the SUCM?.....
.....Does belief in "democratic revolutions" characterise a tendency as bourgeois?

'Revisionism': your emotions blur your vision in this section. Its simply not the case that the UCM the SUCM or KOMALA regard the CPs as anything but bourgeois. E.g. BM 2 clearly describes the Tudeh party as bourgeois. Your criticisms of the word 'revisionism' are somewhat pedantic: the use of a mere word, whilst it may give an indication of what sort of group we are dealing with, does not in any way prove their class nature. I think this is a hang over from your ICC days; the ICC are quite prepared to dismiss an argument because it contains ONE WORD which they think is misused.

You argue that the UCM get the wrong date for the decline of the Russian Revolution (1956). Firstly they are abandoning this position (see BM 2). Secondly is it true that having the wrong date for the Russian government becoming bourgeois is enough to condemn a group as bourgeois?"

The quotations from Bolshevik Message 2 came from an editorial, no less, in that issue signed by one TAGHI and its content was such as to raise hopes that the SUCM was in the process of coming to terms with the contradictions between the positions held by the UCM and those undestandings of reality resulting from contact and discussion with the communist milieu in Europe. As well as those parts quoted by our correspondent the editorial also identifies the 'revolutions' of China, Cuba and Vietnam as being:

" led by petty-bourgeois radical forces claiming to be communists."

and described leftist organisations in Iran thus

"the majority of the organisations which were calling themselves communists and working in the name of communism were not communist.... ....proof of their anti-working class nature."

Certainly there appeared to be the glimmerings of an understanding of the nature of capitalist Russia and the 'communist parties' there and the beginnings of a proletarian analysis of the Iranian Leftist groups, understandings which conflicted fundamentally with the basic understandings of UCM/Komala on these questions. Three possibilities existed. Firstly that the entire organisation was in a process of reaching communist understandings of certain central questions which would conflict more and more with the left-capitalist foundations of the group and which would force the organisation to confront reality and break with leftism. Secondly that since these tentative clutchings at consciousness seemd to be as a result of the SUCM's contact with the proletarian milieu in Europe it might be that only the SUCM might break from leftism splitting off from the UCM and Komala. Thirdly it might be that only a few individuals in the SUCM at most were reassessing the politics of their organisation Subsequent issues of Bolshevik Message were silent on the question and have given us nothing but the same leftist vision of the world that every other publication of the UCM gives us. If Taghi et alia still hold to the same views as appeared in that article they have remained remarkably silent. The UCM/Komala, or as it now is, the Communist Party of Iran, is as firmly fixed in the leftist bourgeois firmament as it ever was; a fact shown by statements on precisely the questions our correspondent raises in his letter.

The Democratic Revolution

Our correspondent asks whether belief in this marks an organisation as bourgeois. If the organisation is clear on the capitalist and bourgeis nature of the Democratic revolution then the answer must be YES. Whatever they may believe and say about their committment THEREAFTER to a proletarian revolution sometime in the future (Andropov would subscribe to this) the Fact that they are actively working for the replacement of the present situation with another avowedly and admittedly capitalist regime shows them, whatever they may think they are doing, to be agents for the maintenance of capitalist rule in an era where the proletarian revolution world-wide is on the agenda.

In their pamphlet 'Populism in the Minimum Programme' which is a comradely critique of the leftist group Fedaeen-e-Khalg they describe the democratic revolution thus:

"..that democracy which the proletariat fights for in the period of capitalism and in order to prepare the proletarian revolution is a bourgeois democracy that has been expanded to the last possible degree."

and again:

"..there is no need for the revolutionary proletariat to conceal the bourgeois-democratic aspect of its transitional and minimal demands,"

Of course Mao Tse Tung put it more clearly when he said

" In the stage of democratic revolution there are limits to the struggle between labour and Capital. The labour laws of the peoples republic will protect the interests of the workers but will not prevent the national bourgeoisie from

making profits or developing their industrial and commercial enterprises."

Revisionism

Our correspondent claims that the UCM is clear on the class nature of the leftists and 'revisionists.
On the contrary they are 'clear' that the leftists of the Fedaeen are comrades. In the pamphlet mentioned above they address the Fedaeen as comrades remarking on

" our admiration of the comrades."

and noting of the Fedaeens manifesto

" the 'manifesto' is expressive of a significant step on the part of the comrades towards the promotion of the agitational-propaganda method of approach of the communist forces to the mass movement."

Clearly the Fedaeen are seen as part of the communist movement. Their fault as far as the UCM is concerned is not that they are capitalists, on the contrary, it is that they disdain to present themselves openly to the masses as communists.

" the comrades regard themselves (as) a communist force but in spite of this, where they address the masses of workers and toilers to tell (them) what they say they make no claim to be communists."

This, according to the UCM is the very essense of Populism and thus represents a "deviationist outlook" within the communist movement. But not only the Fedaeen are communists. In an open letter addressed to those groups they considered part of the movement at the founding of the CPIran participation in this grouping was requested of capitalist organisations such as Vahdat-e-Komonisti,(a trotskist group),the Peoples Fedaeen and the Organisation of Peoples Fedaeen, (two Stalinist groups, it would appear), Ranjbaran,(a three worldist group) and the Labour Party of Iran,(a group of pro-Albanian stalinists). The letter is addressed to the "comrades" of all these organisations.
In Besoy - -socialism No 5 in an article devoted to the communist movement in Europe the writer after mentioning such as the ICC,PCI,GCI etc comes to:

" Amongst currents who previously supported China and Albania (who today count on the 'cultural revolution' of China as being an achievement for the world proletariat but have been seriously attempted to reconsider past deviations) we can name the 'Marxist-Leninist Party' of Germany."

and in Kargar Communist no5 page 17 we find in an interview with Forhad Besharat, a member of the SUCM-abroad, after speaking about the Italian Left saying

" Of course one cannot limit the European Communist movement to these examples. Examples such as s supporters of Albania and China (the old third line) are also in existence who have taken positive steps to improve their past deviations. Even such struggles can be found in some Trotskyist organisations."

As to the date when Russia became capitalist, Of course i is not a question of dates but a question of regimes. Lets put the real question we must ask here bluntly.

Was Stalinist Russia a proletarian regime?
Was Maoist China proletarian and did the proletariat carry out any Chinese revolution?
What was the class nature of the Russian Communist Party and State during the period of the purges and slave labour camps in which thousands if not millions perished?
What was the class nature of the Chinese,Vietnamese and Cuban Communist Parties?

in total contradiction to what Taghi said in BM2 the UCM, Komala amd the newly formed Communist Party of Īran answers and continues to answer YES to the first two questions and PROLETARIAN to the latter two.
There can be no doubt as to the class nature of the UCM In retrospect Taghi was a lone voice who would appear now to be silenced as the CP(Iran) takes up its position more clearly in the left wing of Iranian capitalist factions in its alliance with other bourgeois factions such as the Kurdish Democratic Party and its defence of the Iran/Iraq war when they say:

" participating in the war will only mean that workers have defended their revolution against the war of the capitalists."

Thus Lenin and the Bolsheviks in February 1917 should have continued to support the Provisional Government since Germany continued its offensives against Russia and threatened to defeat the February Revolution.

SUMMING UP

It should be clear therefore that our original assessment of the UCM as yet another variant of left Maoist bourgeois ideology continues to be validated from their own writings. The 'editorial' in BM2 seems to have been but an aberration which stood out in stark contradiction to the norm. If there are Indeed any members of the UCM or SUCM who still seek to come to grips with the anti-working class nature of the politics of the UCM we can but repeat what we said in Bulletin 4

" Any genuine proletarian militants within it should get out as soon as possible. This decaying maoist corpse has no life in it and never will."

Soqman

communist bulletin

Debate between the I C C and the C W O - 11 February 1984.

An Open Letter to the Participants

It would be unfraternal of our organisation, the Communist Bulletin Group, not to welcome today's debate between the ICC and the CWO. The question of class consciousness is one which rightly exercises all revolutionaries in a period when the worsening of capitalism's crisis and the mounting attacks of the bourgeoisie are not being matched by an equal response from the working class - and when the forces of the revolutionary movement remain pitifully small. The position which revolutionaries hold on class consciousness has profound implications for their view of the role of communist organisations. Either we believe that the proletariat's great strength is its capacity to develop a revolutionary consciousness under the hammer blows of the crisis, in which case the isolation of revolutionaries can be overcome in the future; or we do not, in wh ch case we see the revolutionary party as the sole repository of communist understanding and we are exposed to the problems of substitutionism, activism, or localism.

But if this is a subject of profound importance to all revolutionaries we feel entitled to ask why this meeting takes the form of a debate between two organisations. Are these the only two revolutionary groups in Britain? In particular, why was our group, the CBG, not invited to participate?

Recently the ICC published its "Address to Proletarian Political Groups". The CBG responded wholeheartedly to its call for "a systematic work of fraternal debate and confrontation between proletarian political forces". It appeared to echo many of the concerns we had expressed in the pages of the Bulletin: the necessity of groups to discuss their differences openly, and not to allow those differences to become sectarian barriers to co-operation. The ICC's response to our reply can be found in the latest issue of the International Review. In this piece the ICC repeat a number of accusations against the CBG which we have repeatedly denied, then make these smears the excuse for calling for the dissolution of the CBG, denying that it is a part of the revolutionary milieu, and refusing any discussion with us. They conclude that we "got the wrong address". In this months issue of World Revolution an article called "A Reply to some Replies" the "systematic work of denigration" is continued. Here they say that we cannot be taken seriously until we pay back to the ICC money which they claim we owe them. This is something new in the revolutionary movement, the ICC can put a price on recognition as part of the proletarian milieu!

In its arrogance and tone of aggrieved indignation, this is exactly the sectarianism which we thought the ICC's Address set out to combat. While the replies to other groups which responded to their Address do not plumb the depths of their reply to the CBG, we can see the same reflex action - "accept our terms and conditions of debate or there is little point in continuing".

At least the CBG gets a distorted image of itself in the publications of the ICC. Readers of the CWO's press will search in vain for any mention of our organisation.

Their sectarianism expresses itself in a determination not to admit publicly to our existence. This omission contrasts with their behaviour in private. We have had correspondence and meetings with the CWO and invitations to their public meetings, and even to their contact and educational meetings. The latest issue of Workers Voice reprints a leaflet produced for a NALGO day of action. The CWO fail to mention that this leaflet was only produced because the CBG responded to a request to duplicate it and a CBG member helped in its distribution. Yet when we recently suggested a joint leaflet on the wave of redundancies now taking place in Central Scotland, the CWO refused.

Organisation

In spite of these attempts at our political assassination, the CBG will continue to press the necessity for debate and co-operation between revolutionaries. In an aside the ICC accuse us of rejecting any coherence on organisation. They are wrong. What we have rejected is an organisational practice rooted in the period of counter-revolution, a period when the most basic principles had to be defended by small groups leading a precarious existence. That same practice is still alive in the milieu today with organisations carrying on discussions in the language of accusations and insult and exclusion from conferences, seeing any disagreements within their own group is seen as a threat to its existence and stifling any public expression of those disagreements.

What we have rejected is the arrogant assumption that

any one group has a monopoly on clarity and that other groups in the revolutionary movement have to capitulate to its position before any regroupment can take place. What our reading of the history of the last revolutionary wave tells us is that the activity of the class, the only arbiter in many of the questions which divide us now, will force all groups to re-examine their most basic assumptions. The future Party of the international proletariat will not be the ICC or the CWO writ large. Instead it will represent the widest possible regroupment of revolutionary forces based on a resolution of of the issues left over from the last revolutionary wave. In the meantime it is a duty of all revolutionaries to take other's positions seriously and subject them to fraternal and open debate and not to ignore or misrepresent them or demand the disappearance of their organisations.

Finally a word on intervention. Whenever we have proposed joint interventions with the ICC or the CWO we have been met with a blank refusal. And yet if interventions are not merely symbolic acts, if leaflets are not just for the internal consumption of the milieu, if we actually want to change the course of the class struggle, then they demand the widest possible distribution. Given the scarce resources of the revolutionary movement it is surely criminal to refuse to co-operate in this with other groups on the grounds that our purity might be compromised. In the end it is only intervention in the class struggle which enables our analyses and positions to be put to the test and to resolve our debates and discussions.

The Communist Bulletin Group

Communist Bulletin Group
Our Platform

published in Bulletin 4 copies of which are still available from the group address at BOX 85, 43 CANDLEMAKERS ROW.EDINBURGH. SCOTLAND. UNITED KINGDOM.

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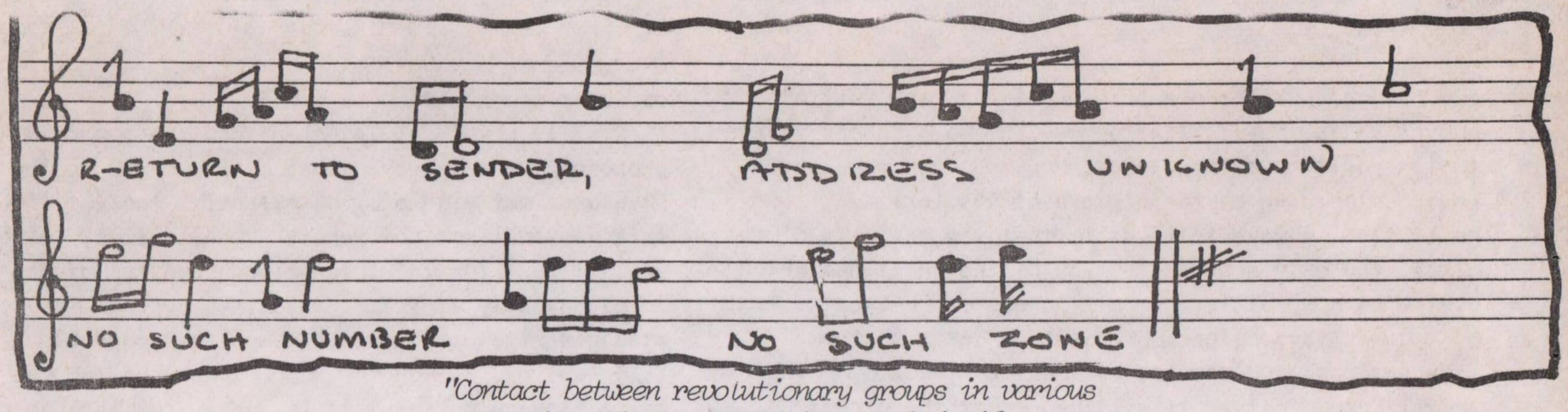


"Contact between revolutionary groups in various countries, the confrontation of their ideas, organised international discussions with the aim of seeking a reply to the burning problems raised by historical evolutions - such work is far more fertile, far more attached to the masses than hollow agitation."

So wrote Internationalisme in 1946 ("The Task of the Hour") quoted in International Review 32 page 25.

Thirty seven years later, in a different political situation the International Communist Current apparently echoed these sentiments in addressing itself to the fragmented revolutionary milieu:

"It is a question of establishing a conscious cooperation between all organisations, not in order to carry out hasty artificial regroupments, but to develop a will and an approach which centres its attention on a systematic work of fraternal debate and confrontation between political forces." ("Address to Proletarian Political Groups" in International Review 35 page 31)

In the event the reality of the ICC's "Address" falls far short of the rhetoric. The full extent of the ICC's failure to match up to its fine words is made apparent in its "Answer to the Replies" in International Review 36; text which, far from opening up a dialogue in the movement is clearly just self-justifying cant

The Communist Bulletin Group, believing that the ICC were serious in their "Address" to the revolutionary milieu, responded in a fraternal manner, recognising (as we thought the ICC did) the immaturity and weakness of the movement. (See Bulletin No.5,pp24-25.) At the time we were aware of the sectarianism which was rampant in the ICC but we recognised that every effort must be made to work with even the most hidebound of communist organisations. Being part of a large heterogeneous movement we cannot, in a dilletante fashion, pick and choose our companions in struggle. In practical action the ICC failed even to recognise the implicit content of their fine words. It even failed to answer our "Response" in a politically honest fashion, preferring the technique of the'Big Lie'.

Once again, like a Stalinist propaganda machine, it trundles out the apparatus of deliberate and systematic falsification of history. It accuses the CBG of being an organisation which was founded on the theft of material belonging to the ICC. This is not the first time that the Current has flung this accusation in our face and it probably wont be the last, but the movement is larger than the ICC and we must let it judge. In Bulletin No. 4 in "An Open Letter to the ICC" we stated publically our position on material which was in the possession of the CBG and which had formerly been in the hands of the Scottish section of World Revolution. In the letter, as we had done on numerous previous occasions, we invited the ICC to arrange how they would collect their material from us. The ICC preferred to stay mute, preferring vilifications and lies, techniques so often used by bourgeois factions, but wholly alien to the proletarian spirit. The offer remains open.

On the other hand it is clear that the Current has responded to our intention to hold on to personal copies of the Internal Bulletin. But this is not done in the fashion of reasoned political argument rather the self-hypnotic form of the litany: "stolen", "stolen","stolen". If only they understood their own rhetoric:

"Can you catch some shameful disease by taking part in the political discussion going on in the proletarian milieu? Is the confrontation of political positions a luxury, an annexe to 'normal' activities..."

("Answer to the Replies" in International Review 36)

Rhetorically the ICC answer No, but practically, give a resounding Yes! Internal Bulletins are part of the life-blood of both individual militants and the movement at large. The ideas expressed in them, the polemics and the advances in positions are not the private property of individuals or organisations. They form part of the base upon which future advances are developed. For this reason we reject any claim that the ICC makes upon them.

"Excommunications, calumny, imposed silence, such are the methods which are substituted for explanations, discussions and ideological confrontation."

Internationalisme wrote this in 1947 (reprinted in International Review 34 p.19), directing their comment at the I.C.P.; it could as well be aimed at the ICC today. At the end of the day the movement will judge the posturing of the Current and its attacks on the CBG. Let the movement recognise that it was the ICC which set out to physically intimidate individuals (with gangs travelling the country to extract its "property" and allegiance) but who also systematically set about the destruction of a militant by charging him with being an agent of the state, a circumstance which they now so coyly describe as the 'troubled waters of the Chenier affair'. We do not at the same time excuse the actions of some comrades who are now members of the CBG who threatened a proletarian organisation with the intervention of the state - this mistake has been recognised and such actions unconditionally repudiated by the CBG. Let the ICC do the same now, give up the lie and acknowledge past and present mistakes.

The ICC make much of 'defending the proletarian milieu. But can this defence be based on the practice of physical intimidation, character assassination and the stealing of individuals' possessions in lieu of the claimed property of the ICC? What the comrades of the Current fail to realise is that particular types of activity are, by definition, unacceptable to the proletarian movement. Their tactics, just as were threats to involve the police, are not worthy of a proletarian group and squarely belong to the world of bourgeois gangs. The ICC might, by whipping up hysteria among its members, succeed in producing a tight organisation. But this is not to defend the proletarian movement - quite the contrary. It undermines the movement, building, as it does, a group on the bodies of destroyed militants within it. Producing a membership stamped with "obedience, cretinism and servitude" (Internationalisme "The Concept of the Brilliant Leader" in International Review 33.)

Having screamed the Big Lie about the CBG the ICC comfortably settles back and draws the conclusion that the CBG has put "itself outside the proletarian milieu and deserves the ostracism it gets". We are told that until the time we understand the "fundamental questions of the defence of the political organisations of the proletariat" we will remain outside the proletarian milieu. Although the whole argument against us if flawed, being based on a lie, the abstract statement is correct and a good principle to work from: organisations cannot operate within the proletarian movement if they base their activity upon the physical intimidation and the theft of other groups' resources. Ostensibly this is the reason for the CBG's so-called ostracism. Unfortunately the central organs of the ICC have not informed its British Section of this principle. We find that World Revolution are a bit more pragmatic and are more concerned with that universal expression of capital:Money.

For WR it is cash-in-hand which establishes the credentials of an organisation. The CBG, they say, will continue to be a non-proletarian organisation until it "coughs up all the money it still owes us."

The ICC has certainly travelled a long way from the day when it debated at length the problem of the degenerat of the revolution in the Twenties and Thirties.Formerl and correctly, they considered organisations to have left the proletarian milieu in the light of their relationship to major events effecting the class such as the policy of 'Socialism in one Country', and taking sides in Capitalist wars such as in Spain 1936 and the imperialist World War of 1939-45. No longer do such issues stand as those which help define the class nature of an organisation. The new class line is : the payment of so-called back dues.

This is the sorry conclusion which now haunts the British Section of the ICC, an organisation which must surely be made up of the 'living dead' of the proletarian movement.

And what of the rest of the "Answer to the Replies", how does the rest of the movement fare?

Not too well. All other responses are characterised as "knee-jerk reflexes".

Not that we are out of sympathy with many of the political points made about the organisations concerned. Our concern, however, is that criticisms in the "Answer" are used to close down debate rather than open it up. The fact that we disagree with other elements within the communist movement should not, must not, blind us to the fact that points of contact between groups is of overriding importance - there is a community of interest in the milieu.

One example of how the ICC snatches at the slightest opportunity to avoid contact is the way in which it refuses to allow the CWO and Battaglia to attend its Congresses. The ICC, the self-proclaimed "most intransigent communist element" in the milieu, refuses on the grounds that the CWO and Battaglia sabotaged the International Conferences. This is true, but it is no reason to act in like manner and refuse direct work with them. As we said at the beginning communist groups cannot pick and choose as dillitantes, or act like spoiled children who must be indulged their every whim. What value a 'dialogue' when all that is meant by that is that unless you all agree with me there is nothing we can say. The communist movement is not a mirror which reflects exactly the concerns of the ICC, or any other group, nor can it be. By its very nature it is heterogeneous around a central core of positions.

As the ICC says "talk is cheap", practice is more difficult. They tell us that the time is not right for calling for new International Conferences. First they say, the lessons of the failure of the first ones must be absorbed. But the major failure was that the Conferences were set up as confrontational enterprises and were not founded upon previous fraternal activity. Indeed the way to new conferences can only be built upon this, otherwise they simply exist as formal organisational propositions. The activity found in conferences, if they are to have a sound base, is an extension of earlier practices which include not only polemics but concrete interventions such as joint leafletting. The ICC is not alone in its attitude to such activity; generally the movement is beset by mistrust and competition; but all is not bleak. Just as the working class has been able to rise above defeats and divisions so too can the communist milieu. This the CBG holds hard to and continues to work towards its realisation in the unification of the movement.

Ferguson

Middle East
the Carnage Continues

The first part of this article appeared in Bulletin 5 copies of which can still be obtained from us.

PART TWO.

The Lebanon was to be the core area of the confrontation between both the petty states and the two blocs in the late Seventies and up to today. The various bourgeois factions in the Lebanon, Sunni, Shiite, Druze, Orthodox, Maronite etc. had been in armed confrontation for some years as the cutting up of the national cake was still based on a distribution of power and rake-offs between the various 'Godfathres' reflecting factional strengths as they had existed in 1934. The intrusion of the Palestinians, thrown out of Palestine and then out of Jordan, completely disrupted the divvy-up of the Lebanon. With the Palestinians seeking to create a state within a state in the country and both Israel and Syria seeking to 'balkanise' the area in order to better their strategic position, the country rapidly fell apart as the various factions sought to better their position in a general free-for-all which allowed the Syrians to intervene at first and for the Israelis to invade on the pretext of expelling the PLO and so to gobble up the southern part of the country AND to deal with Arafat once and for all.

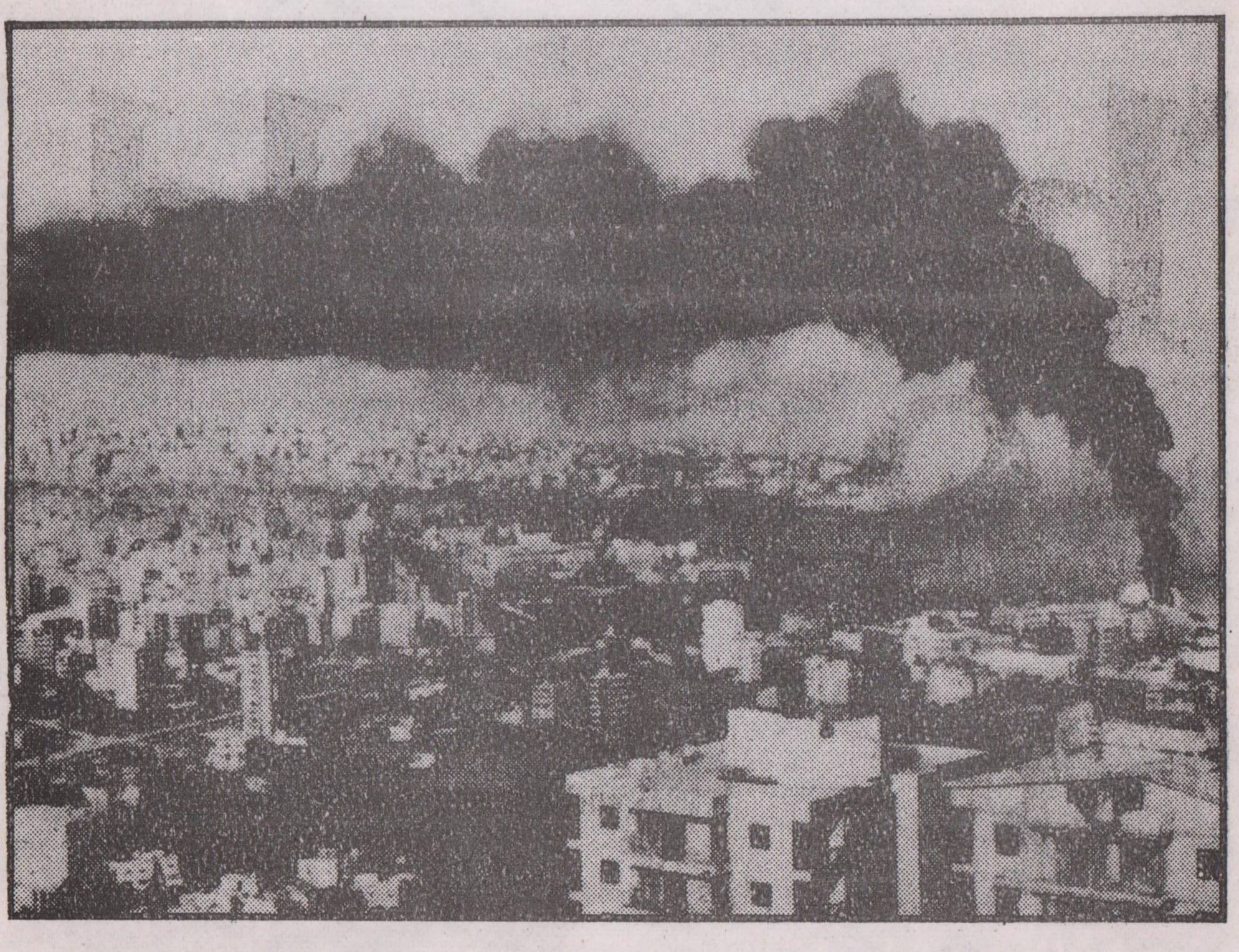
The Americans, however, had bigger fish to fry. Whatever their clients own plans were, the US clearly sought to smash the military power of the PLO by means of the Israeli stick so much the better to force them to accept the US carrot. With their military potential destroyed the PLO, under the already suborned Arafat, would have no alternative but to drastically reassess their position and become a Saudi backed lackey with only a political role to play. The very day that the last PLO fighters were being evacuated from Beirut the Fez summit were duly discussion the 'Jordanian option' for the complete emasculation of the Palestinian efforts to regain their homeland and the creation of a new homeland east of the Jordan under the rule of King Hussein funded by Saudi oil money.

BEIRUT BURNS 1. The Israelis pound the city

Having 'captured' the PLO and smashed those elements like the PLA, under Syrian tutelage, only those tiny 'Nasirite' fractions allied to Gadafi would be left opposing the sensible Jordanian option. (which incidentally was also seen as a means whereby Egypt could creep back into the Arab fold). This would leave the Syrians smashed militarily and politically isolated, their Russian backers having clearly failed to aid them when the Israeli forces attacked and defeated them when they invaded Lebanon. They would be forced to agree to a mutual withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli forces after a suitable period of time to allow a strong Maronite dominated state to be created to guard the northern flank of Israel, to police the Syrians and to discipline the muslim factions.

And it certainly seemd that the scenario was fated for absolute success. The Israelis duly attacked, smashed not only the PLO but wiped out the Syrian airforce with little loss and thrust the Syrian army, with huge losses back up the Bekaa valley. The remnants of the PLO lay trapped in Beirut and though the Israelis wanted to flatten the city in an attempt to annihilate them, wiser counsels prevailed, citing the experience of Warsaw in 1944 and political expediency. Arafat and his troops were forced into a deeply humiliating evacuation, under Israeli supervision. Gemayel jnr. after the removal of his truculent elder brother by 'fortuitous' assassination, was elected president, a good start was made on the creation of an army to ensure that when the Israelis and Syrians withdrew a strong maronie state would fill the gap. The Russians, unable to help Assad, were utterly huniliated and all seemed set for the Syrians to see sense, accept Saudi gold, and change sides like the Egyptians.

So what went wrong. For this is certainly not what happenned. Basically the Russians got their act together in no uncertain manner and promptly began pouring materiel and funds into the region. They rebuilt the Syrian army and air force in record time and installed their most up to date surface to air missiles to avoid a repetition of the slaughter of the Syrian Airforce and, it is rumoured, have placed their latest surface to surface missiles, capable of hitting, if not Tel Aviv itself, then certainly northern Israel and the Atomic reactor on the Jordan; missiles which, furthermore, have a capability of taking nuclear warheads. Through Syria they funded every likely anti-Maronite faction in the Lebanon to the extent that the grouping opposing the Maronites not only includes such previously pro-western and pro-Israeli factions as the Shiites and the Druze, the latter, a faction which had previously been utterly hostile to the Syrians, (in no small measure due to the slaughter of Druze officers of the Syrian army by Assad after their part in the retreat from the Golan in the 1973 war) and friendly to the Israelis who use the Druze extensively in their internal security services for



BEIRUT BURNS 2. The Shiite Amal shell the Green Line

such mundane tasks as interrogation and torture, much as the Gestapo used the Ukrainians in WW2.

The Syrian line was, of course, to support these factions in their attempts to redistribute the wealth and power of the Lebanon in their favour and it is a measure of the success of this tactic that recent days have seen the final evacuation of American troops from Beirut, the collapse of Maronite power in the south and the suppliant visit of Gemayel to Damascus

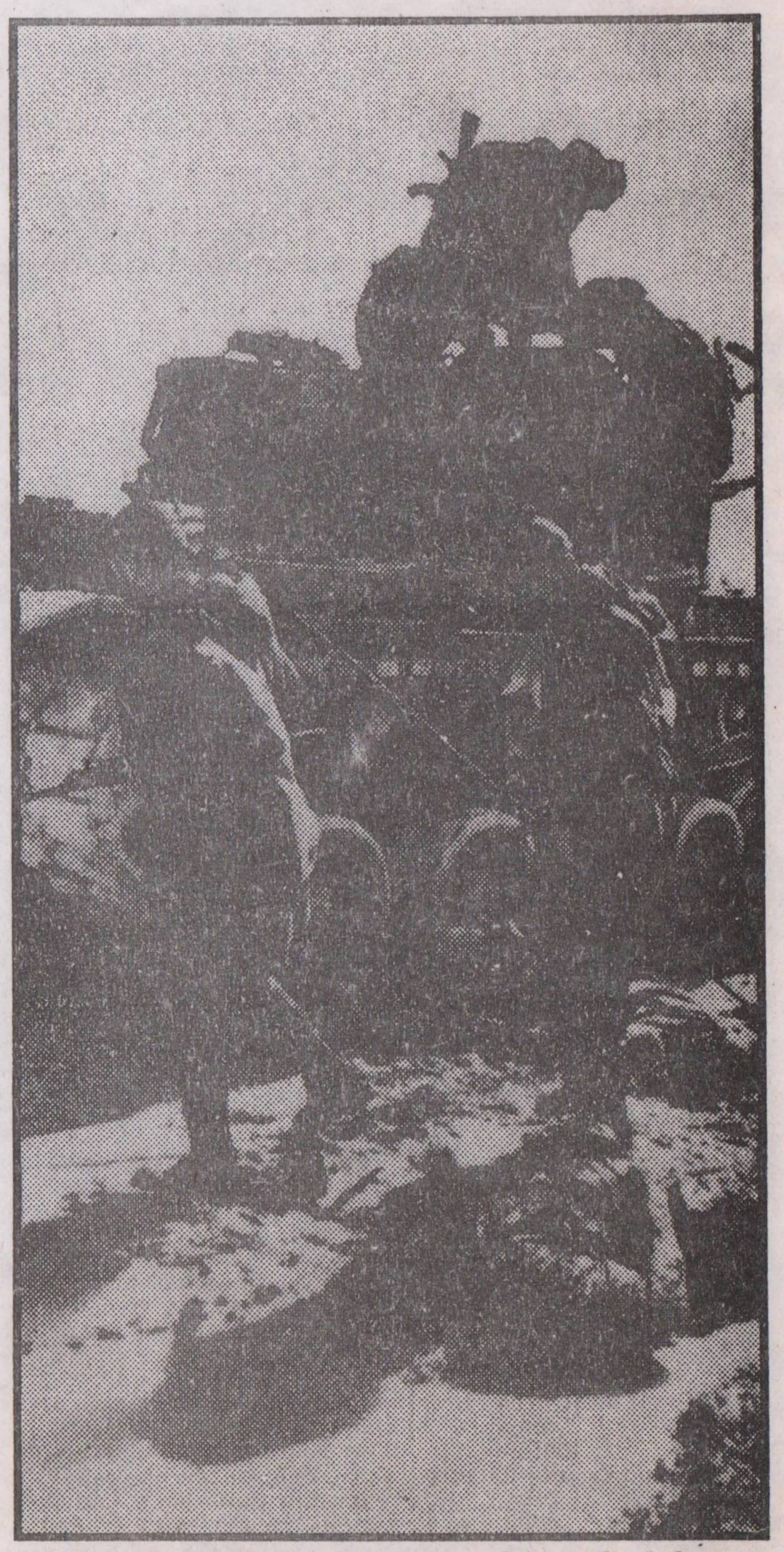
The strong Maronite state sought by the Americans has been proven a non-starter. This has left the Israelis high and dry since they, because of severe economic difficulties at home, want to get the hell out of it but see the vaccuum being filled, not by Haddad or the Maronite dominated army but by the PLO now rearmed by Syria and filtered back into the Israeli border area. For far from forcing the PLO under Arafat to see sense, and be led to the castration of a desert concentration camp in the deserts of Jordan, the Syrians persuaded the bulk of the PLO fighters, even including such Al Fatah veterans as Abu Musa to ditch Arafat and take the PLO, almost in toto, into the Syrian camp.

Syria was thus able to stave off efforts to make her evacuate Lebanon until her surrogates had taken power by the cunning inclusion of the reciprocal evacuation of the Golan heights by Israel in the discussions with the US and while Assad talked his PLO allies trapped Arafat in Tripoli forcing him into a second, even more humiliating, evacuation The next step, delayed for a time by the existence of the multi-national force in the city and the US fleet offshore, was to let loose the Shiite and Druze militias on the army which promptly split asunder into sectarian pieces and evaporated as a military unit. The Druze and Shiite Amal swept into Beirut capturing West Beirut with barely a struggle and eliminated Maronite influence from southern Lebanon in a matter of days. The US plan for the domination of the country lay in ruins.

This, of course is not to say that they have given up. They are nothing if not resourceful and devious. They are more than aware that their previous policy lies tatters, (their sacking of almost the entire corps of diplomats responsible for implementing the plan shows that) and are currently seeking to implement yet another carrot/stick strategy. While off the coast of Beirut lies an armada which, though short on manpower, has the enormous total of 300, some say 400 planes (we may compare the number with current NATO assessments that on day 1 of WW3, 600 NATO planes will face 700 Soviet ones in Western Europe), backed up by the possibility of the arrival of a Rapid Redeployment force within 72 hours, the Israelis are seeking to make their presence felt in southern Lebanon, by thrusting north. So much for the stick. The carrot consists of an increasingly desperate attempt to buy off the muslim factions such as the Shiites and Druze. In the short term this seems fated to end in failure but in the long term there is a distinct chance of success. For even Assad is now seen to be unwilling to allow Gemayel to go completely to the wall, leaving power effectively in the hands of Jumblatt and Berri, two leaders who have no 'natural' loyalty to an Alawite leader who increasing speaks of Syria and Lebanon as one 'nation' divided into two countries.

And so Gemayel has spent the past two weeks shuttling back and forth between Beirut and Damascus trying to concoct a deal which will retain him in power, under the tutelage of Assad, but safe from the unwelcome attentions of Jumblatt, Chamoun, Berri and Franjieh.

So far, for Reagan the whole affair has been a disaster. And so as the possibilities for success in the lebanon disappear, for the time being at any rate. US eyes are increasingly drawn to attempts to recover their power and prestige outwith the



Druze fighters inspect a tank captured from the Lebanese Army

immediate area. Thus the American attempts to ensure a rapprochement between Hussein and Arafat and, via the Saudis still, to lure Assad away from the Russians. (in the same way that Nixon recovered all the US had lost in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos by 'capturing' China.

Overall however the situation in Lebanon has been downgraded by all the great powers as their eyes turn increasingly eastward to the mass slaughter being perpetrated on the Tigris. While a clear cut victory for either Iraq or Iran seems unlikely (and the US bloc would certainly profit from such a situation) the situation there is fraught with danger, what with SS 12's poised to destroy the Oil installations in the Gulf and Khomeini calmly sending thousands upon thousands of untrained children to be slaughtered on

battlefront, sacrifice paid by Khomeini's troops.

Iraqi minefields for the sake of martyrdom. Should Iran, who only two days ago cut the vital road from the Gulf to Baghdad, smash through to that city and topple the Iraqi regime then the situation throughout the Gulf states would worsen drastically, and should Iraq foil the attack or in extremity blow up the oil supplies of Iran forcing the massive Western armada now assembled off Qatar to intervene all hell would break loose. Even now the Saudis are desperately building up their forces, the Jordanians are loudly claiming the right to intervene anywhere in the Middle East and the Russians are pusuing a military solution to their Afghan problem in the hope of releasing those much needed divisions for their southern front.

Even if the worst scanarios are not enacted the continuing world crisis of the capitalist economy, east and west and the resultant increasing rivalry between the blocs will ensure that the Middle East will continue to play a crucial role in the butchery that characterises the decay of capitalism.

Key Ideological Weapons of the Bourgeoisie

The physical weapons of the bourgeoisie are all too evident in the Middle East. Every newsreel and newspaper photograph disppays some part of the hundreds of ships and planes, the thousands of tanks and missiles or the thousands of assault rifles that litter the region. However such tools of the bourgeoisie are in themselves useless unless they can, either directly or through their local compradore regimes, persuade the populations of the region to slaughter each other in the defence of world capitalism, east or west.

It is therefore the ideological weapons of world imperialism, weapons whose success is measured precisely in how effectively workers and peasants can be persuaded to kill each other, which are the most important and an understanding of which is crucial if we are to understand both how capitalism survives in the barbarism of the Middle East and how the bourgeoisie worldwide organise their assault on the consciousness of workers everywhere.

Four main ideological weapons have been utilised by capitalism in the Middle East.

1. Anti-Colonialism

Since the onset of capitalism's decadent phase at the turn of the century, its rule over the peripheral economies of the world, always brutal, has become even more vicious. Seen soley as regions and populations to be milked of resources and labour at an ever increasing rate. Throughout the Twentieth Century the peoples of the Middle East have been increasingly pauperised by agreements between the metropolitan centres of world capitalism and the local bourgeois gangs in control of the area which draw the raw materials like cotton, and latterly oil, to the industrial heartlands of capital in return for a pittance.

From its bases in Egypt and Iran at the turn of the century, Western capital, originally represented predominantly by British Imperialism penetrated and subsequently got control, of the whole region

as the Turkish Empire was dismembered after W.W.I. This manifest control of the west of the economic viability of the region set up after that war and which control continued after WW2, unscreened by mysticisms such as local autonomy or democracy, produced a reaction against that control that permeates every sector of Middle Eastern society. Anti-Western factions of the bourgeoisie in any country needed only to point to the 'unequal' treaties which exchanged the oil of the region through such organs as the Iraqi Oil Company in Iraq for pennies, or which allowed shipping the use of the Suez Canal, to lay the blame for the underdevelopment and poverty of the region and the humiliation of the inhabitants at the door of colonialist powers and colonialist relations.

Since WW2, at the very latest, the mythos that everything would be better with a local bourgeoisie in power has been a very powerful weapon in the hands of local bourgeois factions in gathering support for themselves against western backed regimes, in gaining support for an increasing dependence on that 'friend of anti-colonialism' the Soviet Union and in trying to stay in power, once there, by pointing to colonialism as the 'enemy' which defeats the nation's efforts to be free, and which, by dominating the region economically and politically, prevents the economic and social development of the entire Middle East. Such anti-colonialism was a powerful factor in the support for the coups which in the late 40's and 50's expelled the grossly subservient regimes which the west had placed in power after WW2 and Western capitalism had to adopt new strategies vis-a-vis these states, strategies which masked the true economic relationship between them - announcing commercial arrangements which 'recognised the independence' of the local economy and latterly, because of the importance to the western economy of the Gulf's oil, allowing the local bourgeoisie to play a more major role in the operation of the blocs interests in the entire region.
The oil crisis, eg. and the rise of OPEC was merely a reshuffling of the cards available to western capitalism since it served the dual purpose of seemingly excluding colonialist powers and the USA from having to intervene and fund regimes in the area and allowing the rulers of the Gulf states a role in the maintainance of western rule in the region more in line with the assets they brought to the western bloc.

All this had a direct effect on the workers and peasants of the region and was a crucial factor in diverting the legitimate antagonism of the pauperised and brutalised population away from capitalist rule in itself, the true cause of their misery, towards a choice between local and world powers, colonialist or local bourgeoisies and latterly to a choice between world blocs, which essentially is merely a choice between different exploiters and brutalisers on a world and local level, and thus away from any possibility of attention being focussed on the exploitation and brutalisation of Capitalism itself.

2. Nationalism

Going along with and feeding from anti-colonialist feeling is the second major ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie - nationalism. It acts in precisely the same manner, as an attempt to pull the wool over workers eyes by arguing that if only the 'nation' was independent and ran itself all would be hunky dory. By laying the blame for the barbarism and pauperisation of capitalism on foreign rule and foreign influence the myth that local rule would be any different leads to enciting the downtrodden populations of the area into nationalist fervour. This effectively masks the reality that local bourgeoisies are no less rapacious than supra-national ones, that the logic of capitalist decadence forces them to attack workers and peasants in the same way and with the same intensity and most importantly that in a situation of capitalist economic decay and crisis and of a WORLD system of capitalist exploitation NO local bourgeoisie can be independent, no local economy can be autonomous, all economies and states can act ONLY as part of one of the two world capitalist blocs, the only room for manoeuvre being the ability in certain circumstances to change blocs and, to a certain extent to use that possibility to seek greater aid from either or both blocs.

The forces of nationalism take many different forms in the Middle East and can be found essentially on two levels.

(a) Regional nationalism which essentially means Arab nationalism. This has without doubt been the most important nationalist force and has served capitalism faithfully since WW2 at least. It has been the rallying cry of anti-western bourgeois factions which has enabled them to mobilise millions so as to place them in power, ousting regimes too dependent on foreign powers and then keeping them in power, whatever their bloc orientation subsequently became, so long as they could convincingly claim to be acting on behalf of Arab nationalism. Where they could not, there were plenty of other bourgeois fractions waiting in the wings to divert workers wrath away from the regime in power into supplanting them with yet another nationalist grouping MORE committed to arab nationalism. In Iraq for example the revolution (sic) of 1958 placed nationalist Qasim in power at the expense of the slaughtered monarchy only to see a subsequent succession of coups by a variety of nationalist groups culminating in the present Ba'athist regime. Nationalist groupings from Nasirite Socialites, through Pan Arabists to Ba'athists managed to delude the Iraqi

population that all was needed was to expel the insufficiently nationalist group in power and place them in authority for the benefits of nationalism to be seen and enjoyed. The reality of power has, of course meant that once in power, economic reality has forced them to abandon these fantasies, (if indeed some of them ever had them) and seek economic and military aid from one or other of the blocs in exchange for the same subservience their predecessors exhibited.

On the Periphery 1.

The present situation in the Sudan exemplifies the effect of the decay of the world Capitalist economy on the minor states of the Middle East.

The defection of Egypt after Yom Kippur had as a corollary the closer integration of the Sudan, the largest state in Africa, into the strategic plans of the West with especial regard to its strategic position bordering the Soviet client states of Ethiopia and Libya and latterly as a vital touchdown point for the US Rapid Deployment Force in any move to defend the Gulf.

However the Sudanese economy is in ruins. Almost $8 billion is owed to external banks and the government cannot even keep up the interest payments. Attempts last year by Numeiri to follow I.M.F. directives and remove the subsidies on petrol and sugar provoked widespread uprisings throughout the country and this summer there were further serious demonstrations against the spiralling cost of living. Despite the fact that Numeiri has, over the years managed to exile practically all sections of bourgeois opinion opposed to him even his remaining supporters like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Army are now openly criticising his economic policies: policies which of course are not his but his bankers. They have warned of a Liberian style military coup brewing in the deeply divided army and there have been a number of military mutinies already this year and the dismissal of many officers by the regime. Only recently Egyptian and US intelligence uncovered yet another military coup. being plotted and the present regime does not look set for much longer of a stay of execution.

(b) There have also been attempts to institute a nationalism based on the petty state itself. The most successful have been in areas outwith the arab heartlands among such nations as the Persians and the Turks and even the Egyptians, for no matter how hard Nasir claimed Egypt as an Arab state, the ease with which Sadat took the country out of the orbit of Arab Nationalism into the western bloc shows how weak a concept 'Arab' was to the fellahin of the Nile. Such nationalism is also powerful in the non arab minorities within predominantly arab states as the effects of such on minorities as varied as the Druze in Lebanon and the Kurds clearly shows. Within the arab world itself however such a concept of state nationalism has had little effect as the joke of Hussein's search for a Jordanian nation out of thin air has shown. Similarly the western attempt to create a Lebanese nation has foundered on the multiplicity of races, creeds, religions and 'families' in that land. Where within the arab lands it has been successful, as with the foisting on the arabs of Palestine of the concept of a Palestinian nation, it has needed the physical expulsion from a particular area of the mass of its inhabitants to focus attention on that grouping so as to be able to convince them of their spurious nationality. It is precisely on such a basis that the PLO have managed to latch (one could say leech) onto the plight of the Arab population of Palestine as they have been shunted from camp to camp, from Israeli massacre to Jordanian massacre to Maronite massacre to PLO massacre.

In all its forms therefore and especially in the form of Arab nationalism, in all its varieties, Nationalism has been one of the most important and powerful tools of bourgeois fractions for turning workers and peasants in the region against one another and for mobilising them into capitalist armies to slaughter each other in the interest of one capitalist faction or another, one capitalist bloc or another for the maintainance of capitalism per se.

3. Religion

Religion and mysticism is the third major ideological weapon in the armoury of capitalism in the area. At one level this can be seen as an extension of both anti-colonialism and nationalism pulling together all the different peoples of the region under the ideological validation of Islam, for instance, in an assertion of the 'Muslim Identity' against foreign, non muslim forces. At another level it can be the justification for any of the innumerable small sects which litter the region, muslim and others, to seek to identify themselves as different from others 'by Gods will' and to give divine justification for either their plight or their right to act as they wish, having God's blessing. Thus while at one level we have calls for the unity of all Muslims in an assertion of Arab nationalism (say) we have sects like the Maronitse, Sunni, Shi'ites, Alawites et alia being used by bourgeois factions in their attempts to climb to the top of the pile

and to carve out little principalities for themselves or to hold power in existing states with the support of their co-sectaries against all others.Thus Alawite Assad in Syria holds power by balancing the various religious sects in the country one against the other and by arming to a man those of his own religious persuasion as a military force in defence of his regime. For similar reasons a number of regimes have in recent years gone, like Numeiris Sudan,a sudden conversion to the traditional values of Islam in an effort to stave off criticism from opponents who hope to gain support from militant Islam and to attract support from such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

With only small proletariats and a large peasantry and petit bourgeoisie the attraction of a return to a mythical golden age before capitalism is enormous. One need only look at how the uprising against the Shah in Iran was diverted by such religious idiocies in the persons of Khomeini and the Mullahs,despite the existence of a large and combative working class in Iran,to see the strength of such ideologies, and the hold they have over thousands in the absence of a strong working class with a forward looking answer to the domination of capitalism. Islam in particular also allows a potent identification of your enemies, the real reasons for your plight, typifying them not merely as bad leaders, dupes of the West or East or exploiters,or even foreigners,but describes them as a direct emanation of demonic forces, as the Devil in human guise taking the characterisation of the source of your troubles out of the realm of politics altogether,in characterisations of the USA and USSR as Greater Satan and Lesser Satan, into the realm of 'pure evil' with the encouragement of martyrdom et alia as a raison d'etre for fighting the Mullah's enemies.

4. The Bogeyman Syndrome

The fourth weapon leads directly from this attitude. Just as in the Twenties Anti-Bolshevism was a potent weapon in the hands of the European and American bourgeoisie and just as in the Thirties and Forties Anti-Fascism was an equally, if not more powerful weapon,so too the mirror image of the 'Ultimate Good', the 'Ultimate Evil', responsible for for all the problems that beset society and for all the ills that beset the people, is a potent weapon in the bourgeois armoury. For the vast majority of the populace of the Middle East the move from anti-colonialism to anti-Zionism was but a short step, a step nurtured by the arab bourgeoisie of the area in their move to an anti-Israeli stance. This, in effect,took the concept of'the enemy' to a more metaphysical level and was used to persuade workers and peasants in ther arab countries to endure greater hardships, to allow their masters to devote more and more resources for war and to accept greater and greater devastation of the region in the fight against the Zionist intruders.

At an even higher level of mystification,at the religious level,the demonic forces of Zionism were blamed for seeking to rule the entire Middle East in the same manner as they had captured Palestine, to place the Faithful under the heel of Satan. Such attention has been placed on Zionism by Arab regimes and religious figures in recent years that, in a manner similar to the use of anti-Fascism during WW2,fear of this bogeyman

On the Periphery 2.

Over on the eastern edge of the region the effects of imperialist rivalry and capitalist decay are having their effect on Afghanistan.

The Afghan bourgeoisie, rarely in control of more than a fraction of the country, the bulk of this mountainous land still being in the hands of tribal patriarchs, had sought aid from both USSR and USA during the 50's and 60's to support their stillborn capitalist economy.

In 1973 Daoud had overthrown the impotent monarchy and had to engender support from within the country by a loud anti-Pakistani furore. The pro-Soviet faction in the army under Takari overthrew Daoud in 1978 and the USA in an attempt to frighten the Afghan bourgeoisie had refused economic aid so as to frighten them back into the western fold. This had, in fact, the very opposite effect, driving the Afghan regime further into the arms of the Russians. The USA in fury cut off all support and proceeded to arm the hill tribes in the hope of toppling the regime.

Since then in a scenario reminiscent of the US involvement in Nicaragua, the Afghan regime has been forced into a never ending struggle for control of the country against western backed tribesmen, a military effort which as well as driving them further and further into the arms of the USSR has brutalised and destroyed whatever semblance of order and peace ever existed in the country.

Failure to beat the tribesmen meant that Takari was ousted by Amin who was, predictably more pro-Soviet and when he failed he in turn was overthrown by Karmal while on a trip seeking more support from the Russians in Moscow. This last coup allowed the Russians into the country in force to try to turn the tide of collapse of their clients. And so the slaughter continues.

serves to mask and allow Arab regimes to exploit the people of the region in an even more barbaric manner so long as they can typify their exploitation as the fight against Zionism, the seeking after Martyrdom against Satan and his acolytes. We need only look at the ease with which Khomeini can find young Iranians and Shi'ites willing to blow themselves to bits in the streets of Beirut to see the power of such a weapon.

As we have said all these weapons are of major importance to the bourgeoisie in the Middle East in their struggle to prevent the workers and others realise the barbarism they are subjected to. The extent of the success of such weaponry is shown by the unbroken line of wars, massacres, bloodlettings, poverty, destitution and destruction that is the very history of the Middle East during the entire era of capitalist decadence. The only social class with the ability to act independently, to determine a different future for the region, able to defeat the bourgeois scheme and eliminate the bourgeoisie itself, the proletariat, are, for the most part, only a small group in most states in the region, isolated in a few urban centres and outnumbered by the mass of backward looking peasantry and the petit-bourgeoisie of the bazaar.

Yet every state in the Middle East is not like this. There is indeed one region, one capitalist state within the area where there is a large working class with a long tradition of class combativity and class struggle, one place where the working class does constitute a majority of the population and where class struggle continues even in the midst of imperialist war. And that place is Israel. For the Zionist state of Israel is not an extraeneous adjunct to the Middle East. It is an integral part of the economy of the region, an integral part of the exploitation of the region and thus is in no way absolved from the problems of the region, in no way exempted from the effects of the decay of capitalism andeconomic crisis.

So too its inhabitants are in no way exempted from the ideological offensives of the bourgeoisie. For in Israel, just as much as in every other state in the Middle East, the bourgeoisie endeavour to deflect the working class off their own class terrain, to mobilise the workers for war, to divert them from the REAL cause of the carnage - ie their own ruling class and the rule of world capitalism - to putting the blame for the situation on their neighbours, and thus on the working class of other states in the Middle East. The four ideological weapons of the bourgeoisie are as much in evidence in Israel as elsewhere in the region and have if anything even more particular validity and power here than anywhere else in the region.

A Bastion of Western Culture in a Sea of Backwardness ruled by Petty Despots."

Israel came into existence on the basis of anti-colonialism in the struggle against the British who, after WW2, sought to continue their control of the region through surrogate Arab regimes. Throughout the Fifties and Sixties great emphasis was placed by the Israeli bourgeoisie on the need to defend the state of Israel from defeat and the overlordship of medieval, if not neanderthal arab despots and as the arab states were taken over by 'leftist' nationalist regimes and came more and more under the aegis of Russia, the bogeyman of Russian imperialism and colonialism in the region was emphasised by the Israeli bourgeoisie to a population already concerned at the experience of their co-religionists in Russia itself. While in the Fifties and Sixties the fact that Nasir was employing German scientists was used by the Israeli bourgeoisie as evidence of Egypts essentially Nazi sympathies, in the Seventies the arab regimes' seeking of support from Russia was used as evidence of the anti jewish nature of Israel's enemies.

Nationalism too was a major element if not the major elemnt in the ideological campaign to castrate the Israeli working class and march it off to war in the defense of western imperialism in the region. The whole concept of Zionism and the Israeli state and its survival, the idea of a Jewish nation and its homeland is a 'godsend' to the Israeli bourgeoisie as it periodically sets Israeli workers against Arab workers, as it persuades the Israeli proletariat to accept sacrifices 'for the good of the Jewish Nation' and as it mobilises the population as the gendarme of western capitalism in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Religion, in the form of Judaism, acts thus as a religious justification of Zionism and the existence of the Jewish state of Israel. The notion that God himself has set aside this land for the Jews (wherever they actually originated) is a most powerful weapon in the hands of an Israeli bourgeoise increasingly desperate to maintain their rule in a hostile environment. As the economic situation has deteriorated they increased the volume, so to speak in this area of their ideological offensive, just as the Muslim brotherhood and the Iranian Mullahs have on the other side of the Jordan, seeking more and more as their situation becomes desperate and the veils threaten to lift from the reality of decadent capitalism, to hide the appaling reality of their rule behind a mystical justification as the chosen people of God.

Similarly the Bogeyman exists too for the Israeli bourgeoisie and has been a weapon in their hands against the Israeli worker since Israel came into being. In the Fifties and Sixties Nasir was the font of all evil, his pre-war links with the Nazis and his present links with the anti-Semetic Russians being focussed upon.

Since Nasir's death the new bogeyman has been Arafat. This personalisation of bogeymen is no accident, as the Israeli equivalent of anti-Zionism, despite fervent efforts by the Israeli bourgeoisie to promote it, has failed to capture the interest of the workers. Unable to find it the bourgeoisie have concentrated on 'evil' figures like Nasir and Arafat. The bourgeoisie have had a field day with the terrorist activities of the PLO personified in Arafat through the attacks on Israeli athletes, Entebbe, the attacks on northern Gallilee etc etc. In the absence of wars themselves they have used these local events to keep up the momentum of ideological oppression of the proletariat, to keep it in a state of acceptance of their plight by using the fear of the PLO and Arafat as a tool creating subservience to their will.

In a sense therefore the existence of the Israeli bourgeoisie and the PLO show the symbiotic relationship between these supposed foes and their dependence upon one another in maintaining their rule over their respective populations.

Therefore we can see that by the use of the same range of ideological weapons the Israeli bourgeoisie has, like its Arab counterparts, managed to divert working class dissent away from an attack on capitalism and into a mobilisation in support of their national bourgeoisies and against the enemies of that bourgeoisie in a defence of western and Israeli capitalist interests in the region.

Does this success in mobilising its proletariat for war, time after time after time,on both sides of the Jordan mean that the class struggle of workers in the Middle East has been eliminated? Not at all! Even in states where the working class is tiny and isolated, surrounded by a peasantry and petit-bourgeoisie hostile to its class struggle, the working class of the region has time and again, even in the midst of war and under the intense weight of the bourgeois ideological barrage, managed to speak out and act to defend their living standards. Thus far such acts have fallen prey, as in Iran, to the eventual diversion from the proletarian class terrain into the terrain of the bourgeoisie without however ever being eradicated.

However in Israel we do not have a small working class isolated in a relatively undeveloped capitalist economy, outnumbered by peasants and other social classes. In Israel we have an industrialised capitalist economy with a huge population of proletarians who have a long history and tradition of class combativity and defence of their living standards since the origin of Israel its self and before. This combativity of the Israeli proletariat will be crucial in the years to come as the fabric of capitalist society in the Middle East and elsewhere crumbles revealing the reality of decadent capitalism to the proletariat of the world. Even today we can see the germs of such a process. For the Israeli economy today is a shambles. With inflation regularly at 150% and more, with massive devaluations and huge price increases, with an economy surviving only on huge loans from the USA and the greater part of state's income needed to maintain its huge military services and service its existing debt the prospects for the development of class struggle look good.

While the tininess and political weakness of the proletariat in other countries has encouraged the bourgeoisie to attempt brutal repression as a means of social control for the bourgeoisie in Israel to attempt such a task would undoubtedly prove fatal. Recently we have seen a whole wave of strikes and, more importantly, a wave of struggles throughout the whole spectrum of the Israeli proletariat take place. from the hunger strikes of doctors to the violent pickets of roadmenders the workers of Israel have stated that they will not accept the collapse of their living standards, whatever the plight of the land of Israel,and its government. Thus far the Israeli bourgeoisie have managed to keep the various strikes and class actions separate from each other, a task in which they have been ably served by the Israeli trade unions, but as the crisis deepens and they, like every other bourgeoisie in the world, need more and more to attack the working class, the prospects for the struggle of the proletariat to transcend sectional barriers is good. Undoubtedly the ideological assault in the name of Israel, Zionism and Yahweh and against the Arab hordes will likewise intensify. It rests however upon the success or failure of this class struggle that the ability of the proletariat, not just in Israel but also in all of the Middle East, to join with workers throughout the rest of the world and to oppose the bourgeoisie's solution to their crisis,WW3, will be determined. The crucial step of realising that to fight on your own class terrain means opposing your own bourgeoisie and thus to join with the proletariats of the arab states will mark a major transformation not merely in the ability of the imperialist blocs to maintain their rule in the Middle East but also mark a decisive step in the transformation from inter imperialist war to class war.

One last point. These weapons of the bourgeoisie, so transparent in the starkness of the Middle East are not restricted in their use to such an area as this. We need only look around us to events in South and Central America, Indo Chine and nearer home, northern Ireland,to see that exactly

the same idelogical weapons are in use wherever the bourgeoisie act to defend their rotting system. We can point to the anticolonialism that maintains the farce of Irish Nationalism in Ulster, the divisions consciously created between Walloon and Flemish workers in Belgium, the religious justification for capitalist war in Ireland and the bogeyman of 'Communism' which has such a hold on so many sections of the American proletariat. The weapons used in the Middle East are already being tested in the metropolitan countries of world capitalism, ready to be used in like manner as the crisis deepens, to support the decaying regime of the bourgeoisie and to take us off our class terrain into the support of one set of bosses as they slaughter workers all over the globe in the holocaust they are preparing for us.

Ingram

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subscribe!

This issue of The Bulletin is the third to be produced in printed form rather than duplicated, a process we have been able to use following the purchase of an offset litho machine. This has enabled to produce the many more copies we have needed.

All this however has cost us much more money!

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NEXT ISSUE

Class Consciousness and the role of communist fractions.
Response to Tampa on the Organisation Question.
The Italian Left.
Perspectives for the Eighties.

Communist Bulletin Group

The Communist Bulletin Group locates itself within the political tradition generally known as Left Communism - that is, the revolutionary milieu which traces its origins to the left fractions which split from the decaying Third International, in particular, the German, Italian and Dutch Left.

We believe that adherence to the following positions are the defining characteristics of the revolutionary communist milieu.

Capitalism, as a mode of production, has been demonstrably decadent since the outbreak of W.W.I. and has nothing to offer now but a catastrophic cycle of crises, global war, followed by a temporary "boom" located in post-war reconstruction.

The struggle for reforms which was an integral part of the working class' fight for its own interests in the 19th Century, the period of capitalism's ascendance, is now a bourgeois diversion directed against the working class. The defence of working class interests today can only lead to the overthrow of capitalism, not its reform.

In this era any participation in the parliamentary circus of "democracy" at any level whatsoever, including the use of parliamentarism as a 'revolutionary tribune', can only be an attack on the consciousness and self organisation of the proletariat.

Today trade unions everywhere, in every guise, are capitalist weapons which attack the proletarian struggle in order to defend capitalism.

There are no progressive factions of capitalism anymore and there can be no "conditional support" for one faction against another. Therefore any form of 'united front' is an attack on the working class struggle.

Likewise 'national liberation' struggles have nothing to offer the working class except a shift of alliance from one imperialist bloc to another.

There are no "socialist" countries in the world today. Russia, China and all the other so-called "communist" states are simply a particular form of decadent capitalism which will have to be destroyed by the proletarian revolution. All the self-proclaimed 'workers parties', the CP's, the Trotskyists, etc. which provide them with support, however critical or conditional, are in reality, bourgeois parties intent on imposing their own brand of state-capitalism on the working class.

The working class, because it is a collective, exploited class without property of its own to defend, is the only class capable of carrying out the communist revolution. It can only do this by destroying the capitalist state and constituting a dictatorship of the proletariat based on the international power of the workers councils.

The revolutionary party playes an indespensible role by constituting a core of political and programmatic clarity. "hard as steel, clear as glass" which allows it to undertake the political leadership of the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat.

The C.B.G. believes that this "core" of the future party is not to be found in any single revolutionary organisation currently existing. It will emerge, hand in hand with the development of the class' own struggles, from a process of fraternal confrontation and clarification involving the whole revolutionary milieu. Therefore revolutionaries today must organise themselves in a fashion which utterly rejects the suppression of this process by monolithic structure internally and by sectarian practice externally.

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