

# communist bulletin

30p

- \* Class Struggle in Scotland  
**HiFab & Moss Morran Strikes**

## GRENADA

- \* “a lovely little war,  
short, sharp and cheap”

- \* **SPLIT in / Monolithism**  
**the C.W.O. / in the ICC**

- \* **Capitalist Carnage in**  
**the Middle East**



# Contents

<u>Class Struggle in Scotland</u> .....	page 1.
In Fife and in Easter Ross this year two bitter struggles were waged between workers and a combination of ruthless employers and Unions.	
<u>Union Negotiation Means Defeat</u> .....	page 5.
A leaflet produced by the <u>Bulletin</u> for the strike at Nigg in Easter Ross.	
<u>Tebbit and T.U.C.: In Tandem</u> .....	page 7.
The new Tory legislation is an attack on Unions by a government which does not realise that Unions are the state's shop floor police and both unions and government are on the same side <u>against</u> the workers.	
<u>Grenada. "a lovely little war, short sharp and cheap."</u> .....	page 9.
The role of the Grenadan invasion in American policy at home and abroad.	
<u>Split in the Communist Workers Organisation</u> .....	page 13.
Introduction to the splitting text of E.Mav who recently left the CWO to discuss with and work with the CBG.	
<u>On The Monolithism of the C.W.O.</u> .....	page 15.
<u>Is the ICC Tending Towards Monolithism?</u> .....	page 18.
After an extended visit to Europe when he discussed with Communist fractions in Britain, France, Belgium and Italy a comrade from Hong Kong approaches the problems of monolithism and sectarianism in the milieu.	
<u>Aire Valley Yarns</u> .....	page 23.
A short postscript to the article on this strike last issue.	
<u>Correspondence</u> .....	page 24.
Our response to the "Address to Revolutionaries" of the ICC sent to them shortly after the publication of Bulletin 4.....page 24	
Our response to the article on the CBG which appeared in WR 65.....page 25	
The CWO's response to our Open Letter which appeared in Bulletin 4.....page 27	
Letter from the CBG to the CWO of 6th September 1983.....page 27	
Letter from the CWO to the CBG of 30th September 1983.....page 28	
Our response.....page 30	
<u>Carnage in the Middle East</u> .....	page 34.
The first part of a two part article on the competition between the two blocs in the Middle East, the weapons they use against one another. Part Two, in the next issue of the Bulletin will deal with the events of the past five years and the ideological weapons the bourgeoisie uses against the populations of the Middle East.	

PLEASE SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO OUR GROUP ADDRESS. CORRESPONDENCE TO OUR FORMER ADDRESS WILL NOT REACH US. POST ONLY TO:

**box 85 43 candelmakers row edinburgh u.k.**



# Class Struggle in Scotland

## Introduction.

Its becoming a common cry these days that the working class in Britain has been passive in the face of the attacks of the crisis: accepting lay-offs, wage cuts speed-ups. And it is undeniable that working class resistance to austerity has been at a low level for the past few years. In past Bulletins we have attempted to explain this phenomenon and state it here again. The class is not defeated: what the relative quiet indicates is that the struggles of 1979/80 marked the end of a stage in the class struggle - what resulted was the realisation that austerity was the inescapable consequence of the world crisis, not just the ideological reaction of one particular faction of the state. It was no longer possible for workers to believe that it was just the greed of the bosses or bloodymindedness that stopped the bosses from coughing up: when they said they couldn't afford it they were speaking the truth!

Inevitably such a realisation has led to a period of reflection, of acceptance of austerity: if 'they' have no choice but to attack living standards, then what's the use of fighting back. Clearly we, as Communists, see very plainly that there is a point, that fighting back is crucial if the bourgeoisie are going to be prevented from dragging the world into the horrors of World War III. But equally as Communists we realise that the fight back is not dependent simply on workers listening to us - the inescapable surge of austerity itself will drive, and is driving workers back to struggle as unemployment increases, dole and wages are cut and productivity is forced up. Future struggles, and the recent strikes in France, Germany and especially Belgium suggests not too far in the future, must move to a new level: implicit in them will have to be a recognition that the 'system' is bankrupt and that continued struggles must begin to look beyond that 'system'. The myth that capitalism is eternal is crumbling.

## Moss Morran

But if a new wave of struggle still lies in the future there is still today, despite the apparent calm, evidence that the working class is not defeated. There is still bitter, though localised struggle. One example of this took place in Fife in Scotland during August of this year. On the Fife coast, opposite Edinburgh a huge oil complex containing petro-chemical plants, ethane cracker plant and oil tanker terminals is being built.

At the start of August six electricians on the Moss Morran petro-chemical plant had wages docked for refusing to comply with a national agreement on working in bad weather which had been imposed by the employers in the engineering construction industry and the main union, the Electrical, Electronic Plumbing and Telecommunications Union

(EEPTU). Immediately 400 electricians working for Matthew Hall engineering on the Shell site walked out in sympathy and pickets persuaded some of the remaining 3,600 to stay out too. (This, by the way was not the first strike at the Shell site - in July 300 pipe fitters had staged a week long unofficial strike in sympathy with 250 colleagues involved in a demarcation dispute at the adjacent Esso ethane cracker plant.) The EEPTU immediately condemned the dispute and ordered the electricians back to work.

Two days later however, with Union/Management threats still being ignored, 200 men employed by Lumas at the Esso cracker plant began unofficial strike in sympathy. At the end of the first week the 400 electricians were sacked - an act which led to 140 men employed by Watson Norie at the Braefoot tanker terminal and 6 pipefitters walking out in sympathy next day. Despite continued threats from unions and management (the Esso strikers were threatened with the sack) the strikes held firm and indeed numbers were swelled by 300 welders and pipefitters employed by John Brown Engineering at the £700,000,000 petro-chemical complex. Faced with such widespread strike action Matthew Hall capitulated three days later, all the 400 electricians were taken back and the original six were fully compensated for their docked wages. At this point the EEPTU, realising that it had to do something quickly to regain some kind of credibility on the site, jumped in and claimed it was seeking compensation for its members for their time out! And this from the union which throughout the dispute was haranguing workers to return to work!

The lessons of this strike are clear for all workers - it is class solidarity that wins fights. And solidarity today can only be expressed in joint action. Declarations of sympathy mean



nothing, whip-rounds for cash support mean nothing, workers on strike confront bosses behind whom stands the state, and no matter how much 'sympathy money' comes in the state can always starve out workers in the end; only spreading the strike works. The most serious challenge against such spreading comes from the unions - its no coincidence that sympathy collections and wordy resolutions of support are the unions stock-in-trade when it comes to ensuring that meaningful acts of solidarity don't occur.

The significance of the Fife strike doesn't lie in the winning of one struggle for one aspect of working conditions - the bosses will be forced to carry out more and wider attacks all too soon, and next time we can expect the unions to be a lot more circumspect at Moss Morran; they will be careful not to play their hand too soon so that next time they can be in a position to contain the struggle from the beginning. No, the real significance lies in the lessons learned by workers - that the only way forward lies outside of and against the unions, that rapid and wide spreading of the strike is the only way forward that the confidence and strength generated by joint struggle is an enormous weapon. These lessons are being learned not just in Fife but internationally - albeit in a fitful and localised way at the moment - in South America, Asia and Europe and behind the 'Iron Curtain'. The deepening of the crisis and the strengthening of the bosses' attack internationally will ensure that the lessons are generalised and spread.

### HiFab

The militancy demonstrated at Moss Morran, the willingness to fight, the refusal to accept the attacks imposed on them, all of which perhaps point to the period of bewildered acquiescence in the increasing austerity of capitalist crisis drawing to a close was demonstrated even more clearly in the long drawn out strike at the Highland Fabrication Yard at Nigg in Easter Ross. Here the sheer dogged militancy - the indispensable starting-point for the struggles to come - was starkly defined by the scale of the barriers confronting the workers. They faced aggressive management determined on a policy of hardline "take it or leave it" confrontation, a union hierarchy setting its official face intransigently against them, putting all its strength behind the management, shop stewards who maintained a 'militant' posture in line with shop floor feelings whilst working tooth and nail to stop the struggle spilling out of its union prison plus the very real possibility that the yard would simply shut up shop for good if the strike wasn't called off.

### The Management

The aggression of the HiFab management wasn't simply

another expression of Thatcher's 'new realism' which we've seen increasingly displayed in the past two years or so by management regimes made confident enough by the apparent quiescence of their workforce to make their attacks on the working class with brutal directness. Certainly, there was an element of that in the undisguised eagerness with which the confrontation was provoked, but behind that, there was a genuine desperation on the part of management. The yard had lost £10 million in 1982 were set for even larger losses this year and had only one contract - the construction of a Tension Log Platform for Conoco - which was causing them considerable financial and technical difficulty. Conoco had already threatened to cancel the contract unless the work was speeded up. Faced with this the management decided on drastic and open confrontation.

On the 11th August when the men returned from holiday they found that "in the pursuit of economies" the customary free orange juice and coffee, paid showering time provided for welders and fitters mates working in high temperatures and heat shelters had been summarily removed. The response - a complete walkout - was immediate and almost certainly foreseen (and welcomed) by the management. Within the week they had announced the sacking of all 2000 men and a week later put forward a plan for the selective rehiring of 1600 on the grounds of "merit" - in other words, a weeding out of troublemakers. In addition, everyone had to sign a new 24 point "Statement of Conditions and Terms of Employment" which represented a savage increase in the rate of exploitation and a massive attack on working conditions (including most importantly the removal of free transport which would have cost many of the men £10-£20 per week.) The intention was absolutely clear - a slimmed-down, cowed workforce plus immediate savings of £7½ million per year.

### The Unions

With the exception of token expressions of "sympathy" and "support" in the first week the unions were unambiguously hostile to the strike. As unions always do, they accepted that the workers' interests could only be 'defended' by ensuring that the firm was strong and competitive and profits were healthy. They accepted the evident truth of the management's position that the future of the workers could only be "guaranteed" by guaranteeing the yard's future competitiveness which meant layoffs and increased exploitation NOW. Unions don't attack workers simply because they're corrupt or because they're stupid etc. but because they defend a political vision which ACCEPTS the logic of the capitalist market place. That's the essence of reformism - that workers can be defended within the present system which means accepting the imperatives of the present system which, in turn



means accepting the attacks on workers that a decadent capitalism in the grip of inescapable crisis demands.

Accordingly the unions first response was to engage in delaying tactics about making the strike official in the hope that it would fizzle out. First, the local officials said that they would have to wait for the Scottish national meeting in Perth, which didnt take place for two weeks, and then it had to be put to the national meeting in Brighton on the 2nd September - three weeks after the start of the strike. At that point, with the strike still standing firm the unions decided to "negotiate" on the 24 points which they had already announced to the press were "mostly innocuous". The results of these negotiations were presented to the workforce at a mass meeting on the 5th September as a "victory" with management backdown on the three most "obnoxious" points:

- the management agreed not to reduce the number of stewards.
- they wouldnt change the times of the buses!
- the 400 sackings would no longer be on "merit" but phased in on a last in-first out basis once the strike was called off!!

The unions made no "official" recommendation in the now 21 points but defended throughout the meeting the position that they had defended at length in TV interviews and in the press - that they were convinced that the management were NOT bluffing about closure and that if the package was not accepted there could be no official backing for further action.

### The Workers

The angry and unanimous rejection of this union 'victory' by the mass meeting reflected the profound depth of feeling which had flared into existence from the first day of the strike. Despite the eventual limitations of this militancy its significance shouldnt be underestimated. The strike was embarked upon and maintained for more than six weeks in the full knowledge that the threat of closure was no bluff. There couldn't have been any doubt about this - it was asserted by the management, the unions, the stewards, the local and national press, the TV and underlined by Conoco's threat to remove the entire contract. It was accepted by all, that the gigantic losses and the lack of future orders werent simply management propaganda but stark reality. Despite this the strike went ahead without any hesitations. The workers actions spoke clearly: 'we dont care about your crisis; we dont care about your needs; we dont care about the logic of the capitalist market place. Our needs come first.' It is precisely this logic which was the starting point of the Polish upheavals. 'We know the country is bankrupt but we dont care anymore.' Its a clear sign that the acceptance of the reality of the

crisis needn't lead simply into the cul-de-sac of bewildered resignation but can be the foundation stone of a qualitative development in the class struggle.

Although, in the last analysis, the strike was unable to overcome its limitations, the sheer strength of militancy involved produced more concrete successes than simple pointers to the future. The attempt to break the strike in the third week by bussing in blacklegs who had accepted the 24 points was smashed within two days by fierce mass picketing. Up to 1000 men turned up for each day of the picketing and were joined by many of their wives and families. The willingness to break through the constraints of legality and use collective force was clearly demonstrated by the sabotage of the buses and by attempts to turn over the company vehicles trying to get through the picket lines. Only the efforts by Rab Wilson, the Stewards Convenor, jumping on the vehicles and appealing for calm prevented this from happenning. This failure to break the strike with blacklegs eventually forced the management to withdraw the sackings and remove the threat of the 400 lay-offs which the union officials had already agreed to.

Even right at the end of the strike the management still failed to get the acceptance of the full 21 points despite repeated public statements by the unions that acceptance was "absolutely necessary" and any further resistance would be "totally without union support"! and that the workers could "like it or lump it". This was backed up by the shop stewards who recommended unqualified acceptance of 20 points, a "compromise" on the real sticking point - the removal of the free buses. In the end the management had to make do with only the 16 least important points accepted and had to promise to maintain the free buses, cut the canteen rises from 50% to 4%, reintroduce paid showering time and remove entirely the threat of lay-offs. In the end although the workers undoubtedly ended up with tighter working conditions the major thrust of the intended attacks had been successfully, if temporarily, fended off. In that sense the depth of militancy had produced a definite victory.

### The Stewards and the Union Division of Labour

However, if the strike displayed the militancy, the stubborn willingness to fight, whatever the odds, that will be the necessary foundation of the revolutionary struggles to come, it also clearly failed to point the only way forward for such militancy if it is not to be smothered in union cul-de-sacs. The unions were able to display their open and constant hostility to the strike because the militancy was totally contained by the division of labour between the unions and the local stewards.

Despite the enthusiasm for the strike, clearly



4.

displayed in the very high attendances at mass meetings (something not easily achieved given the large travelling distances involved) and the massive turnouts at the picketing, the direction of the struggle remained firmly in the control of the stewards committee, with no apparent impulse appearing for an elected and revokable strike committee. They decided on the timing of the mass meetings, they controlled the pickets by a system of whistles and they made sure that every impulse to spread the strike was delayed or diverted into useless token activity. The call for solidarity from other local workers, for example, was transformed into a collection from the nearby Ardesier yard by the convenors. The call for a wider solidarity was constantly channelled into a 'fight' to persuade the unions to give official backing. The anger of the workers with the unions was diverted into sending stewards delegations to national meetings of the various unions involved and to the TUC Congress. Always the call was 'Wait until the next meeting', and always the 'next step' was to secure official union backing.

Every time the union officials would demand a return to work and acceptance of the 21 conditions the stewards would noisily recommend rejection, making sure that they remained with the workforce. Despite their strident 'militancy', on every occasion their role was to advocate acceptance of something less than the workers were demanding. Even at the first move of the strike when the demand was for the return of the high temp. concessions, the orange juice, the showers and the shelters, the stewards transformed this into a rejection of management 'dictation', stating that they were quite prepared to "discuss the withdrawal of the facilities in a fair and equitable atmosphere." When the union demand for acceptance of the 21 conditions (including the layoffs) was rejected out of hand the stewards turned it into "no negotiation on the 21 points until the sackings are withdrawn and everyone was back at work". When they managed to persuade an eventual return to work on this basis they presented a demand for acceptance of 20 out of the 21 conditions and on the 21st condition the Convenor had this to say:

*"If the management adopt a sensible attitude there will be some movement on the buses question. We do not think there is nothing left to negotiate."* ! (statement by Convenor Wilson before the final mass meeting on 19th October.)

However the men thought otherwise and rejected it out of hand accepting only the 16 least damaging

points.

The clear division of labour between the union hierarchy and their representatives on the shop floor - the stewards - was once again extremely effective in keeping the struggle locked within safe limits. However it is a mistake to see it as a Machievellian plot to destroy the struggles of the class, (although at the same time we should never underestimate the cynicism, the cold-blooded posturing, the manipulations and secret deals etc. which undoubtedly exist at all levels of the union machine). The division of labour, which can be (and is) consciously taken advantage of by the bourgeoisie isn't just a scenario enacted by skilled actors. It has a material basis for its existence. The stewards are on the spot, part of the workforce and the community. Their own jobs are at risk and they are subject to all the pressures from their daily contact with the men on the floor. At that level their vision and understanding of the needs of the national economy and the Trade Unions role within it is obviously much more limited than the more complete overview which exists at the upper levels of the Union machine.

Therefore they often react with a 'genuine' militancy which isn't simply cynically faked. A revolutionary intervention in the struggle which states that stewards are simply liars and fakers risks being simply dismissed as patently untrue by workers who are quite capable of recognising the sincerity (or otherwise) of their stewards. A revolutionary denunciation of stewards must rest, not on asserting their insincerity, but in pointing out that however 'militant' they are, however hostile to the hierarchy they are (even to the point of breaking away in rank and file organisations) their 'militancy' will always be contained within a political programme of Trade Unionism, of reformism, of negotiating within the system. Therefore they will always act in a fashion which aims to cripple and divert any class activity which threatens to go beyond that. That is why they will always attack the class.

The HiFab strike underlines once again that the working class struggle to defend themselves, the fight against the bosses and the state, is first and foremost, a fight against the unions and all their manifestations. Militancy, the desire to fight is the starting point, but workers can only go forward by generalising their struggle, by spreading the fight to other workers and by controlling that struggle by themselves.

GM/Cormack

\*\*\*\*\*



leaflet

# UNION NEGOTIATION MEANS DEFEAT

This strike has stood strong now for more than four weeks and has defied all the management attempts to divide and break you. But one thing is absolutely clear.

THE UNIONS ARE AGAINST YOU.

The stewards have argued all along that the only way forward is to make the strike official, but that is a GUARANTEE OF DEFEAT. The unions are against your struggle because they accept the same logic of the capitalist marketplace as the management. That's why people like Lafferty and Gray have never been out of the news whining about Hi-Fab's losses. They accept that the management are being "reasonable" in demanding redundancies and in screwing up work rates. Their first priority is the health of the profits and to hell with the workers. That's why the unions support the 21 Conditions which they negotiated and have tried to frighten you by repeating the management threats about closure.

Dont be fooled by the shouting of the stewards. They rejected the 21 points which their own bosses in the union negotiated because they knew that anything else they said at that point would be ignored. As stewards they are part of the unions and in the long run they'll do what the unions want. When you came out on strike your actions spoke loud and clear:

GIVE US BACK THE SHOWERS  
GIVE US BACK THE SHELTERS  
GIVE US BACK THE JUICE AND COFFEE  
NOTHING TO DISCUSS!

Three weeks later what is Rab Wilson saying: "Let us back in and then we'll discuss it." That means only one thing - they'll negotiate how much the management can get away with. Now he's saying that the only way forward is to get the unions to make it official.

BUT THE UNIONS ARE AGAINST YOU.

They will accept the harsh new conditions. They will accept the redundancies which are coming. Just as they accepted the 140,000 redundancies among steel workers in the past three years and the tens of thousands of shipyard workers who have been sacked. Ask the workers at B.L., at Scott Lithgows, at Ravenscraig, at Robb Caledon. And all the other three million who are on the dole. All the unions have done about unemployment and falling living standards is to divert the anger of workers into useless cul-de-sacs - token one day strikes, useless marches to Parliament - and made sure that the strikes they couldnt avoid stayed locked in isolation. This is because the unions and the capitalists believe the same thing - that the economic crisis can only be solved by workers making sacrifices. That's why they attack our struggles.



# the way forward

That's why the strike must be defeated if it is left to the unions and stewards. You've already shown your strength - the blackleg attempts were smashed and the 400 sackings were reversed, but be clear, this was not achieved by 'union' strength and skill. It was achieved by your own mass collective strength. The way forward must build on that and that means taking control of the struggle YOURSELVES. This means:

- REGULAR MASS MEETINGS
- AN ELECTED AND REVOCABLE STRIKE COMMITTEE  
    NOT A UNION ONE
- REGULAR MASS PICKETS NOT TOKEN ONES (ignore the government picket guidelines. They're designed to defeat you)
- SPREAD THE STRIKE

Isolation is your greatest enemy. Send large delegations to other yards and firms to speak to the workers and to ask for their support. Don't send union officials to talk to union officials. The workers at the Ardesier yard have already given financial support but the only real solidarity is sympathy strikes.

Follow the example of the Fife electricians at Moss Morran. In August 400 went on strike AGAINST union orders when they were ordered to work in the rain. Three days later they persuaded 200 workers at Lumas, a neighbouring yard, to strike in support. Two days later workers at Braefoot Tanker terminal also struck in support. All against union orders. By the 16th of August all their demands had been met. ITS ALL ONE FIGHT.

But even if this strike succeeds the victory can only be a temporary one. The crisis of capitalism is world-wide and will NEVER be solved. Every country is hit - from America to Russia, from Britain to China. We know how the capitalists solved their crisis in the 20's and 30's and they're preparing to do the same again. They have only one answer - attack the workers and prepare for war.

Every time we fight to defend ourselves, every time we say to hell with your interests, every time we put our own needs before the needs of profit, we point to the only way out - the destruction of the whole rotten capitalist system.

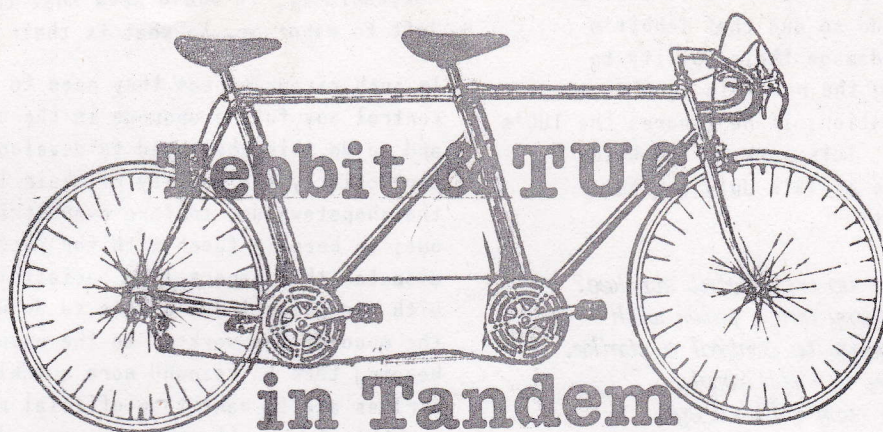
NO TO THE REDUNDANCIES!  
NO TO THE 21 POINTS!  
SPREAD THE STRIKE!  
AGAINST THE UNIONS!

---

This leaflet is published by the Communist Bulletin Group who can be contacted at Box 85, 43 Candlemakers Row. Edinburgh.

---





*"We cannot legislate against every form of industrial action."*  
(Norman Tebbit)

What is the purpose of the new Tory laws on Industrial Relations proposed by the former Unemployment Secretary, Norman Tebbit? (now replaced by Tom King) The answer to this question requires an understanding of three things; the role of trade unions in Modern Capitalism, the crisis of the British 'Labour' Movement and the consciousness of the bourgeoisie, in particular its ability to understand the working class.

As the Bulletin Group stated in our Platform (see Bulletin 4):

*"The Trade Unions which were set up last century when the winning of reforms was a possibility, have fundamentally changed this century when such gains and reforms are no longer possible. They now act to tie workers to the state, policing them in the interests of capital."*

The reason they do this is because they are, by definition (as permanent mass bodies under capitalism) defenders of an outmoded and bourgeois political programme - the minimum programme of the 19th Century workers movement, the programme known as reformism - the idea of the working class gradually improving its living standards. Since 1914 this has been in the long run impossible and even when living standards have improved temporarily for some workers, this has been paid for in wars in the blood of millions of workers. Thus those organisations which exist to defend reformism - the trade unions and leftist parties - can only defend a lie and in practice implement the reduction in living standards which is all that capitalism can offer in its decadent epoch, the epoch of state capitalism.

It is not sufficient, however, to say that all unions are integrated into the state. Although there is a large degree of such integration in the capitalist democracies, and total integration in the 'state capitalist' countries like Russia, there are many exceptions to this general tendency. The underground unions in Turkey and Poland are not part of their respective states, but they are

capitalist because they defend reformism and thus offer alternative capitalist programmes with the idea that the capitalist state can still offer reforms to the working class. This fact has led many unions directly into the state and in Britain the trade unions are involved permanently in the state apparatus at many levels - from joint management boards in the nationalised industries and at various levels of local government to the NEDC at Whitehall. Thus the recent move by the TUC towards talking with the Tory government is nothing new - the TUC and its tentacles talk to the government, Labour or Tory, at all times.

Neither is it sufficient to say that unions are capitalist because they permanently negotiate with capital - the unions in Russia don't negotiate at all, they simply impose the decisions of the bourgeoisie on the workers in an open and blatant fashion - they are literally shop floor police. In other countries the unions tend towards this level of integration because they think that they can help save their country from the effects of capitalist crisis at the same time as promising workers pie tomorrow if they accept greater misery today. This is particularly clear during capitalist wars when unions in all countries blatantly impose speed-ups and no-strike agreements etc and act clearly as an arm of the state.

Occasionally a member of the ruling class makes a statement which enables class conscious workers to see the real disputes which divide their class enemy. On 12th July 1983 TUC General Secretary Len Murray objected to Norman Tebbit's legislative proposals on the grounds that they would only increase strikes. He openly defended the view that



8.

the role of the unions is to control strikes and that they are able to do so and that Tebbit's legislation will only damage their ability to do so. Before examining the probable results of Tebbit's latest legislation, if he ignores the TUC's appeals to moderate it, let's look at the Union Viewpoint. The Guardian of 13th July quotes Murray asking of Tebbit:

*"Is he trying to stir up unofficial strikes? He must know that every union tries with 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."*

But Tebbit doesn't know this!

He, like most conservatives, to the extent that he is aware of the working class as a social force, sees the class as the unions and the defeat of the unions as the defeat of the class. Tebbit wants to take away the unions' flexibility to make official any strike which breaks out, thus controlling, limiting and defeating it by making it compulsory to ballot members before 'officialising' the strike. As Murray points out Tebbit is being short sighted: when official strikes break out in number again the new legislation will make it HARDER for the unions to gain control of them if they have to ballot all members before doing so and thus the danger of the uncontrolled strike breaking beyond Union limitations will increase.

A pamphlet on the new Tebbit proposals by Southwark Trade Union Support Unit complains:

*"Unions would become liable for damages if they authorised or endorsed industrial action without conducting a secret ballot of the members being called out."*

In other words there's more chance of unofficial industrial action outside union control.

*"Unofficial action is not covered by the proposals"*

the pamphlet adds. It's difficult to legislate against unofficial wildcat action. Before the late seventies most strikes in Britain were unofficial. Since the bourgeoisie's victory over the steelworkers in 1980 the unions have increasingly asserted their control over the working class in strikes. The present low level of struggle has allowed certain unions to pose as more militant than their members but in general has reduced the unions' importance. They have sabotaged the class struggle so

successfully, it would seem that there isn't much left to sabotage. So what is their role today?

In such circumstances they need to prepare to control any future upsurge in the class struggle - and to do this they need to develop their flexibility, particularly the ability of their lower levels, the shop stewards, to take over strikes which break out; to keep in touch with the factory floor. The disputes that papers like Socialist Worker have with the union leaders have to do with communicating the mood of the workers to the union leaders, begging them to respond more quickly to wildcat strikes and to make them official more quickly. Tebbit's laws will make this more difficult. By nature, accepting the validity of capitalist law, unions stay within it. Thus if the law makes balloting compulsory it will be that much more difficult to take over wildcat strikes quickly.

One of the reasons then that the TUC is busy complaining bitterly is that they are seeking to warn the government that their legislation will merely increase the level of uncontrollability of the working class when they go on strike. Their other reason is to try to convince the Tories that in spite of the downturn in workers' struggles they are still important, and have a role to play by dint of their control of workers in determining policy for the survival of the economy; That by attacking them the Tories are attacking a force for economic recovery and that when class struggle breaks out again an emasculated Trade Union movement will be no help to British Capitalism.

The Trade Unions and the Tories therefore, whatever their differences, essentially work in tandem. In Eastern Europe one is a tool of the other. In the West one would dearly like, once more, to be a tool of the other, a valued tool allowed a say in the determination of policy. The paradox is that the bourgeoisie is divided into factions here in the west and the faction in power at present, having an incomplete consciousness of its situation, is embarked upon a course of action designed to attack the working class but in reality attacking a bourgeois organ as well, a bourgeois organ which acts to defuse class struggle, and to defend capital. Though the dispute between the Tories and the TUC is real, they both act against the revolutionary interests of the proletariat and, though they may not see it, act in tandem as representatives of bourgeois rule.

E. Mav

\*\*\*\*\*



# GRENADA

**“a lovely little war,  
short, sharp and cheap”**

Prior to the US invasion the 100,000 inhabitants of the Eastern Caribbean island of Grenada were ruled by the 'New Jewel Party', a gang supported by Russia and its local stooge, Fidel Castro's Cuba. With Grenada devoid of natural resources or dollar-earning industry Prime Minister Maurice Bishop tried to bolster the island's shaky economy by building educational facilities for foreign students and developing that staple caribbean industry - tourism. To finance these schemes he tried, though with little success, to supplement his Cuban aid with US loans. Bishop's policies created tensions within the ruling Grenadan clique with a hard-line faction emerging round deputy Prime Minister Bernard Couard and army commander Hudson Austin. The hardliners wanted to strengthen military links with Cuba while cutting off all contact with the USA. Their manoeuvres to get rid of Bishop began during his trip to Czechoslovakia and culminated in his bloody execution. How far Russia and Cuba were involved in these machiavellian plots is not yet certain but it is noteworthy that throughout the crisis they attempted to defuse the international tension in the hope of avoiding armed interference by the USA.

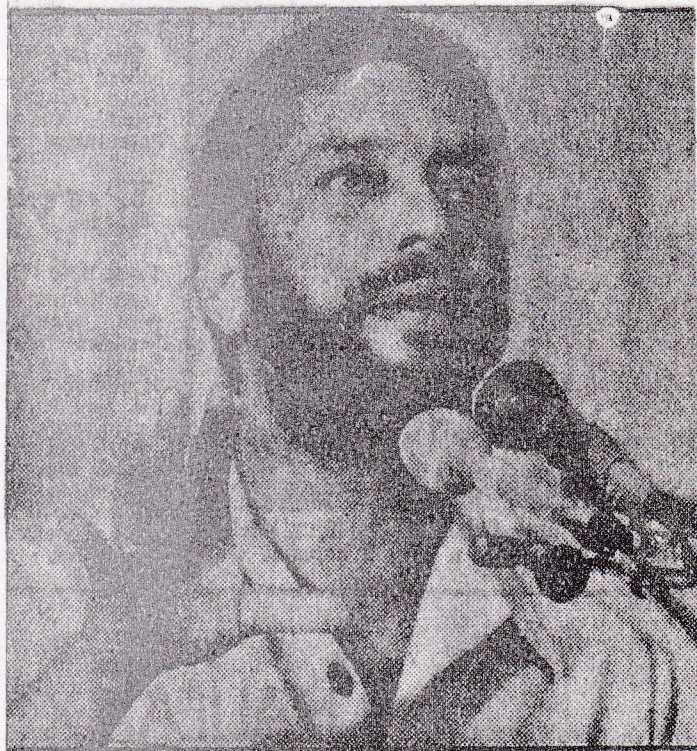
## Reagan Sends in the Marines.

However the very interference the Eastern Bloc dreaded was soon launched. An American invasion force supplemented by token forces from other Caribbean islands smashed the Grenadan 'Peoples Revolutionary Army', rounded up the leadership of the 'New Jewel Party' and bundled all Eastern Bloc personnel off the island. A massive propaganda victory was achieved at the cost of twenty helicopter gunships, the lives of forty US soldiers and several hundred Grenadan civilians.

Why did Reagan launch the invasion? The coup that deposed Bishop provided a splendid pretext for the US to intervene so as to "restore order" and "protect young american lives", but the real reasons for the invasion were more prosaic.

American prestige had been dented by the deaths of the two hundred marines in the suicide lorry attack in the Lebanon. The Grenadan adventure was designed to show the world that the USA is not to be trifled with and that the current administration is not going to pussyfoot around like the Carter regime. Reagan comes up for re-election next year and domestic political considerations were well to the fore when the decision to invade Grenada was taken. Thatcher's government in Britain was swept back into power after stirring up an orgy of jingoistic nationalism during the reconquest of the Falkland islands and Reagan has clearly been on the lookout for a similar opportunity. Grenada was

an ideal target; its defences were weak and could be easily overcome by massive American firepower. Unlike an attack on, for example, Nicaragua, the plan to invade Grenada required a comparatively small commitment of US men and materiel - a short sharp and cheap victory could be won.



Maurice Bishop  
Just another Capitalist Gangster



If the US invasion had some opportunistic aspects it was also part of long-term American strategic thinking. For twenty years the USA has been trying to prevent Cuba from establishing a coterie of pro-Russian states in the American hemisphere. The events on Grenada do not mark a major escalation in inter-imperialist conflict, but are merely the latest in a long line of US policing actions in its designated sphere of influence. Grenada has been a US military target for some time: in 1981 they staged a practice amphibious invasion none too subtly codenamed "Amber and the Amberines, our enemy in the Eastern Caribbean".

### The Central American Dimension.

Since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 the USA has regarded Central and Southern America as its private domain and has sought to evict all European influence from the sub continent. The invasion of Grenada has to be seen within the context of modern US policy objectives in Central America.

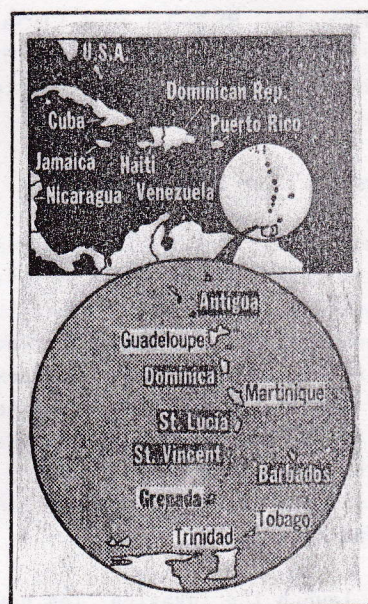
The history of Central America under proxy rulers of the US graphically illustrates the barbarism of capital's rule in its peripheral areas. The region lacks any substantial heavy industry. It relies on agriculture worked by peasants and rural proletarians. The weak working class in the area (unlike their brothers in South America) has failed to fight in its own class interests against the misery served up by capitalism. The gangsters of the Fruit, Coffee and Cotton companies and entrenched landowning interests form the ruling class, which the USA has used to police the region by setting up brutally repressive rightwing regimes - the classic banana republics. With little opposition coming from the working class the local bourgeoisie has seen no need for any democratic or liberal mystification and the full horror of capitalism has held sway with social and economic repression backed by mass murder.

In this way the US has sought to run the area on the cheap, but the chickens are now coming home to roost. As the world crisis deepens, the old regimes, lacking any flexibility, have come under increasing strain from all elements within society - from disaffected bourgeois to peasants. Hence the increasing rebel activity throughout the area as rival bourgeois factions attempt to replace the status quo with their own particular 'solutions' for the 'national' interest. But there can be no 'national independence' today - workers dragooned by such 'liberation' movements face only increased exploitation in the 'national' interest and the press gangs of the capitalist war machine. Thus today Nicaraguan workers and peasants face ever increasing militarisation of all social life from the Sandanista state just as under Allende Chilean workers faced the outlawing of strikes and the baton and guns of his army

enforcing labour discipline, just as under Castro Cuban workers face labour camps or prison or conscription in Russia's campaigns in Africa.

No state can stand wholly apart from the rivalry between Russia and America and in the economically peripheral areas today that rivalry more and more means war. In the Far East, Middle East, Africa and Central America the lesson is clear: workers and peasants have nothing to gain and everything to lose from alliance with so-called progressive factions of the bourgeoisie.

America's rule in Central America is absolute both because of its geographic proximity and its economic strength. The Russian bloc has no prospect of gaining a foothold here - the most it can hope for is to provide a thorn in US flesh by supporting local leftist and nationalist factions. Cuba is the one firm foothold it has in the region and Washington is probably content to allow it that since the island's financial drain on Moscow (it is kept afloat only with Russian aid to the tune of



over \$2 million a day) probably outweighs its strategic importance. But it is worth noting that the 'marxist' Castro after his coup in 1959 applied for loans direct to the US dominated Organisation of American States; he very clearly was only too eager to come under the US umbrella. It was only after a bellicose American administration rejected his overtures and halted sugar imports that he was forced into a trade agreement with the USSR leading to his conversion to 'Marxism' in 1961.

The question, though is why the US forced this conversion. The International Communist Current's analysis would prove interesting, especially in the light of its analysis of the Nicaragua/El Salvador conflict. World Revolution 64 states that the US campaign in these areas is deliberately based on an attempt to whip up hatred of 'US Gringos' throughout South America - thus defusing



class struggle there in order to "drive the populations behind their 'leaders' or the parties of opposition" We must reject this analysis which credits the bourgeoisie with a complete consciousness - indeed a Marxist consciousness! - of its situation. For the ICC the bourgeoisie does not make mistakes - except cf. the French elections when such events don't conform to ICC predictions. Its apparent mistakes are in reality taken as evidence of his cleverness. For us this is not true; bourgeois ruling factions can, and do make 'mistakes'. The US made one over Cuba in 1959 when they could have accommodated Castro and compounded their error by attempting to correct their mistake through the ill-fated Bay of Pigs fiasco. Similarly in Nicaragua in 1979 the Sandanistas who overthrew the ruling Somoza family immediately opened up talks with the US seeking American patronage - and for a while under the Carter administration this seemed to be forthcoming. But the new Reagan regime ended this accommodation and adopted a hard line towards the Sandanistas who have gradually changed their out and out nationalist stance for more and more leftist rhetoric and have been driven towards the Russian bloc for support. Bourgeois factions, like the Reagan government are victims of their own ideology and the neanderthal business interests that back them.

#### Consequences of the Invasion of Grenada.

Despite a string of tactical blunders (leading to the unnecessary loss of 20 helicopters) the American invasion was a military success - Eastern bloc influence on the island has been exterminated and a pro-US puppet government has been installed. On the political and ideological level the operation was equally successful, giving a clear warning to other states in the region that the USA is perfectly willing to resort to force in order to protect perceived strategic interests. Despite the, at times, ham-fisted attempts by the US government to make propaganda capital out of the Cuban presence on the island etc. Reagan has rallied what appears to be the vast majority of Americans behind his aggressive foreign policy cloaked with a gaudy chauvinism. At home the shadow of Vietnam has

been largely removed from American militarism. In Europe the picture is not so clear-cut, with many workers noticing how little US antics in Grenada differ from the Russian atrocities in Afghanistan.

The US invasion caused a great deal of embarrassment in British government circles, with Thatcher feeling obliged to say that she considered the operation a mistake. While a few backwoodsmen like Enoch Powell want senile British capitalism to once more act as an independent imperialist power (an impossible dream in the post-Suez era), what Thatcher and Co. are upset about is the lack of consideration the US showed for her domestic political problems. The US invasion coincided with the arrival of Cruise missiles in Britain and the attendant CND jamborees giving "welsh wizard" (ie. capitalist con-man) Neil Kinnock and his Labour Party cronies plenty of point-scoring ammunition. Furthermore Reagan's behaviour tarnished Thatcher's claim that she enjoys a special relationship with the USA, graphically illustrating the junior position Britain holds within the Western Bloc. Despite Thatcher's injured pride, Britain will fall in behind America's global strategy in the Caribbean as elsewhere.

As was noted earlier the events on Grenada do not mark a qualitative escalation in inter-bloc conflicts, but they are a signpost of what the bosses have in store for us if they are left to their own devices. With the economies of poorer nations falling apart, with instability everywhere, both superpowers will have to launch many more Grenada style operations in order to temporarily restore stability within their respective empires. The social and political disintegration of the states of the Caribbean and Central America is an indication of the larger crisis which is driving the bosses towards the 'solution' of global war. Only the working class led by its political vanguard can provide an alternative scenario. Experience shows that the very ground which spawns war is that which proves fertile for the development of class struggle.

Rowntree.

The Communist Bulletin Group can be contacted only at the following postal address.

**box 85  
43 candlemakers row  
edinburgh  
scotland  
u.k.**



# subscribe!

This issue of The Bulletin is the second 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!

If you havent already subscribed please do so now. For £2.00 in cash or BLANK postal order (we have no account in the names either of the Bulletin or the CBG) we will send you the next four issues of the Bulletin. Contact us at our NEW ADDRESS.

Box 85. 43 Candlemakers Row. EDINBURGH. UK.

Any contribution over and above the subscription will be gratefully accepted and, given the cost of producing the Bulletin is badly needed if we are to continue to be able to contribute to the process of political clarification within the revolutionary milieu and to intervene effectively in the class struggle.

## Back Issues

### Issue 2

The Ultra Left Review: Vehicle without Lights. An open letter to the comrades of Wildcat and Ultra Left Review. Why we believe the path they are on to be a political dead end.

Letter to the ICC and Our Reply. A response to our letter suggesting joint action on the Falklands War and our reply.

Aberdeen and the ICC. A statement of our experience in the ICC and a repudiation of their accusation that our intention was to "destroy" the ICC.

Letter from the CWO and our Reply.

Letter from Tampa. Correspondence and a leaflet from US comrades.

Another Look at the Question of Organisation. A major look at the question in the light of the experience of the last revolutionary wave.

### 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.

\*\*\*\*\*



# SPLIT in the C.W.O.

The text below, "On the monolithism of the C.W.O." was written by a former member of the Communist Workers Organisation. In it the comrade sets out his reasons for leaving that political organisation and explains why he believes the CWO's activities are detrimental to a healthy development of the revolutionary milieu.

Since Bulletin 1. was published in 1982 we have consistently criticised the political functioning of the C.W.O. This was done in the firm conviction that an ongoing and public political dialogue is an essential feature of communist activity. Our reasons for believing this are well documented in our earlier publications. Here, all that we intend to do is specifically relate this split in the CWO to our wider analysis.

Over the recent past the CWO has consistently denied that there is any general 'crisis' in the revolutionary movement, a claim first developed by the International Communist Current and one which we endorse. The comrades of the CWO maintained that this so-called crisis was nothing more than the ICC projecting its own problems onto the larger movement. The CWO, rather than being in crisis, was quite the contrary: it was said to be developing in a politically healthy manner. Unfortunately for the comrades the simple repetition of their rejection of crisis is not in itself enough to stave it off; nor is it enough to completely obscure the reality. The split documented below is evidence that the pressures which helped tear the ICC asunder also operate on the CWO. It also shows that, irrespective of a different position held on the nature of the party, the CWO resorted to organisational manoeuvres and manipulations similar to those used by the ICC.

In 1982 we wrote:

*"Change within the CWO is characterised by unbending resistance followed by a fracturing of positions. From this fracturing there emerges a new unbending position." (Bulletin 1, page 4)*

The present unbending position of the CWO is one which extols the purity of the Italian Left tradition and at the same time deprecates the legacy of the German Left Communists. Comrade E. Mav contested this shift in position and as a result suffered the consequences: political suppression. The way in which the Italian Left is defended by the CWO is that of the dogmatist. The suppression of political dissent is the obverse of dogmatism, namely monolithism. The split which emerged as a result of this was an indication of the tensions which at present are endemic to the

revolutionary movement. On the one hand there is the fact that the political life of militants is built upon a constant and critical appraisal of revolutionary activity; on the other hand, the material circumstances which circumscribe organisational existence pull in the opposite direction. Organisations in the revolutionary movement are very small and do not have roots in the everyday struggle of the class; they are profoundly isolated from the class. This observation the CWO has chosen to categorise as a "banality". But the implications and repercussions of this "banality" completely evade the CWO.

Isolation drives organisations towards a search for solutions. Not a bad thing in itself. Unfortunately the CWO's search has led it on the path of false solutions, the new one being the Party as the saviour of the class, supposedly the lesson to be drawn from the experience of the Italian Left Communist tradition. Apart from the path of false, almost messianic in the case of the CWO, solutions, isolation imposes further consequences. It generates the fear that the tenuous connection with the mass class struggle will be lost if there is any ongoing internal disagreement in the organisation. This manifests itself as a tendency for the organisation to quash any internal dispute, keep dispute private and to demand unanimity of positions.

A year and a half ago we were sceptical about the manner in which the CWO was attempting to assimilate the traditions of the Italian Left; we saw this as simply the rebuilding of a Pantheon of Heroes. In an attempt to alter its mode of operation we published "The Hunting of the Snark" and an internal text of the CWO. Our reason for publishing the latter text was not to threaten the 'security' of the CWO but was to try and open up the debate which was going on within it. The CWO was not only harming itself by hiding the process of change within itself, keeping its debates private, but was also undermining the rest of the proletarian movement. The process which the CWO saw as healthy internal debate was in fact the organisation drawing into itself believing that its political turmoil was a private affair of no concern to the rest of the milieu. In effect the CWO acted as if the communist movement was made up of wholly separate and competitive organisations. As a result it could not expose its new 'product' to the threat



of being either worthless or not all they claimed it to be. On top of this it feared that if debate was open those militants who were unhappy about the new course would not easily submit and would thus threaten the 'strength' of the organisation.

But what is this strength? In the CWO it is building a political organisation which is unable to handle political differences which appear inside it. On the face of it the organisation appears as if it has the strength of homogeneity. But this is a false strength because it is founded upon two basic faults: one is that it fails to see that strength is born with the interplay of the whole movement and remains as a product of this; and the other, that it reduces militants inside the organisation to mere rubber-stamps of organisational decisions. By doing this the lifeblood of the militant and the communist organisation is drained. Militants are confronted by practices which are inimical to the development of a critical appropriation of the organisation's activities. Indeed it tends to generate the situation where the militant will draw back from criticism for fear of breaking the 'strength' of the organisation. In this way monolithic activity can become self-replicating.

This is the heart of the crisis which is hitting the revolutionary movement. The all-consuming paranoia which tore the ICC apart and which continues to eat at its heart is an expression of this. The CWO's response to E.Mav, and its theory of "pseudo-groups" which prevents it from recognising the breadth of the revolutionary movement are the deadening results of its own isolation from the class, combined with its incomprehension of the importance of this "banality". The awful irony is that the more the CWO "strengthens" itself the more difficult it becomes for it to intervene in the developing struggle. It is blinkered by dogmatism, its militants strength is sapped.

The split from the CWO and comrade E.Mav's critique of its practice is one more test to its openness and its ability to transcend its obvious political limitations. To date we have seen one letter written by the CWO to comrade E.Mav which purported to be a political reply to his criticisms. If this had indeed been the case we would have seriously considered publishing it. But the truth is that the letter avoids the political issues raised, in much the same manner that the CWO has avoided the political questions asked by the CBG. Instead of a political answer the CWO resorted to invective and character assassination. We see no point in publishing such material in the pages of the Bulletin. It is all too easy for comrades to obscure the issues raised by attacking the integrity of militants. This was done by the ICC in the 'Chenier Affair'. This expressed the organisation's fear of open debate. This seems to be happening to the CWO now. If the CWO wants such published they can use their own publications. However if the CWO decides to politically respond to comrade E.Mav then we would certainly consider publishing such material if they were unwilling to use their own press.

Openness in relations between groups and openness within organisations on the development of the Communist programme: this is the starting point for the revolutionary milieu's work and move towards unification. In 1921 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote on the willingness to openly debate "controversies" then appearing in the Third International. She said:

*"Such controversies are a sign of healthy development. through them the movement grows onwads towards higher aims and broader horizons: by studying them, by taking part in them, the membership will develop in knowledge and political capacity."*

This remains true today.

\*\*\*\*\*

**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.





# ON THE MONOLITHISM OF THE CWO

15.

The main cause of the current crisis in the revolutionary movement is its isolation from the revolutionary class. This fact does not simply lead to the view that revolutionaries need to intervene more, but also to the need for more consistent theoretical work and a genuine debate. We therefore need an organisation which facilitates the theoretical development of its members through debate, and does not stifle it. In my opinion, such an organisation would as a result be more capable of intervening effectively in the class, since the workers can only be convinced of the communist perspective by people who understand what they're talking about, rather than just repeating phrases learned by rote. This is why I support the aims of the Communist Bulletin Group, though making no secret of my political disagreements with it, in fact welcoming its commitment to public debate between revolutionaries on all areas of disagreement.

Monolithism in the communist movement is not the everyday concern of the average worker. It must be difficult to understand our concern with this problem. Surely the events in the Middle East dwarf our petty organisational disputes? This is precisely why we need to begin the task of building a unified international communist organisation, and attempt to overcome the problems which exist in the tiny revolutionary milieu today, so that it can lay the foundations for a party which is able to learn from the working class's experience and activity, and lead it to victory. The communist movement today must learn to organise itself without stifling debate, otherwise it will be unable to build a party tomorrow.

Monolithism is for the purposes of this text, the imposition, by formal or informal central organs, of one position on a particular question onto an organisation which defends more than one position, and the suppression of public and internal dissent from the official position: as the CWO put it: "the views of the dominant organs of the ICC become group views, and became, as the seceders found (without understanding why), unchallengable" (*Workers Voice* 6, p7). Exactly the same is true of the CWO.

## THE CWO : PUBLIC FACE AND REALITY

Firstly let's examine the CWO's official attitude to factions and debate, and contrast this with its actual internal life.

The CWO claim that, unlike the Bordigists and

the ICC, it allows factions, is false: The only time a faction has ever been formed in the CWO it was immediately barred from publishing its views in the CWO's Internal Bulletin.

This is what the CWO says about factions, groups formed within the organisation to defend a particular analysis:

"the stifling of debate which the banning of factions must involve has dangerous implications for the presentation and discussion of issues in front of the class by the party after the revolution."

**Revolutionary Perspectives** 14, p21. And in **WV** 6 it asserts: "Given that we accept that debate is vital, we have to organise a mechanism for it. And the mechanism for it, as incorporated in the statutes of the CWO, is full faction rights, i.e. of publication and organisation, consistent with group discipline. The debate is carried out till the issue is resolved, either by agreement or vote, and incorporated into our programme for class action." (**WV** 6, p7).

And this is the reality: In practice, when faced with internal dissent on the question of the Italian Left and the United Front, the CWO's Executive Committee barred me and others from internally publishing disagreements with the official line on the grounds that:

"The two year long debate on the question of origins has been valuable; but ... we need to be thinking about drawing this debate to a close; it is crippling us, and effort must be transferred to the educational programme outlined by the EC".

(from "The Disunited Front of CP and EM: August 1914 of Empiricism", by DG Place, p5).

The EC of the CWO barred any further debate on the Italian Left and the United Front. Supporters of the "minority" were barred from publishing a reply to Place's banalities. I was at the EC meeting which suppressed this vital debate; I was not even allowed to object to the suppression of debate. I was told that if my opposition to the new method continued, I would be accused of "sabotage". In theory, the CWO believes in encouraging the contribution of factions, and that stifling them is dangerous: In practice,

1. In case the CWO try to get out of this, I would point out that at this meeting no distinction was made between taking a critical attitude to the Italian Left and the PCInt, and breaking group discipline.



faced with disagreements, it says they are "crippling" the group, and must be suppressed.

The next Congress of the CWO was manipulated by the outgoing EC to prevent any debate on the Italian Left and the United Front. For example, outgoing EC held a secret meeting during actual Congress time, unconstitutionally excluding the majority of the group from part of their own Congress. It is true that this was accepted by the CWO's members - it is not true that this makes it acceptable, it is a sign of political degeneration and apathy.

The EC asked me to write a summary of my views on the differences with the PCInt (Battaglia Comunista) of Italy. The reaction of the CWO's central organ to these differences with the PCInt was hysterical. They claimed it was an "attack" on the CWO because it "accused our fraternal organisation of defending the counter-revolution which is certainly not consistent with group discipline." DG Place and his friends had very cleverly manipulated the debate, characterising objections to his views as a threat which would "cripple" the organisation by "arming our adversaries" so that firstly no answer to his ideas was possible in the CWO, and secondly, no discussion about the CWO's relationship to the PCInt was possible either. The result is confusion: whereas most of the CWO's members deny that they regard the CBG as a pseudo-group - as comrade LIM confirms - "In my discussions with them the CWO deny having made this remark of the *Bulletin*", the Glasgow section openly defend this stupid "theory".

I can reveal the origins of this sectarian theory: a statement signed CWO Executive Committee, Jan 82. In this text it says:

"For within the revolutionary communist left there in reality but 3 viable and legitimate currents (irrespective of the correctness of specific positions). These are the ICC, the PCI (Programme Communiste), and the PCInt/CWO. All other formations are in reality pseudo-groups with no tradition or legitimacy, claiming to have emerged with the truth ex novo, due to the genius of some momentary guru. These pseudo groups generally don't last long, but can do incalculable harm."

Of course this description in no way fits the CWO, but this text begs the question: how has the CWO elevated itself into the pantheon of "viable and legitimate currents"? Only it would appear by its relationship to the PCInt, which consists simply of a mutual agreement not to debate the issues which divide the two groups.

A brief note on method cannot be avoided here:

The phrase "in reality" occurs twice in the above-quoted passage. What does the CWO mean by "reality" here? It clearly does not mean material reality, since in this reality there are more than 3 groups of the communist left, in practice and in theory defending aspects of the communist programme. Some of them have considerably greater claims to be in the communist milieu than Programme Communiste. The only conclusion that can be drawn regarding the CWO's use of the term "reality" is that they are using it in the Platonic sense, to denote the world of ideal forms. In the CWO's heads, there is only room for 3 viable currents, so the real world must be equally restricted. This bizarre theory of "pseudo-groups", a complete invention, has poisoned relations between the CBG and the CWO. You only have to look at DG Place's letters to the CBG to see this. Yet most CWO members deny that "pseudo groups" is a position of the organisation! This is an indication of the CWO's internal practice. It prevents the development of homogeneity - instead, it encourages the pretence of homogeneity: that is, monolithism. Dependence on all-powerful central organs means debate is unnecessary. Thus the CWO's members learn phrases by rote and cannot actually defend the politics which underly them. This is not because they are stupid, it is because they belong to a monolithic organisation.

Instead of discussing with and attempting to learn from the CBG the lessons arising from the splits in the ICC, the CWO has consistently refused to recognise it as a communist group. The CWO's attitude, a result of its idealism and lack of ideas, is even more sectarian and irresponsible than that of the ICC. At least the ICC explains its lunatic reasons for condemning the CBG: the CWO simply refuses to answer: why is the CBG regarded as a pseudo-group? At recent meetings in London, the CWO have either denied this or refused to answer the question, but in Glasgow, the group quite openly defends this "theory". In private, the CWO denies that the theory exists: they should openly reject the theory and its implications. The CWO's sectarianism is in any case inconsistent: reality continually enforces itself on the group.

**For example:** The CWO correctly comments: "The CWO offered the ICC the opportunity to solidarise with our internationalist intervention on the Iran/Iraq war, the ICC refused on the most ridiculous grounds." (CWO Reply to the ICC's "Address", Sept 83).

However, the comrades of the *Bulletin*, prior to their regroupment into an organisation, proposed a joint intervention on the Falklands



war with communist groups in Britain, a national capital directly involved, thus carrying out a fundamental task of revolutionaries. The CWO refused on the most ridiculous grounds: it wrote to the **Bulletin** as follows:

"...we would be committing nothing short of "crass opportunism" were we to produce a joint leaflet with a collection of individuals of no stated political positions". (**Bulletin** 2, p22).

Shortly after this, the CWO invited a collection of Iraqi individuals, who were known to have more reactionary views (e.g. councilism) than the **Bulletin** comrades, to sign its poster on the Iran/Iraq war. Not crass opportunism, but crass sectarianism and crass stupidity.

### The Red Herring of Concrete Intervention

The CWO claims that its interventions are "more concrete" than those of the CBG. Lets examine this claim, for the CWO's justification for the present split in the revolutionary movement depends on it. It claims that agreement with the following phrase:

"Recognition of the organising role of the party in the daily struggle of the working class, as well as in the revolution itself" is essential for making a concrete intervention in the class. There is insufficient space here for an examination of the theoretical basis for this position (though I make no secret of the differences between myself and the CBG on it), but lets just look at the empirical evidence that the CWO's formula is such that its interventions are far more concrete than those of the CBG.

Many of the CWO's interventions have put forward demands to unite the class, but then so have the ICC's and the CBG's. Recent leaflets produced in Scotland by the CWO and the CBG are equally concrete, equally addressed to the immediate concerns of workers, and by no means mere abstractions. The leaflet "Union Negotiation Means Defeat", reproduced in this **Bulletin**, is as concrete as any CWO leaflet. And the comrades of the CBG have been writing leaflets like this for the last 6 years. The question of what specific concrete demands to put in a leaflet or article is a tactical argument within the communist movement.

The CWO claims that a joint response to the class struggles in Poland in 1980 from the communist movement was impossible because of the fundamental split in the revolutionary movement, because groups other than the CWO and the PCInt confine themselves to mere abstractions. But CWO texts on Poland are just as abstract as the ICC's. In December 1981,

the PCInt and the CWO produced a joint leaflet on Poland entitled "Governments and Bosses are in Solidarity with Solidarnosc". This leaflet is just as abstract as anything produced by the ICC or its offspring. When the ICC call on workers to carry on the class struggle, this is denounced as "their usual empty phrase" (Report on Iran/Iraq meeting). Yet when the PCInt produce a leaflet of equal abstractness, containing exactly the same "vacuities" and "banalities", the CWO reproduces it.

The CWO should read the Organisation text in **Bulletin** 2. In it the CBG shows that what gave the Bolshevik party its vitality, its ability to continually develop its politics according to the situation, was due to its openness, its ability to carry on continual public debates during its whole existence, in spite of the extremely difficult circumstances in which it always found itself, including during the Civil War itself. It wasn't until after it became a capitalist party in 1921 that it reached the monolithic fear of debate that now reigns in the CWO. This fear was clearly revealed at the London CWO public meeting in October, in which the CBG was not allowed to reply to the CWO's misrepresentations. This is in spite of the claim that

"CWO meetings always offer other groups extended opportunity for intervention and a summing up at the end".

(RP 20 p37).

What this actually means is that the CWO sometimes offers other groups opportunity for intervention and a summing up at the end, depending on what is convenient.

The isolation of the revolutionary movement from the class cannot be overcome by formulae such as "concreteness" (particularly where such formulae remain at the level of abstract declarations), but it must be recognised if its attendant problems, monolithism and sectarianism, are to be overcome. The question of open and fraternal debate within and between proletarian currents must be taken up with increasing urgency if the regroupments of the future are not to suffer from the crippling weight of sectarianism and monolithism. The CBG are at present the only group seriously dealing with these problems, as well as intervening in the class. Communists have a duty to relate to the CBG fraternally, rather than slander it as the CWO and the ICC do. Opposition to monolithism is not just an empty phrase, it is a programmatic acquisition of the communist movement, and the public resolution of differences, taken for granted in revolutionary Russia, is a central part of communist work.

E May

\*\*\*\*\*



# Is the ICC Tending Towards Monolithism?

## Introduction

The following text was written by a comrade from Hong Kong after an extended visit to Europe this year in which he discussed with every major communist fraction. The text speaks very much for itself and needs little introduction from us except to point out that it not only directly addresses the same central concerns of revolutionary organisation which have been animating the work of the Communist Bulletin Group, but that it also reaches virtually identical conclusions.

Taken together with the text from the comrade who split from the CWO, also published in this Bulletin, it provides convincing evidence that the work we have done in trying to understand the

material basis for the crippling weight that sectarianism and monolithism have within the revolutionary milieu and the framework we have sketched out for a revolutionary practice which can recognise and deal with that weight, is finding an echo within the milieu at large.

We hope that this text by LLM will help to overcome the determined refusal of both the ICC and the CWO to openly confront the vital issues that we have raised and that it will help to pierce the smokescreen which they have attempted to throw over the entire debate. In the next issue of the Bulletin we intend publishing further correspondence with LLM on the question of the role of the Party and revolutionary intervention.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Foreword:

The fact that I am publishing the following article in the pages of the Bulletin, coupled with the fact that the International Communist Current (ICC) regards the Bulletin group as making an entirely negative contribution to the communist milieu, that the Communist Workers Organisation (CWO) is alleged to regard it as a "pseudo-group" <sup>1</sup> and that the PCInt views its split from the ICC as "ridiculous" (comment made during my discussions with them), require that I pronounce my opinion of the Bulletin group, since I regard myself to belong to the same milieu as the above three groups.

During my discussions with the ICC and the Bulletin group earlier this summer, I tried as far as possible to find out what actually happened during the Chenier affair and the Aberdonian split. As is inevitable in such cases, I succeeded in no more than scratching the surface. Based on what I do know happened, I think that the forerunners of the Bulletin group (in the first case, only some of them) were wrong in the following: 1. to threaten to call the police; and 2. splitting the ICC on a non-programmatic issue, i.e. the question of monolithism. On the second point, the Bulletin group said that even if they had remained within the ICC, given the latter's monolithism, they would not have been able to function for long. On the other hand, the ICC agreed that they would have expelled them but on other grounds, not because of any monolithism. These other grounds, whatever their soundness, do not interest me. It is the ICC's alleged monolithism that I want to address. This question is of immense importance for the whole milieu, for among the left communist groups today, aside from Programma, the ICC is the only group with experience in international centralisation. Its experience in this respect, both its acquisitions and failings, should therefore be examined by the whole milieu, and not just shoved aside as "its own business". As the following article attempts to show, I find a considerable amount of truth in the Bulletin group's allegations of monolithism against the ICC, which, furthermore, the ICC confirmed in its very own words. Thus, if the Bulletin group has a somewhat illegitimate birth, its existence does have positive contributions to the milieu.

In the past four issues of the Bulletin, the group has spent many pages on the question of organisation in the light of what they view as the ICC's monolithism. Naturally, I do not agree with all the points being made. However,

it is not my intention here to discuss these agreements and disagreements; it is to some extent to throw some new light on the question based upon my own discussions with the ICC, which centre around several issues.



## The Question of "Open" Theoretical Questions of a Non-programmatic Nature

Should an organisation take an organisational position on such questions such as crisis theory, the state in the period of transition? (note : these issues are to be distinguished from conjunctural analyses with which I deal below). Before answering the question, it must be pointed out that some regard the second issue as a class line, i.e. as programmatic. My view is that the position on this question originating from **Internationalism** is a justified attempt, though mistaken, to draw lessons from the Russian Revolution; for this reason, the question can remain "open" today. Returning to the above question, it is obviously connected with whether or not minorities are allowed to defend their positions both inside the organisation and outside as in public meetings, the press etc..

The ICC told me that members of minorities, including those belonging to central organs, are free and given the opportunity to do so (a point on which more below). But in such a case, the organisation surely is not "speaking with one voice" (the ICC). Furthermore, what purposes does it serve for it to take an organisational position on such issues at all? I have discussed this with quite a few ICC comrades and here are some of their answers:

\* By taking an organisational position, it shows that the organisation is not just an addition of individual members.

My answer: positions on any question are not individual positions; on any question, there are not 1001 individual positions, but only several orientations. Moreover, if the former were the case, by taking an organisational position, the organisation does not in any way do away with the fact that it is an addition of individual members.

\* An organisation cannot discuss all questions at all times.

My answer: True. But an organisation can certainly call a temporary halt to any discussion without having to take a position on it.

\* It serves the purpose of "synthesising" a debate at a certain stage, so that when discussion is resumed, it is not necessary to start from the beginning again. It also helps the debate in the milieu.

My answer: What is meant by "synthesising"?  
(Reply: to draw the agreements and

disagreements of the contending viewpoints). For every Theoretical question, if there are two or more positions, and if one is a Marxist position, then the others must inevitably be bourgeois.

Take crisis theory, for example: in a "synthesis", the agreement would be that capitalism is based upon value production or the exploitation of wage labour, the disagreement would be the realisation of the part of the surplus value to be capitalised. The agreement, however, is no agreement resulting from the debate in question at all, for it is the very starting point of Marxist theory. As to the disagreement, it cannot be "synthesised" precisely because one theory (Luxemburg's) stays on the market level (and is, therefore, bourgeois empiricist) while the other (the falling rate of profit theory) goes to analyse the underlying cause of overproduction.

Or take the question of the state in the transitional period. In a "synthesis", the agreement would be the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the role of the workers' councils, while the disagreement would be on the nature of the state. Again, the agreement is not any agreement (resulting from the debate on the state in the transitional period) for it is programmatic. The disagreement, again, cannot be synthesised precisely because one theory (the state is conservative "by nature") departs from the survival needs of society-in-abstract (the very starting point of bourgeois, professional sociology) while the other analyses the state in terms of specific historical classes. The point is, therefore, that making a resolution at a congress on an "open" theoretical question, merely shows that at a particular point in time, a majority of an organisation supports one position instead of another or others. Reading the ICC's State pamphlet, one gets to know all the issues involved without having to read the draft resolution, the draft counter-resolution, and the resolution adopted. Reading the resolution itself, it is crystal clear that it does not "synthesise" the two opposing positions, but merely registers the majority's. <sup>2</sup>

\* But surely an organisation cannot remain without a position on any question.

My answer: Why not, if it is an "open" theoretical question, and if "minorities" (in quotes because they are not formal in this case) are free and given the opportunity to defend their positions?

(Readers are referred to the text "Report on the Structure and Functioning of the



Revolutionary Organisation" in *International Review* 33 and contrast the stipulations of point 3 on p. 20 and the point (in point 9 on p 23) about not "compelling members of the minority to be spokesmen for positions they don't adhere to". Although this quote does not say minorities are free and given the opportunity to defend their positions, the implication is clear (for, otherwise, are they supposed to keep their mouths shut in public meetings etc?).

In my discussions with the ICC, those who defend the necessity of organisational positions on "open" theoretical questions did not come up with one single purpose that would have been served by it. I stand to be convinced if someone can come up with a convincing argument.

Contrary to what some people think, if members of communist organisations behave as responsible communists, and if the organisations themselves possess the political maturity to handle non-programmatic divergences, "open" theoretical questions will not cause splits. They are non-programmatic and have little bearing on the organisation's intervention (on this latter point, see below). Organisations should, of course, attempt to "thrash out" divergences of this kind, but this cannot be done by making a resolution.

The ICC today is in a very peculiar situation on the question of crisis theory. There has never been any debate (of any length) within it on the Luxemburg-Grossman / Mattick controversy. Yet it has an "organisational" position (taken by the central organs thereby becoming the organisation's position? On this point, see below). I have spoken to comrades knowing little or nothing about Capital, Mattick etc or even Luxemburg, yet finding themselves "defending" the latter's crisis theory!

### The Question of Conjunctural Analyses

Again, if minorities are free and given the opportunity to defend their positions, I cannot see any purpose served by taking organisational positions on conjunctural analyses, which need to be defended (by the organisation "as a whole"? both against the minorities and other groups, such as the Left in Opposition, etc.. Does that mean I don't see any need for an organisation taking up positions on events? Certainly not. Take an example: in a congress, the group will pass a resolution on the International situation (that any lack of unanimity should prevent its passage is ridiculous) which inevitable contains an

analysis of the current situation. That is necessary. But the point is whether this analysis then serves as the basis for "the whole life of the organisation in the ensuing period"? (Point 4, op cit. see also point 5). Firstly, since minorities have the abovementioned "rights", there's no question that it serves the group in such a way, unless there is unanimity. Secondly, conjunctural analyses are no more than analyses, what if events "in the ensuing period" subsequently show their falsity? Should the central organs (including the minority members in the central organs?) continue to defend them? And should "the whole life of the organisation" (including the minorities?) continue to defend them?

But what's the point of passing such a resolution at a congress, then, one may ask? Well, passing such a resolution isn't to produce a dogma, nor for the exercise of monolithism. But surely conjunctural analyses have an impact on a group's intervention, and if an organisation is allowed to defend divergent analyses, would it not lead to organisational paralysis? The answer to the first part of the question is "yes" and "no" and to the second is "no". The ICC has a particular analysis of the Falklands war, but should that affect its intervention in calling on British and Argentinian workers and soldiers to sabotage the war efforts and fraternise, though it is only, according to the ICC, a phoney war? On the other hand, an analysis of an upsurge of the class struggle will certainly lead a group to emphasise on certain aspects of its intervention. This leads to the second part of the above question. Here we must distinguish between questions of analyses and questions of organisational practice. To continue with the above example, if at a particular conjuncture, a "majority" (in quotes because we are envisaging the absence of organisational positions on such issues) of an organisation holds an analysis of upsurging class struggle while a "minority" holds a different analysis, what happens? On the level of organisational practice, if the "upsurge" thesis commands a "majority" (either in the whole group or in the central organs depending on the situation), the thesis will be translated into decisions concerning intervention, for e.g. increased leafletting etc.. Whatever position one holds on the conjuncture, these decisions are binding on all members. But, on the other hand, this does not mean that members holding a "minority" thesis will not be allowed to defend their analysis.

Take a Bolshevik example. The Left communists around the publication *Kommunist* held opposing positions on many questions of analysis (Brest-



Litovsk, one-man management, etc.) to the Bolshevik majority. But as members of the state, they were obliged to implement the policies they were opposed to. Yet as members of the RCP, they were free and had the opportunity to defend their positions in Kommunist. If the stipulations of the ICC (point 3, op cit) were followed, Kommunist would never have been able to be published!

### The Role of the Central Organs

The ICC says (op cit point 5) the central organs have the responsibility

"to take positions whenever necessary, on the basis of orientations defined by the Congress; taking up positions on internal debates when necessary."

and

"the positions and decisions of the central organs always take precedence over those of other parts of the organisation taken separately."

I have already dealt with the point "on the basis of orientations defined by the Congress" Should central organs be allowed to take positions on "open" theoretical questions and conjunctural analyses? In the former case, if the organisation itself does not take a position, the question becomes non-existent for the central organs. In the latter case, certainly the central organs should. If again there is to be no one organisational position, the position taken by the central organs in response to particular events will only be a matter of "majority"/"minority" within the central organs at particular conjunctures. The question is should the organisation's position taken by the central organs then become the organisations' position, to be defended against the group's own dissenting "minorities" and other groups' criticisms? For the same reason spelled out above, my answer is naturally "no". Take an example, the central organs decide to publish a leaflet on a certain event. It discusses the event and an analysis taken (on top of defending the basic class lines such as revolutionary defeatism in the case of a war) which will be contained in the leaflet. But, for the reasons already discussed, neither should this analysis be binding on the central organs, nor on the group as a whole. I.e. after the publication of the leaflet's analysis, they should be allowed to debate it, as just one analysis and not the organisation's, not only internally, but also publically.<sup>3</sup>

In the ICC, there is a practice that the central organs preface a contribution in the internal bulletins with a comment on its

theoretical validity (though the frequency of this cannot be ascertained, the practice is admitted by the ICC). What's wrong with this, says the ICC? Isn't it (the preface) also a contribution to the debate? Members of central organs surely also contribute to internal debates, but should they do so as members of the organisation or of the central organs? It is wrong in principle for central organs to preface any discussion with its comments on its validity; that is tantamount to regarding itself as a theoretical teacher. The central organs do not have any theoretical "precedence over" the rest of the organisation in the sense of theoretical authority, though because of its very mandates, it surely possesses prerogatives unavailable to other parts of the group. What is the purpose of central organs taking up a position as the central organs in internal debates? I cannot see any, if not to impose theoretical authority.

Am I reducing the role of the central organs to that of a coordinator? No. As said, central organs take up positions in conjunctural analysis when necessary. They make political decisions for the organisation between conferences, such as initiating conferences with other groups, etc.. But we must not confuse political leadership with theoretical authority, or regard analysis taken by central organs at a particular conjuncture as serving the basis for the "whole life of the organisation".

### Minority "Rights"

In my discussions with it, the ICC reasserted several times that minorities have the "right" and opportunity to defend their positions, and this applies to members of the central organs as well. Yet, the "performance" of the ICC on this score is, I must say, not encouraging, though compared to other groups', its far from the worst. (This certainly has something to do with its view that "it is more opportune if, within the [central] organ, there is a strong proportion of militants who, at the Congress, pronounce themselves in favour of its decisions and orientations" p22, op cit)<sup>4</sup>.

For example, though I know quite a few members within the ICC are against Luxemburgism and the Left in Opposition perspective, I have yet to read anything in its English press presenting these dissenting views (admittedly, this may be because of other factors than the one suggested here; I've also been told that there was once indeed one article criticising the Left in Opposition view in WR, which, however I cannot recall). More important however is what I read in a WR Internal Bulletin (no. 53, as far as I remember):



"The fact for example that 50 or 80% of the comrades within one territorial section may disagree with a certain position of the whole organisation decided on at an international congress, does not mean that we are free to dispose of that position at our intervention. The central organs of that section are obliged [i.e. even if they hold a different position] to express that position." (my emphasis)

Although the term used is "express" not "defend", the meaning is clear. Where does that leave the "rights" of minorities? If that is not monolithism, what is?

### "Secret" and "Bilateral" Correspondence, Meetings, etc.

In an over-reaction to the Chenier affair, the ICC rejects "secret and bilateral correspondence" between members (point 9, op cit). Here "bilateral" and "secret" go together as though they had an intrinsic relationship. During the second Congress of the RSDLP, Lenin and the Iskraites around him held private meetings to clarify their own positions, the Mensheviks', how best to argue their case, etc.. These meetings were certainly "bilateral", although not "secret". What's wrong with them? Nothing says the ICC except that they should have been open to all members of the RSDLP, so that the Mensheviks could contribute to the clarification. That was why the ICC insisted that meetings of the "tendency" be open to all members. But what's the purpose of such meetings in the first place? Precisely for members with similar views on certain questions (in a healthy group, tendencies should be issue-oriented, i.e. around one or two questions, not a series) to clarify to themselves their position(s) etc.. If they should be open to all members, why then have the meetings in the first place? Why don't they just discuss the issues in section meetings? Further, I don't see any objection to the circulation of "bilateral" texts. It certainly should be up to the participants to decide if these texts have sufficiently clarified matters to be "returned" to the organisation as contributions to its debates. There may, in some cases, even be nothing to be "returned" to the organisation as for example when the participants after some discussion become convinced of the opposite view.

"Bilateral" and "secret" are different. There is no necessity to keep "bilateral" meetings/texts "secret", nor is there any need to announce these to everybody. I do not fetishise "bilateral" meetings/texts, so long as they are undertaken for the purpose of clarification (when participants feel its

better to thrash things out between themselves first) I can't see anything wrong with them. "Secret" is something different. Anything "secret" is a reflection of something wrong, either with the participants, or the organisation, or both.

### Conclusion

The ICC realises that it has to draw lessons from its crisis, which to its credit, it has survived. But, unfortunately, it appears that it has missed out some of the most important lessons. Personal animus, manipulation, laxity in organisational discipline, etc, have been put forward as causes of its crisis. But the question not asked is: why did all these factors, if they were really the causes, work through disagreements on non-programmatic issues? (That a majority of the splitters subsequently degenerated into libertarianism and federalism is no a posteriori proof that they were originally reacting to centralism as such, just as the degeneration of the Russian Revolution is no a posteriori proof that it was from the beginning only a bourgeois revolution). As an illustration of its refusal to tackle the issues raised in this article, the ICC steadfastly refuses to even consider the political questions raised by the Bulletin, which it regards as no more than an "anti-ICC rag", "the sooner it disappeared, the better". I can understand the aggravation involved in the Aberdonian split, but should that blind us from the political questions? "I can't see the point for anyone to speak to someone [the Bulletin group] who threatened to call the police on comrades", a comrade of the ICC said to me. I replied: are we to abandon the contributions of Internationalisme because it abandoned the class struggle for over a decade?

Among the questions I discussed with the ICC was integration. I said though I disagree with the Left in Opposition<sup>5</sup>, the critique of the theory of the weak link in its present extreme form (the insurrection can only begin in Western Europe), Luxemburgist crisis theory, the state in the period of transition, the historic course, these are non-programmatic. The reply, to my surprise, was that though these questions are non-programmatic, nevertheless, agreement is important, if not essential, for a member to function in the ICC! I continued: does that mean that the ICC would not integrate someone who defended all the class positions but disagreed with these "open" issues? The reply was: but the historic course is in the platform!<sup>6</sup> Thus, in its own words, the ICC confirms the Bulletin's allegation: monolithism. Either one agrees with all the "open" theoretical questions and conjunctural analyses, or one will find it difficult, if not



impossible, to function within it.

The ICC is a vigorous communist organisation, but, as all revolutionary groups in the past did at certain periods, it is treading towards a dangerous direction at the moment. The

dangers that it faces, moreover, are lessons for the whole milieu. I do not pretend to possess all the answers to the above question, but not to recognise them is a bigger folly.

LLM / Hong Kong, August 1983

### Notes

1. In my discussions with them, the CWO deny having made this remark of the Bulletin.
2. In an attempt to "synthesise" the two positions, the resolution adopted says the task of the state "will be to codify, legalise and sanction an already existing economic order" (p 80, State pamphlet), yet, at the same time, it is "of guaranteeing the advances of this transitional society". These two tasks are clearly contradictory: one excludes the other, because the "already existing economic order" can only be the surviving capitalist realtions, not any "advances". An ICC comrade replied that what it means is that all previous "advances" are "already existing" before a new "advance" comes, so the two tasks do not exclude one another and the state is still conservative "by nature". According to this view, all administration is conservative "by nature", including the administration of things under communism. So what we are, and what we would be fighting for, is something conservative!
3. I was told that according to the ICC's statutes, if there is dissension on a position of conjunctural analysis taken by the central organs (which, in today's ICC functioning, of course, becomes the organisation's position), it must first only be expressed internally. Whether or not the ensuing internal debate gets public, and if so, the stage at which it does

so, are the prerogatives of the central organs. The example of Kommunist again springs to mind. And minority "rights"?....

4. Though this question is important in itself, it clearly is subordinate to the issues raised here. Therefore, to save time and space, I do not intend to discuss it here.

5. My article on the Left in Opposition published in International Review 34 is mistakenly taken by some people as supporting the perspective. I must emphasise it is not; in fact I reject the perspective entirely.

6. What's in the platform is that there is a resurgence of the class struggle since the late 60's after 50 years of counter-revolution, which few would dispute. The ICC's platform, in fact, contains quite a bit of Luxemburgist explanations. However, a programmatic

agreement is on the class lines and the general class analysis (such as the alternative is war or revolution), and not on every twist and turn of the explanations. Similarly, the CWO's platform contains the falling rate of profit explanations, but they told me they would integrate defenders of Luxemburgist economics if all the class criteria are met. The PCInt, which also defends the falling rate of profit theory, told me something to the same effect.

7. One important area of study is to examine how past revolutionaries organised themselves. Despite claims to the contrary, no group, including the ICC, has paid enough attention to this question.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Aire Valley Yarns

In Bulletin no.4 we reported on a strike at Aire Valley Yarns in West Yorkshire. The strike ended as that issue was going to press. Eighteen of the twenty-one strikers were given their jobs back and the firm agreed to recognise the union (the TGWU). Liaquat Ali, the worker at the centre of the struggle, was left to the tender mercies of the Industrial Tribunal which ruled in favour of the management. The other two workers not reinstated had spoken up for Ali in earlier Tribunal hearings.

This sordid, back-door agreement was hailed as a victory by the local Labour Party and trade union bodies. The Trotskyists and the local community paper screamed "sell-out" but their cries rang hollow when all through the strike they had supported the call for union recognition. There have been no reports of what Ali, one-time shop steward at Aire Valley Yarns, and the two other sacked workers now think of the role of trade unions as they draw their dole.

\*\*\*\*\*



# Correspondence

Since the publication of Bulletin 4 we have been engaged in correspondence with a wide spectrum of the revolutionary milieu. We print below two series of such correspondence, with the ICC and the CWO. Following the ICC's 'Address' we replied and after their article on the CBG in World Revolution we respond here.

As for the CWO we print the series of letters following the printing of our Open Letter last issue.

## **RESPONSE to the ICC's 'ADDRESS'**

Dear Comrades,

We feel that your Address to Proletarian Groups demands an immediate and positive response. Firstly, we want to express our solidarity with the approach and the concerns expressed in the Address. In many important respects your analyses of the problems confronting the revolutionary milieu co-incide with those that we have developed in the four issues of the Bulletin that we have published. To quote from the editorial of the very first Bulletin :

"The recent traumatic events within the revolutionary movement have underlined once again that the overwhelming problem confronting revolutionaries remains the central question of organisation. The re-emergence of the revolutionary movement at the end of the 1960's had as its foundation the crucial assumptions that: 1) the economic crisis of capitalism was worldwide, inescapable and inexorably deepening; 2) in this period the proletariat was an undefeated revolutionary force and would respond appropriately with the unfolding of the crisis; 3) the revolutionary movement would also grow in size, organisation and its influence on the class. The past decade has seen the first two assumptions dramatically confirmed while the revolutionary fractions of the class have remained tiny, fragile and isolated - with no indication appearing of the mechanism which will take us from where we are today to the party of tomorrow."

The crippling weight of sectarianism and its mirror-image monolithism has not been overcome and remains the foundation stone of the fragmentation, dispersion and distrust which divides the entire revolutionary movement. We agree with you that these problems cannot be overcome by the individual efforts of any one organisation. Similarly we do not accept that political clarity can be the unique property of any single group. The fundamental regroupments of the future which will lead to the creation of the mass party can only emerge from a process of clarification which involves the entire milieu. That is why open, fraternal and continuing debate is a material necessity for the revolutionary milieu and not simply a luxury or a tactic to be pursued for reasons of narrow self-interest. We accept wholeheartedly, therefore, your statement in World Revolution no.63.

"More than ever it is vital that revolutionary groups give themselves the means to have a political life in which they do not ignore each other, in which open theoretical debate and confrontation makes it possible to go beyond disagreements and which serves as a point of reference for all the communist forces that will be engendered by the intensification and generalisation of the class struggle."

We think that there are several consequences which flow from this. Firstly we have to fight for the recognition of the existence of a proletarian, political milieu which extends beyond the organisational identity of any single group; and that the existence of this milieu engenders a community of obligations and responsibilities. We have to understand that the process of clarification is never a finished one and that it involves all the elements of the milieu. Clarity is not inscribed in the sacred tablets possessed by any single group but emerges from the fraternal



confrontation of political positions and analyses. Therefore we must be clear that the partisan defence of positions we believe to be correct is only a contribution to an entire process of clarification and must not be carried out in a sectarian and destructive manner, but, on the contrary, confronts in a serious fashion the contributions from other elements. This demands from us all the ability to accept the criticisms of others and to deal with them on their own merits rather than dismissing them out of hand as "irresponsible blather" or "systematic denigration". Above all it demands the capacity for self-criticism.

Turning to the practical consequences for our work, we support your call for a conscious cooperation between all groups and agree that we must work towards the resumption of the international conferences. We agree that it would be best if they were based on the same criteria of demarcation which were used in the past but would add that if this could not be agreed on, the CWO have already argued in public that the formulation on the Party added by the CWO and Battaglia Comunista need not exclude those elements who defend the ICC's position on the Party.

Finally, given the spirit of your Address, we urge you to respond positively to the Open Letter we addressed to you in Bulletin no. 4 and we take the opportunity to repeat its proposals here:

- that as a matter of course proletarian organisations exchange publications and honour subscriptions
- that we service bookshops for each other
- that you make a political response to the contributions we have made in the Bulletin about the central problems of organisation and the current period
- that you reconsider your unqualified rejection of political collaboration with us

We think that the possibilities for joint work in the proletarian milieu are much greater than sectarian blinkers would allow. For example, we think there is no principled reason why the latest CWO leaflet, "Workers Unite Against Redundancy Threats", could not have been signed and distributed by us all. We think that the contribution such joint work makes in fighting sectarianism outweighs any tactical criticisms any of us might have of the leaflet. We think that this is entirely in line with your hope that future conferences should not be publicly dumb.

Yours fraternally,

The Communist Bulletin Group

(31/8/83)

## RESPONSE to WR 65

We want to respond briefly to two articles concerning the Communist Bulletin Group which appeared in World Revolution no.65. The first, "Empiricism versus Marxist Method", was a reply to the critique of the theory of the left in opposition we published in Bulletin no.4. While we disagree with the central argument presented in the WR article (that the CBG's approach is bourgeois empiricism) we think that its publication is a step forward in that it is the first serious response from the ICC to anything written in the Bulletin. Previous articles in WR have, sadly, been little more than attacks on us as individuals or demands that we disappear. We hope that the ICC will follow up their article with responses to some of the other issues we have raised in our press: the

Internal structure of the Bolshevik Party, the separation of revolutionaries from the working class in today's period, the problem of monolithism, etc.

If the publication of "Empiricism versus Marxist Method" had some positive aspects, the same can hardly be said for the "Reply to the Communist Bulletin Group" which was carried in the same issue of WR. The ICC is the only communist group in the world which has refused to have any relations with our organisation; in WR 60 they attempted to justify their behaviour in an article titled "With Comrades Like These" which attacked some CBG members for alleged individual failings. However, this sordid little article backfired on the ICC and earned them heavy



criticism from many elements in the communist milieu. So in WR 65 they changed tactics and went back to announcing that the ICC cannot have any relations with us because we are an organisation founded on principles of "theft, lies and threats to involve the police in the affairs of communists". Despite the change in emphasis the purpose remains the same: throwing up a smokescreen to obscure WR's deeply sectarian approach to the CBG. We shall not correct all the numerous distortions littered throughout the "Reply to the CBG", nor do we think that there is anything to be gained by raking over the minute details of the 1981 splits yet again - readers interested in this subject are referred to the exhaustive analysis contained in the first two issues of the Bulletin. In their "Reply to the CBG", WR invites us to "take a clear and public position about the principle of theft between communist organisations". We think that the CBG position on the main principles at stake during the events of 1981 are crystal clear to anyone who has actually read the first four issues of the Bulletin, but for the ICC's benefit we will restate them here.

\*There can be no relations of violence within the revolutionary movement. During a split the prime purpose of all parties is to clarify the political differences at issue, not to terrorize their opponents.

\*When splitting from a revolutionary group, the splitters should return hardware belonging to the group and any funds of the organisation. There can be no question of seceders "reclaiming" their past financial or material contributions to the group.

\*If a split is particularly large and coherent it may be decided to give to the splitters, from the property of the group they are leaving, the material means to continue a political existence. But such a decision rests entirely with those who remain in the organisation.

\*Splitters are under no obligation to return "internal bulletins". These documents are not the property of the organisation, still less of its central organs. They are a living part of the individual militant's political trajectory, and to return them would be to perform a self-inflicted political lobotomy.

\*To accuse a member of a revolutionary organisation of being an agent of the bourgeoisie is a charge of the highest gravity and must immediately be backed up with corroborative evidence. Such evidence must be made available to the proletarian movement as a whole.

\*Threatening to involve the bourgeoisie in the affairs of a revolutionary organisation, no matter what the circumstances, is behaviour totally alien to revolutionary practice. Any individuals actually carrying out such a threat immediately place themselves outside of the revolutionary movement, and will be dealt with on that basis.

In their "Reply to the CBG", WR talks of a dramatic change in our approach to the ICC. However, in reality, the only change has been in the temper of our polemics (hardly surprising after the passage of two years). WR is under a misapprehension if it thinks we have abandoned the criticisms we have made of its sectarianism and monolithism. We have always regarded the ICC as an important communist organisation, an organisation to which we are politically very close, an organisation with which we want normal political relations and joint work. Our record here speaks for itself; for example, the attempt by the precursors of the CBG to make a joint intervention with the ICC on the Falklands War soon after the acrimonious splits.

We think the proletarian movement is now in a good position to judge precisely who is being sectarian and irresponsible. Despite issuing an address to the revolutionary milieu which contained a series of excellent points on how and why organisations should relate to each other the reality of WR's behaviour towards the CBG is pure sectarianism, consisting of demands that we disappear, a refusal to have any relations with us, and attempts to dissuade other elements in the milieu from contacting and discussing with us.

WR accuse the CBG of spreading "lies, slander and distortion" about its organisation, but we intend sticking to our political tasks and we will continue to publish developed and fraternal critiques of the ICC's analyses and organisational practice. WR labels such articles "denigration", but for us they are an integral part of the process of clarification and regroupment. We hope that, for example, the publication of the text by a comrade from Hong Kong in this Bulletin will provoke a far reaching debate within the ICC, and a public reflection of that debate.

All the offers we made in our open letter in Bulletin no.4 still stand, and we hope that WR will have the maturity to take them up. In WR 65 they talked of the need to "send a signal to the entire proletarian milieu about how it should conduct its relations" - such a signal is required comrades, and the ball is now very firmly in your court.



# cwo response to our open letter.

Dear Comrades,

Your "Open Letter" to us has come to our notice via receipt of your Bulletin No.4. After discussion of its contents the CWO proposes the following;

1) We will be organising a public meeting in Glasgow in September, probably on the issue "The Class and its Party". We invited the cds of the Bulletin to attend this meeting and are prepared to offer our hospitality for it. You will have full scope, in such a public forum, for airing your criticisms of us.

2) We will be holding a CWO Educational meeting in Aberdeenshire in October; the main topic of discussion will be "Class Consciousness" for which a draft text will be available. We invited the cds. of the Bulletin to participate in this meeting where they can state their disagreements in front of our members and contacts.

We hope that you will accept these offers, and that you will inform us of similar activities of your own, and invite us to them. The more practical aspects of relations (exchanges etc. ), we feel can best be discussed informally around the two above meetings.

For the CWO,

D.G.Place.

**cbg to cwo 6/9/83**

Dear Comrades,

Thank you for your response to our Open Letter. Unfortunately we have to say that we found it very unsatisfactory. You have ignored all the political issues that we raised and responded to our request for open and public debate with a simple reiteration of your past offers of private debate. (We don't think that your invitation to a Public Forum in Glasgow changes the essentially private nature of the discussion on offer. First of all we presume that your Public Forums are always open to us, therefore, your present offer changes nothing; and secondly, with the best will in the world, it's hard to believe that a "public" meeting in Glasgow will be anything other than a private meeting with the CWO and its contacts.)

If we accept that one of the vital tasks confronting revolutionaries today is to lay the basis for the regroupments which will produce the Party of tomorrow then for our part we don't think that that can be carried out unless we understand that debate is neither a luxury nor a tactic aimed at the narrow self-interest of any single organisation. On the contrary the interests of the whole milieu demand open fraternal and public confrontation of positions and analyses. It seems clear to us that the best way of achieving this is fundamentally the mechanism of developed polemics in the pages of our publications plus face to face debate in a forum which, like the now-defunct International Conferences, involves by design all the elements within the milieu. Obviously more restricted and limited forms of discussion can play a role within this process but can never substitute for it. Therefore whilst we don't have any principled objection to such limited and private discussion with you, our central concern is to see if it can be a useful contribution to the wider process we've just outlined.



There are two immediate issues flowing from this.

1) We think it only reasonable that you give us some explanation of your basic approach to relations with the CBG. In particular we would like to know if you still consider us to be a "pseudo-group", what it is you mean by this novel term and whether political collaboration is possible between the CWO and "pseudo-groups". When we last discussed with two of your comrades in Aberdeen we understood them to say that the CWO discussed with "pseudo-groups" in order to "break their collectivity". Is this your position?

2) You should be clear that if we participated in your Educational Meeting in Aberdeenshire, we would not consider the proceedings to be private concern of the CWO and ourselves but would feel free to politically comment on it and publish any of the texts we considered useful.

Finally we want to repeat the practical proposals we put forward in our Open Letter. We regret that you thought they could be dealt with informally. For ourselves we didn't consider them to be minor, extraneous suggestions but measures which lie at the heart of any serious effort to overcome the sectarian barriers which divide the entire milieu. We ask again.

- do you want to exchange publications?
- do you want us to service our local bookshops for you?
- will you do likewise for us?
- will you reconsider your unqualified rejection of political collaboration with us? We think it worthwhile pointing out, for example, that we would have had no objection to signing and distributing your last leaflet.

fraternally,

The Communist Bulletin Group.

\*\*\*\*\*

**cwo to cbg 30/9/83**

Dear Comrades,

We welcome your recent attendance at our Glasgow public meeting, and letter of 6/9/83, both of which demonstrate a wish to discuss with our organisation, and that you have broken with your previous position that "the CWO with its attitudes can only be an alien influence. Their only contribution would be to throw red herrings in our path to divert us along thoroughly unproductive lines. Thus we do not think they should be invited to our meetings nor at this stage should we continue these irrelevant discussions with them." (Ingram: Meeting with the CWO member, 13-15/11/81, p3.) This attitude found expression in your being accomplice to our exclusion in 1981 from the Manchester meeting of ICC seceders, and your rejection of our invitation to attend our 1982 CWO Congress. We do not mention these things to rake over the embers but rather to set the record straight, and correct any impression that the lack of discussion between you and the CWO has stemmed in any way from us.

However the question of discussion is not an abstract or empirical one but has to be put in a political framework. The CBG claims (or claimed) to have been founded on the political positions of the ICC, seeing "no reason to disagree with its Platform", but simply to add a vacuity ("the need to debate") and a banality ("we are isolated from the class") does not constitute the valid basis for an independent political tendency, the definition of which is the occupation of independent political ground. In the absence of any apparent political dynamic the only scope for your activity was that characterised in the first three issues of the Bulletin, denigration of the ICC and irresponsible criticism of the CWO without reference to



All along our argument has been that unless a political critique of the ICC's errors which led to your split were undertaken you would head for political paralysis, and eventually demoralisation. Only a critique of the ICC could give your split a political dynamic and legitimacy. And as we have often stated, in our view such a dynamic could lead only to councillism (as it did for the vast majority of those who left the ICC) or it could lead broadly to the political ground occupied by the PCInt and the CWO. We have always been prepared to debate and discuss with you and have tried to include you in practical cooperation with our work (i.e. the Falklands leaflet which you rejected). We hope that, despite the present lack of a clear political framework, you will soon acquire one, both through confrontation with reality, and debate with other communists.

Though we can't agree with much of its contents we feel that The Communist Bulletin no.4 is a move away from the political introversion that had previously characterised your activity, and this is echoed by your production of the Nigg leaflet. You now tell us you broadly endorse our Iran-Iraq War poster and latest unemployment leaflet. Comrades, have you failed to notice that the perspectives on war, revolution, demands, intervention and a whole gamut of other issues which underlies these texts is different from that of the ICC? When N was a CWO contact (and we make no apology for asking him why, given the above, he joined the CBG, in our view a bizarre move) he argued that he accepted our views listed above, and he also accepted that they represented a move away from the ICC. In his explanation of why he joined the CBG he argued that since you all shared the above move he was free to join you! Curiouser and curiouser ... Had this been the case his task would have been to argue against the formation of a new group, and for you to have related to us the way he was doing. At this time however we felt that he was mistaken and that you had not moved at all from ICC positions. But what happened in Glasgow? Your first contribution argued that you couldn't disagree with our presentation, and ignoring this apparently minor point, launched off on a tangential outburst of sectarianism of the worst order, i.e. slanders about us and the PCInt (e.g. that they work in trades unions today) constituted its basis. If in fact you have politically moved then you have a duty to say so publicly. This will confirm that, however marginally, a move away from ICC positions has taken place, that a political dynamic is occurring; in such a case relations with you become different, as you demonstrate your move to political ground independent of the ICC. Thus it was tragic that you found it impossible to remain behind in Glasgow for mutual clarification.

However we must clarify a further point. Our invitation for you to join our educational meeting in the Northeast is still open provided you withdraw your stated intention to publish our internal texts. Not only does this threaten to breach the security of our movement but actually prevents comrades freely discussing inside their own organisation (since one of the purposes of internal debate is to let comrades test out ideas in a fraternal situation). You have already breached this elementary need once and there is no way we would allow you to do so again. Such an act in our view is nearly as bad as one or two you committed on leaving the CWO and then the ICC, which you have subsequently regretted. We wish to spare you further regrets.

On practical questions we are willing to an exchange of publications. As regards the other points we are as yet unable to clearly answer. Mutual bookshop stocking is a task undertaken by groups in close political agreement (e.g. we only do it for the PCInt). We do not distribute the ICC's attacks on us and feel unwilling to do so with publications of the CBG. The question of joint political work is a less restricted one. If you still maintain that you are a neo-ICC, our position can only be what it was to the old ICC - who actually agreed with it! If on the other hand there is movement in the views of the CBG the question is in the melting pot. The possibility of joint work with a tendency in motion rather than an absurd neo-ICC would be there. Maybe this answer will not satisfy you but its ambiguity comes from the perceived ambiguity in your position towards us. Hopefully your next letter will commence the process of clarification.

Communist greetings,

The CWO



# our response

Dear Comrades,

We echo your sentiments, we welcome your letter which at long last hints at a willingness to enter into a political dialogue with the CBG. However, this welcome is made in the recognition that the greater part of this change of course is born of two basic misconceptions on your part. One is a misconception on the nature of the proletarian milieu and the other, largely derivative of this, is your assessment of the present political trajectory of the CBG.

Obviously, if this debate is to develop, and we believe it must, these and other points must first be cleared up in order that neither group is sent chasing after hares.<sup>1</sup> Let us start with the misconception that we are moving "away from the ICC". You take as evidence for this the fact that we turned up at one of your public meetings, our endorsement of some of the analyses made by the speaker from the CWO and the fact that we produced the Nigg leaflet.

(a) First let it be said that we have moved away from the ICC. If we did not believe this then we could not have split from that organisation, nor could there be political justification for our separation (more will be said on this below). As regards our attendance at the meeting in Glasgow and the intervention we made there, this did not indicate a change in political orientation by us. Our appearance at the meeting was simply one part of our general attempt to intervene in the revolutionary milieu. In this instance the intention was to clarify the CWO's relationship to the CBG and to indicate the extent to which openness of dialogue and unity of action were necessary parts of work within the revolutionary milieu. These issues have been well covered in past issues of the Bulletin, including very specific points made about the activity of the CWO. To date you have chosen to ignore these! The intervention in Glasgow was an extension of this activity in the hope that you might be willing to discuss openly the political issues which confront the communist movement.

(b) Yes we endorsed some of the points made in the presentation, specifically those relating to the problems of the crisis, war and revolution: what the ICC inflatedly term the Course of History debate. Obviously you have taken this endorsement as a sign of what you call a "political dynamic" which is carrying us "away from the ICC" and presumably towards the politics which you adhere to. We do not deny that the CBG has a "political dynamic" but it is not the one which you perceive. This dynamic is

still within the political limits we set out in past Bulletins.

For the uninitiated the so-called Course of History debate centres upon the ICC's analysis that the courses towards war and revolution are mutually exclusive. For us the CWO defends the more correct position that the course which leads to revolution is in fact the same one which leads to war. The objective conditions which drive the bourgeoisie towards inter-imperialist struggle are those which engender the deepening of the class struggle. In fact we would say that the more the class struggles to defend its economic position within crisis-torn capital, the more capital is forced towards the solution of war. The act of defence of economic interests does not stop the overall march to war, certainly it alters the tempo and pattern, but this in itself is not to say that the drive to war is halted. The ICC view fails to grasp the totality and inter-relatedness of the economic and social relations of capital.

The CWO obviously believes that this is a new departure for us. It is not. The majority of the comrades who make up the CBG had criticisms of the ICC's analysis while they were in that organisation. These criticisms were aired in internal bulletins; unfortunately none of this surfaced in the publications of the ICC, which meant that it looked as if there was unanimity in the organisation. (In passing it is worth noting that this failure is just one more example of an all pervasive fear of openness in the milieu.)

Even if this was a new position for the CBG this would not imply, as you appear to believe, that the logic of our analysis leads us away from common assumptions held by us and by the ICC on the role of the party and the nature of class consciousness. For you the ICC's position on the Course of History is the simple, and only possible, conclusion which can be honestly drawn from its understanding of the role of revolutionary organisation and the nature of proletarian class consciousness, that is you see the ICC as spontaneist, occupying a political stance drawn from the "councillism" of the German left. (Apart from being an inaccurate characterisation of the ICC, it is also a gross misunderstanding of the German left.) We agree that the ICC's Course of History analysis can well be said to be drawn from a particular vision of class consciousness (as can its mistaken view of the "Left in Opposition", which it could be argued is the obverse of this analysis). But this is so only in so far as they choose to stress particular aspects of



their theoretical work on class consciousness, that certain incoherences in their elaboration of the theory are present. More than one outgrowth is possible from the ICC's analysis just as other interpretations follow from what we could call (for want of a better term) your "partyist" position. It could be argued that if you were to be honest and coherent you should stand for the Great Leader as the embodiment of class consciousness - if the Party, why not the Central Committee; if the Central Committee, why not the "clearest" individual? In fact you do not accept this, but it is a possible position if stress is given to particular aspects of your theory. A critique of the ICC's analysis of the Course of History does not imply a wholesale rejection of its Platform or its notion of class consciousness. Of all of today's revolutionary groups the ICC has contributed the clearest understanding of the latter.

(c) The Nigg leaflet and the question of "concrete demands". (A very confusing term much used by the CWO - it is a concrete demand to call for strike action, to call for Soviets, etc - but we shall not deal with this here.) Firstly, let us be clear why we produced the Nigg leaflet. It was a struggle which had important features and one which we could intervene in. Revolutionaries must intervene in class struggle, hoping to add a political dimension. This is the reason for their political existence. There are two major dimensions to intervention, one is at the mass-class level, the other is towards the revolutionary movement. The greater part of the CBG's work has been concerned with the latter but this is not as you claim "introversion" but rather our struggle to come to grips with the meaning of the splits in the ICC and their ramifications for the larger political milieu. This was and is a valid project, indeed an essential one. So, for the CWO contemptuously to dismiss the work of the CBG as introversion means either you dismiss such work as a waste of time or that you are simply being malicious and dishonest. (Of course it could be that you see nothing in our political analysis but it's hard for us to tell since you choose to ignore our critique.) There is a direct continuity between the earlier work of the CBG and our production of the Nigg leaflet.

Yes we related directly to the demands which motivated the workers struggle at Nigg. Why should this imply a new political orientation by us? You do not tell, perhaps expecting that we will guess intuitively what lies behind your statements. We presume what motivates you here is the belief that one of the functions of revolutionary organisations is not only to specify the political horizons of the proletarian struggle but also to generate

specific "concrete demands" which will unify the class. Most certainly, if this is correct, this does not tally with the overall view you hold on class consciousness, i.e. the absolutely restrictive possibilities of the class breaking from the fetters of capital without the intervention of the party. However the detail of the leaflet was not a product of this analysis but came from the recognition that an awareness of the content of a struggle, as well as the extent to which specific demands raised by workers are more likely to lead to united class action (something you yourself openly acknowledge), makes for a better and clearer intervention.

How do all these points relate to the claim that we defend the general Platform of the ICC? Let us be clear on this. The CWO is of the opinion that we have yet to make a political critique of the ICC and that the Bulletins are founded on "banality" and "vacuity". What really irks the CWO are two things. Firstly that we have not disappeared from the political scene. Contrary to the prediction you made last year we have not fallen into an all-consuming "libertarian angst" and "inertia". And, more centrally, the CWO finds it difficult to stomach and comprehend that we are not clearly travelling on a course towards your understanding of the role of the party. You are unwilling to accept that any critique of the ICC can be made outside of your premises (in both senses of the word).

(d) Beneath all the above misconceptions which you hold about the CBG lurks a larger and all-encompassing one, namely on the composition of the larger revolutionary milieu. It is quite difficult for us to elaborate exactly what you say on this because you refuse to spell out your views clearly. Hence we are forced to pick at fragments found in your publications, from letters, from conversations and finally reading between the lines. If we are wholly misunderstanding your stance on this the way is open for you to refute it by spelling out your views either in your own publications or in the Bulletins of the CBG.

What appears to motivate you in relations with another revolutionary organisation is the extent to which, to use your own words, it constitutes a "viable and legitimate current". The nearest you come to defining the ground which a group can occupy and remain "viable and legitimate" is the article in Revolutionary Perspectives no.19 on the Italian left. The general conclusion of this text is that the German left was councillist and wrong, whereas the Italian left was correct on the role of the party. Thus two poles of organisational ground (around interpretations of class consciousness) are said to exist. When the CWO applies this to the



movement today you are somewhat confused on which groups are said to "legitimately" exist. At one time you claim three, PCI, ICC and Battaglia/CWO (text of the Ex-Com of the CWO, January 82); and at another time you allow an additional point of the libertarian/anarchists (meeting with the CWO, 1982). It is obvious that allowing in the category of anarchists and libertarians only confuses the issue (presumably an indication of the extent to which you have yet to elaborate your theory).

It is reasonable to assume that the clearest formulation is that of the three (or should it be three and a half?) poles. Why the CWO should be allowed on to the ground of a "viable and legitimate current" alongside of Battaglia is not made clear but we shall let this pass. And what of other organisations? The CWO say that "all other formations are in reality pseudo-groups".

So what happens when this is related to the text in RP 19? Clearly the ICC occupies the so-called "councillist" ground of the German left while the two Italian groups and the CWO are found to occupy the space which is the historical legacy of the Italian left. Thus, although three groups are "legitimate", essentially it would seem to be the case that the PCI, Battaglia and the CWO can be seen as one general point. What you have done is to construct a theory of political legitimacy founded upon an image akin to a railway track with a station at either end. Political groups shunt backwards and forwards, arriving and departing from the "viable and legitimate" stations, but between stations no such ground exists, only a "political dynamic". We are tempted to say that should the CWO eventually publicly defend their theory of "pseudo-groups" they will surely become the Bradshaw of the revolutionary movement.

What has baffled you recently has been our actions, situated as you are within the blinkers of this view of the revolutionary movement. Your understanding is that any political dynamic must be along this railway line so that when you thought there was some change in political orientation "away from the ICC", you naturally concluded that we had boarded the "partyist" train and were headed in the opposite direction from the "councillist" ICC. Hence you called into question your previous characterisation of us as a "neo-ICC" which was attempting to occupy ground which could only legitimately be held by their organisation. In essence you thought that the CBG was heading towards your notion of class consciousness and as a result it was deemed to be worthwhile speaking to us. On the face of it this smacks very much of an opportunist turn by you, sensing possible recruits.

We do not see your railway line model with a station at either end as being useful or correct in understanding the revolutionary milieu. It fragments or rather divides a movement which is in fact a totality within which no single group can be said to embody the single greatest moment of revolutionary consciousness. Applying your "pseudo-group" theory to the movement of today means that you are blinding yourself to the real political differences (which includes organisational) which exist within the milieu. To a large extent, as has been stated in past Bulletins, these differences are a direct product of the defeat of the last revolutionary wave. The search for solutions and explanations as to why the defeat occurred produced a centripetal force which has tended to throw the revolutionary milieu apart. To this extent we are all victims of the failure of the last revolutionary wave. Today what is in fact "viable and legitimate" ground is largely defined by this legacy. But we must not make a virtue of these weaknesses, which is exactly what the CWO appears to do.

The CBG occupies a particular point in the revolutionary spectrum as a result of the failure of the milieu to understand the consequences of the defeat. Our analysis of the organisational problems which face us all today is not peripheral but is central to the political activity of revolutionaries. We broke from the ICC because it failed to comprehend this; we continue to try to relate to that organisation for the same reason. Similarly with the CWO, we recognise that now that we have made our position clearer it will probably be difficult for you to relate directly to us, your theory of "pseudo-groups" getting in the way. But this will not prevent us from addressing ourselves to your organisation. This, however, will not be enough in itself to alter the overall political ground of today's revolutionary milieu, hence we would argue that we will be forced to continue occupying a real and "viable" space which at one and the same time expresses the weaknesses and strengths of the movement.

(e) Inadvertently you highlight one of the weaknesses of the milieu - deep-seated mistrust and fear of openness of disagreement. You believe that our expressed intention to publish internal texts of other organisations (where relevant) is "threatening to breach the security" of the CWO. Before the CWO obscures this issue with smokescreens, let us make ourselves quite clear. We would only consider the publication of such texts where we thought a significant contribution to a political debate could be made; in the past this has been our sole intention. Despite what has been claimed by the ICC as they attempt to avoid political



issues (and the CWO appears to favour a similar course) the CBG is not an irresponsible organisation charged with the task of undermining the revolutionary milieu. Quite the contrary, all our actions are directed towards a political critique of the movement with the aim of strengthening it.

Debates must not be private (with obvious exceptions) as this tends to generate false visions of homogeneity. Not only this, where internal debate is conceived of as private, it exists in a number of watertight compartments where each group works out its own private solution and subsequently informs the rest of the world. But the nature of the revolutionary movement must be different from this; unlike organisations of different parts of capital there is no necessary antagonisms within the movement. Like the class itself, revolutionary fractions are expressions of a common interest, they are part of a larger movement and they should organise to ensure that our forces are not dissipated in useless, internecine warfare. This is not a platitude but is at the very heart of the possible unity of class action founded upon the material realities which define the social and historical situation of the working class. It is in this light that we consider publication of internal texts and discussions.<sup>2</sup>

Why should an organisation or its individual members feel "threatened" by such an action? Even if ideas are only half formed a contribution can be made to a debate. Comrades should not be afraid of finding their views aired in public. Any fear that is generated must surely come from the organisational fear that any sign of disagreement will weaken the organisation. This is a fear born of isolation from the class, believing that a monolithic front will somehow compensate for this. History has shown that it does not. At the individual level, fear of expressing disagreement in public flows from the larger, organisational one, but is buttressed by the additional fear that disagreement will be branded as heresy and will be rooted out by the central organs. This was

the tendency which emerged in the ICC and appears also to be operating in the CWO. Such an approach stifles internal debate, inter-group debate and breeds deep-seated mistrust.

(f) Despite, or rather because of, the misunderstandings and misconceptions which can be seen in the CWO's view of the CBG, this debate must continue. We are, over the short term, pessimistic about this possibility. The evidence seems to indicate that you will remain blinkered by your fear of "pseudo-groups", fearing that an open political debate with us will confer "legitimacy" on the CBG (as though the CWO was the arbiter of what is legitimate and what is not). We fear that you will, at best, only continue a covert debate in much the same way that you have done up till now. This is characterised by your refusal to publicly and systematically address yourselves to the criticisms we make. Rather than do this you prefer that undeveloped letters be sent to us and that we be invited to private meetings. This is of little use to the revolutionary movement as a whole. We are not in the business of cutting ourselves off from the larger reality. Not that we refuse to meet with the CWO in face to face meetings, these can at times be beneficial, but they are not and cannot be the major orientation of political work. If we did approach the question of debate in this manner then we would be guilty of carrying out a policy which undermines unity in the revolutionary movement, which fragments it and which, as a consequence, can only be wholly irresponsible. Once again we ask that you reconsider your present stance and that as a sign of this you take up the offers of co-operation made by us in our letter of September of this year, that:

1. we exchange publications
2. that we mutually service bookshops
3. that we address ourselves to the question of joint political intervention

These are starting points for future unity in the revolutionary movement.

#### Footnotes

1. The CWO and the CBG subsequently met formally in mid-October. At this meeting a number of the points set out here were stated. Hopefully this helped to clear up misunderstandings.

2. You make a lot of the CWO's publication of internal debate in Revolutionary Perspectives no.20 but in truth this was not the publication

of a debate but rather the remnants of a debate which had already happened. Any lessons which the revolutionary movement drew from RP 20 was lost to the CWO for you had already arrived at your conclusion.

The Communist Workers Organisation can be contacted at this address:

C.W.O., P.O. Box 145, Head Post Office, GLASGOW

\*\*\*\*\*



# Capitalist Carnage in the Middle East

The rate of progress of events in the Middle East has reached a dazzling speed. Each new day presents us with yet another banner headline announcing a new massacre, outrage, slaughter or intervention. For many, events in that region are a bewildering Chinese puzzle populated by a myriad of religious sects, races, nationalities run by collections of Mafia-like Godfathers all busy murdering each other to seemingly, little purpose. However this is precisely how our capitalist masters wish us to think. If we can relegate the slaughter of the millions who have died in this region to the realms of fantasy, or as the responsibility of madmen, or religious loonies then we can be diverted away from seeking to understand why such events are occurring. For, any reasoned look at these events, once we have removed all the smokescreen, reveals unerringly that the strings on these puppets, these perpetrators of massacres, of outrages, of terrorist attacks, these private armies, are held not by tinpot dictators or mad mullahs, but ultimately by the leading capitalist governments of the two world capitalist blocs. A close look at the barbarism now firmly entrenched in the Middle East shows who the real culprits really are – the power hungry imperialisms of Moscow and Washington who are in turn faithfully served in doling out death in the region by their clients and junior partners of their capitalist alliances.

This article makes no pretence at being a history of the Middle East. Such a work would require many pages. All that is attempted here is to try to steer a path through the murk to attempt to discern the thread which connects so many seemingly unconnected events. It cannot hope even to give any kind of depth to analyses of the effects of imperialist domination in even a single country where the shifts of power, change of bloc etc have been so widespread and violent in so many countries since World War Two. All it can do is seek to explain the intent of the two world capitalist blocs in their endeavours to subordinate the area and all the regimes therein to their interest and to have them do their bidding. In this they have used all the weapons, economic, political and military, in their power.

Similarly we can give little space to the history of class struggle in the region since WW 2 much as we would have liked to spend some time on the implications of the results of such struggles. All we can do is to attempt to show the importance of the proletariat in the region and to show the main ideological weapons used by the bourgeoisie against the workers and other classes. More, we can show that, in true dialectical fashion, the very ideological weapons used, along with the deepening of the world crisis, has created, and continues to create, a situation which the two blocs are finding increasingly difficult to control DESPITE the fact that for over thirty years they have been able to mobilise the population of the region for war and slaughter and have persuaded generation after generation of workers and peasants to murder each other in the defence of capitalism east or west.

Moreover such an understanding leads directly to the realisation that the weapons they use to conduct such slaughters, to gull the millions of the Middle East are precisely the weapons they have in store for workers throughout the globe as their capitalist economy crumbles and the bourgeoisie more and more face up to the need to mobilise the whole world for war and massacre.

Workers have many lessons to learn from the course of imperialist activity in the Middle East and the area has the clearest expressions of the barbarism of decadent capital. It is up to us to learn those lessons if we are to intervene where the proletariat is strong and where the victory over world capitalism must be sought.

The Middle East serves to highlight many important facets of the confrontation between the blocs since it lies directly between them in a potentially strategic position and has been a hotbed of their intrigues since the last great redistribution of territory and resources after the last great imperialist war.

## Strengths and Weaknesses Carrots and Sticks.

We must start with basic assumptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the two blocs headed respectively by the USA and the USSR. For it is by understanding their respective strengths and weaknesses that we can best comprehend why they have pursued certain strategies not only in the Middle East, both vis a vis each other but also towards their client states, but throughout the world,



wherever they compete with and confront each other. For the two blocs and the two bloc leaders have different strengths and weaknesses. The western bloc, led by America, has, even in the throes of capitalist crisis, enormous economic and financial resources, far greater than Russia even though Russia has far greater direct control of the economic means at its disposal. It has far fewer economic means and depends to a far greater extent on the sheer military power it can present for its power over its satellites as well as the abused legacy of the revolutionary wave of 1917, which experience it can refer to in its dealings with those brutalised under a western regime.

Both blocs use a combination of carrot and stick, both to control their dependant capitals and to seek to take control over the dependant capitals of the opposing bloc. The carrots and sticks may differ depending on their respective strengths and weaknesses but their use is the key to understanding the seemingly contradictory activities of the blocs.

Given the much stronger economic base of the west the USA has, where possible and necessary, attempted to use the carrot of economic aid, loans, grants etc. to secure the adhesion of regimes to the west. One only has to consider the vast sums of money in the form of credit and grant, counted in the hundreds of billions of dollars which the USA either itself, or through the medium of the World Bank or the IMF has poured into such dependant capitals as Brazil, Mexico and Argentina et alia (to point to but one part of one continent) so as to tie these states to the western bloc and to incorporate their bourgeoisies into the west's system of exploitation of the areas inhabitants. However this is not to say that the west is unwilling to use its considerable military muscle to achieve its ends either in the form of armed interventions such as in Cuba or Zaire, where, for various reasons, it has been unable to find a suitable regime to do its bidding by economic muscle or by the creation of indigenous forces to terrorise the population into a state where they are unable to confront their exploitation such as in Guatemala and Thailand. However by and large its principal tactic has been to seek to subvert, if necessary, some section, if not all of the local bourgeoisie, of the states it seeks to control either by making them handsome offers or by supporting rival factions in an attempt to oust them from power, replacing them with a more compliant pack of wolves. Since WW2 the USA has staged literally dozens of coups in small countries, and in not a few large ones. But this number is surpassed by far by the number of states where economic muscle has prevailed and where the local bourgeoisie has been handsomely cut in on the exploitation of the country by the USA. From the Shah to Pinochet we have seen a succession of bourgeois thugs installed at US behest and from Mexico to Turkey we have seen regimes of a variety of hues survive as dependents of the USA and the

western bloc supported by the economic might of western capitalism. By this means the west has managed to retain control of the majority of the states of the world. In many cases there has not even needed to be a change of regimes. One need only recall the move of China into the western bloc to see a very visible example of the success of such tactics.

However the barbarism of such exploitative regimes inevitably produces fractions of the bourgeoisie cut out of the distribution of favours, and excluded from a share in the exploitation of the inhabitants, and it is from these fractions of the bourgeoisie that the Russians have sought to change the orientation of western satellites.

The USA, of course, does not carry out such activities alone. In many areas of the world it utilises its junior partners such as Britain and France, especially in those areas where, due to their colonialist past, they were responsible for installing the local regimes in the first place. Thus France 'runs' the network of regimes controlling those parts of West Africa where she previously ruled directly just as the British still play an important role in policing, economically at any rate, their former Commonwealth (sic)

### The Soviet Strategy

The Russians don't have anything like the economic wherewithal of the west. Their economic weakness is starkly shown by the fact that their economic strength is not even sufficient to hold down their junior partners in Eastern Europe, let alone minor states elsewhere. If the local regimes in Bulgaria and Rumania for instance were to be tied to Russia by economic strings only they would have long ago felt the tug of economic rationale to the west, towards economic viability as the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 proved. It is a truism that only the massed divisions of the Russian Army permanently stationed in East Germany, Poland etc. etc. prevent the logic of capitalism producing such a move. (The fact that 'communist' Yugoslavia is a member of the western bloc and that 'communist' Albania is a client of, of all places, China, is directly attributable to the fact that there have never been Soviet Divisions in these 'communist' countries.) Any slackening of military control over its satellites would inevitably mean their eventual defection. Thus in trying to maintain its dominance over its clients or in attempts to supplant western control in any state or region Russia's economic strengths is utterly inadequate to compete with that of the west. In such situations soviet rule and success is dependant, just as in Eastern Europe, on military muscle. Success in taking over states from the USA has inevitably been due to military effort not economic subversion. In the main it has come about by the support of anti-western national liberation struggles against the brutal



western compradore regimes place, such as in Cuba, Ethiopia and Vietnam using the supply of military hardware and the stance of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism to aid the ousting of western regimes and their replacement with avowed state capitalist ones. Even in areas and states where they have not yet been successful they have managed to 'keep the pot boiling' in the hope of future success and to force the western regime to expend valuable resources in never ending military confrontations with the pro-Russian factions.

To date Russia has managed to 'take over' only a few states from the west outwith Eastern Europe but they are strategically located in the centre of whole regions and as such affect all the states surrounding them. Cuba affects the whole of Central America; Ethiopia is a source of disruption for the whole of East Africa; Angola has the same affect in the East and Libya in the North while Vietnam threatens the stability of every western regime in South East Asia.

Russia's main problem, however, has often been that where their clients succeed their continued rule is subject to the same economic conditions as their predecessors and thus on a rate of exploitation and amount of economic aid similar to those they have ousted from power and, given the difficulty of providing sufficient aid to such regimes, the Russians have found that such countries have often been tempted back into the western bloc by promises of resources such as those supplied the last regime. One need only look at the cost to Russia of keeping the tattered Cuban economy afloat to see their difficulties. For it is one thing to supply small arms to a budding guerrilla group but quite another to maintain a capitalist infrastructure in a period of deepening capitalist crisis.

Indeed it could be argued that the Russians, rather than seeking to extend their network of client states are seeking only to place them in key areas and to extend the conflict to neighbouring states not with the intention of capturing them but merely of bleeding them and forcing their continued support by the west to be as costly as possible.

On a world scale therefore the western bloc has sought to encircle the Russian Empire with a ring of client states forcing, at a military level, the Russians to divert substantial numbers of troops and military resources away from the projected cockpit of WW3, Western Europe, to the defence of their eastern and southern borders. The Russian response has been to act upon the repression of western compradore regimes to subvert them by means of anti-colonialist and national liberation mythologies so as to either overthrow them, allowing pro-soviet regimes to further penetrate western dominated areas or to force the west to divert their forces away from Russia itself to deal with potential trouble spots

scattered throughout the globe. For as the capitalist crisis deepens so too will the barbarity of the regimes as they desperately seek to retain control as the profitability of world capitalism and thus the infrastructure of peripheral economies is destroyed.

### The Middle East

It is within this context that we can examine precisely how the two blocs have faced up to one another in this key area, the Middle East. We may note three areas where we should hope to gain insights into the dynamic of decadent capitalism.

- 1) How the two blocs compete with one another. The tactics they employ and the weapons they use; their respective strengths and weaknesses, their successes and failures.
- 2) How the local bourgeoisies and their regimes operate both within and between the blocs; how such local states have their own imperialist drives, however futile, and their own need to dominate and bleed their own populations; how they are affected by the inter imperialist rivalry and are utilised by it.
- 3) The weapons that the bourgeoisie, both local and global, use against the local populations in an attempt to force them to accept the misery of their decaying capitalist regimes and to drag them into local and regional wars by dividing them against themselves. Such weapons as nationalism and religion give us a keen insight into the dangers for workers not only in the Middle East but also in the industrial heartlands, for the world bourgeoisie will not discard weapons it has successfully used in an area but will turn to them again as the collapse of their system extends further and further throughout the world.

### Controlling the Region

The attempt to control the Middle East by the West rested on two pillars, one in the east of the region and one in the west.

#### Iran under the Shah

The main western thrust over on the eastern flank of the region, bordering the southern, 'soft underbelly' of the Soviet Union was the building up of the power of the state of Iran under the Shah both to be the principle gendarme for the west in that area and as a strong military power strategically located facing Russia in an area which lay far removed from the main centres of Soviet population and industrial strength and at the end of very long and inadequate supply routes for the Russians. Threatening the Russians here on their exposed flank when generalised hostilities broke out would force the Russians to permanently locate in this region a disproportionate number of troops. In local terms the Iranian



army would and did serve as a shield for the Gulf states, threaten any of the local regimes who stepped out of line and protect the oil routes to the west.

Immediately after WW2 the neutralist/leftist regime of Mossadeq and his allies of the Tudeh party who sought closer links with the Russians were eliminated by a CIA sponsored coup which placed the Cossack Pahlavi dynasty back in power and for almost thirty years the Shah remained in power backed by one of the most powerful, largest and certainly most modern armed forces the region has seen. Iran also served to deter the many troublesome nationalities excluded from power in the carveups which followed both WW1 and WW2 from upsetting the status quo.

### The Israeli Threat

The second major pillar was the creation of and continued support for the Zionist state of Israel which has only managed to survive thus far due to the massive influx of capital from the USA. At present only one third of its yearly budget comes from its own resources; a further third comes in the form of loans from the USA and the remaining third as free grant from the same source.

For over thirty years the existence of the military power of Israel, just like the Shah has been a key factor in the domination of the Middle East by the West. By using the mythology of Zionism and the poison of nationalism on the Israeli proletariat the US and the West has time and again enforced its dictat on the region by military means, using the Israeli army on the forces of the local bourgeoisies of the region. In the early years this was a formidable counter to the bourgeois forces of arab nationalism which attempted to harness the discontent of the arab population with western colonial rule. Unable to harness such nationalism for itself, since it was directed against it, the West was able to use the Israeli fear of being swamped by hostile arab forces to build up the Israeli armed forces into a formidable military machine for imposing their dictat on the region and one which would periodically batter the hell out of adjacent arab countries in an attempt to force them to toe the line. Paradoxically however this crude form of social control had the unwanted effect of merely intensifying not only anti-Israeli feeling among the arab population but, given the close and obvious links between Israel and the USA, also anti-western in general and anti-US feeling in particular. Inevitably many of these arab states were thrust into the clutches of the Russians. With the abject failure of the pro-western arab regimes which held power in the late Forties to mask their dependence on Israel's chief backers it was inevitable that they would be ousted in most arab states involved in war with Israel

and replaced by regimes committed to revitalising the military power of the region and more able to harness arab nationalist feeling for their support.

After the utter failure of the Arab armies in the 1948 attempt to destroy Israel King Farouk was ousted in Egypt by a revolt of the junior ranks of the army led by Gamel Abd al-Nasir while the immediate effect of the Suez war of 1956 was the taking of power in Syria by the Ba'athists although even before that war there had been a joint military command between Syria and Egypt. These two regimes subsequently formed the United Arab Republic.

Iraq which had, along with Jordan and Lebanon been a bastion of western influence in the area under Nuri experienced a series of coups from Qasim's in 1958 where the King and Nuri were slaughtered through regimes led by Arif, the Ba'ath et alia, each progressively less stable and more inclined to lean towards the Russians whenever sufficient aid was not forthcoming from the west; and each more dependent on nationalist and anti-colonialist feeling to ensure their continuance.

The west's response to this series of coups, culminating in Qasim's coup in Iraq was to warn the new regimes against trying to extend their rule to other states in the region. The Iraqi coup had certainly surprised the west. As Eisenhower said in July 1958.

"This was the country that we were counting on heavily as a bulwark of stability and progress in the region."

More practically the US Marines landed in Chamoun's Lebanon and British paratroopers flew into Amman in a concrete demonstration of western support for their clients.

This stemmed the rot, and forced the west to speed up the build-up of Iran as the gendarme for the east of the region. Those regimes which had ousted pro-western cliques were forced more and more to ensure their survival by reversing existing western economic arrangements, especially in the oilfields and forced to take up more of an anti-Israeli stance if they were to survive however much economic reality led them to try to reach a profitable compromise with the west. In order to control their own populations they had to, verbally at least, oppose the Zionist state. Such a situation inevitably made them receptive to the military blandishments of Russia throughout the Fifties and Sixties. Egypt and Syria developed a military capability as part of an increasingly subservient alliance with Russia, however much they attempted to play one side off against the other, so that they could assuage their populations and ensure their own survival by the military defeat and eradication of Israel. Time and again however they set such wars in motion only to be smashed by the far superior Israeli forces.



By the Seventies however the onset once more of capitalisms difficulties world-wide forced the USA and the western bloc to realise that this form of control was becoming increasingly counter-productive and dangerous. As events moved towards military confrontation once again in the early Seventies a continued commitment to periodic wars in the Middle East not only threatened the very existence of the state of Israel whose forces had to be continually beefed up as Arab strength increased with every new military mission from the USSR, ( as the much better performance by Egyptian and Syrian forces in the Yom Kippur War was to show ) but also was creating a more and more difficult situation for the remaining western regimes, especially in the vital Gulf area. In addition the remaining neutrals, in reality regimes who because of their location were able to balance themselves between the blocs, taking aid from both and able to do so since each bloc feared that cutting it would thrust them into the opposing alliance were, due to increasing anti-US and Israeli feeling threatened with supporting the attacks on Israel or falling.

In such circumstances the US sought, by use of its economic strength to put forward such a juicy carrot to key states that it would have the effect of drawing the teeth of the anti Israeli alliance by ensuring the defection of key states and thus preventing any possibility of a war in the Middle East which might destroy Israel and allow the Russians to dominate the area.

### Egypt Moves West

Using its economic strength therefore in the form of massive financial inducements the US directly pulled the Egyptians completely out of the Soviet orbit. Since the death of Nasser his successor Sadat had been keeping power only at the cost of diverting discontent by declaring that he would attack Israel 'next year'. After a few years of this and a badly declining economy effected by the bypassing of the Suez canal by the large supertankers from the Gulf his request to the USSR for the modern military equipment necessary to finish the Israelis was refused. Sadat, while still taking supplies from Russia expelled his Russian advisors and responded enthusiastically to the American offers. Sadat's efforts in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 was a direct attempt not merely to inflict a defeat on Israel and to use up his Soviet hardware but also to 'up the ante' on his defection west. As far as the Americans were concerned his defeat and their willingness to stop Sharon's armour from taking Cairo vindicated their policy and Sadat took the route to Camp David in exchange for a level of support which in 1984 will reach, per annum, \$750 million in economic aid and \$465 million in military aid. At a stroke therefore the US had pulled away the main prop of the Soviet Union's policy in the region. But the US did not stop there.

### Enter the Saudis

Although America in person, because of the anti western feeling rife in the Middle East, was unable to be seen to intervene directly outwith Egypt, through its junior partners in the western alliance it sought to carry out the same tactic elsewhere in the region. It had already bought the support of Hussein in Jordan using British and latterly Saudi money, to the extent that Hussein had willingly slaughtered some 20,000 Palestinians in the notorious Black September operation in 1970 and now the Saudis were to be promoted to a more senior role in the west's attempts to subordinate its erstwhile opponents in the area. Funds were filtered to Iraq and even Syria in an attempt to persuade them with the carrot of economic aid but the main focus of attention outwith Egypt was the attempt to pull the PLO itself and El Fatah under Yassir Arafat in particular away from Russia. Arafat, a relative of the Mufti of Jerusalem who had been a prominent leader in the 1948 war was zealously courted by the Saudis, offered finance

Yassir Arafat



Westward Bound

and aid, and by 1976 at the latest was firmly and clearly in the western camp. Adroit politician that he is however it would have been fatal to have made this clear to his still rabidly anti western fighters and while setting up training camps in Qatar and basing himself in Algiers, he has continued to blame the Americans for everything while distancing himself from the Russians and their clients Syria while quietly pocketing Saudi gold.

The effort aimed at Iraq wasn't considered very important since the US still had the big Iranian stick ready and no one in Washington saw any need to finance a regime which might fall at any time and where the carrot wasn't necessary. However serious attempts were made, with Saudi money to persuade Syria that her best interests weren't being served by a Soviet alliance. Indeed the fragility of the Alawite regime of Assad was



such that the attempt nearly succeeded, especially after the disaster of Yom Kippur but, it seems, the inability of the west to pull a recalcitrant Israel off the Golan Heights, barely 16 miles from Damascus forced Assad to stay with Russia and plan for a further war to secure his borders.

It must be said therefore that these slight setbacks notwithstanding, the US effort to control this part of the Middle East had certainly borne fruit. With Egypt now a pliant tool supporting US intentions not only over the Suez but also in the confrontation with Gadafi in Libya and with the Ethiopian regime further south, and with the PLO now well on the way to military and political castration and due after some mopping up operations in their present refuge The Lebanon, to be lost in some desert prison camp being prepared for them as the 'Jordanian' option proposed by the Saudis, the carrots proffered needed only to be backed up by the Israeli stick aimed at the PLO and Syria to ensure the exclusion of the Russians from the entire region. However things didn't quite work out as Washington intended.

By the late Seventies the world wide crisis of capital was placing tremendous strains on all these arrangements, requiring more and more funding at a time when less and less credit was available. Capitalism globally was forced into a policy of austerity and this austerity affected especially those regimes with less economic viability and thus more of a need to squeeze their populations as things got tougher.

### Exit the Shah

Thus the dynamic of capitalist decay worldwide had as a direct consequence the fall of the Shah, a collapse in which the Iranian proletariat played a leading part which was subsequently diverted into the reactionary dead-end of support for the Mullahs in their attempt to wrest Iran out of the orbit of the Twentieth Century altogether and return to the Middle Ages. At a stroke one of the key bastions of Western power and influence in the Middle East disappeared, and although these events did not lead immediately to an anti-western regime in Iran, let alone a pro-Russian one, such was the state of confusion that Russian influence was able initially to penetrate the area via its front organisations like the Tudeh and the various pro-Soviet nationalist groupings in the area. With the collapse of the West's gendarme an alarming hole in the pattern of western domination was left. The threat to Russia's southern border disappeared and the Russians were able to take a much stronger line in its client states like Afghanistan and vis a vis the nascent nationalist guerrilla groupings throughout the region due to the loss of the policing role the Shah had handled for the west.

The potential for the expansion of Soviet influence

in the area was thus greater than it had been for decades if the West didn't manage to control the deteriorating situation. More particularly a new gendarme for the area was needed and a new candidate for the job appeared in the person of the Iraqis. The regime in power there had, as previously described, been trying to extract maximum advantage by playing both sides at once, getting military and economic aid from both sides and although little valued by either the Russians or the West had managed to keep a measure of autonomy - or at least as much as the enmity of Iran allowed. The Iraqis immediately put in for the Iranian franchise and declared their willingness thus to not merely wholeheartedly join the western bloc but, in return for sufficient aid, to take on both the external and internal policing role the Shah had had. To prove it could handle such responsibility it responded to the victory of Khomeini by invading Iran, with Saudi support, in an attempt not only to show their worth but also to discipline the Iranian bourgeoisie. The Iraqis themselves sought to clear the Gulf and take control of areas taken from them by the Shah in which effort they were prompted by the Saudis who were clearly concerned at the turbulence of the Arab populations of the area.

The Saudis, it must be remembered, rule tiny states largely populated by Shiite immigrant workers who are specifically excluded from the oil wealth. Similarly Iraq has a large Shiite minority.

However, for the Americans, humiliated by their hostage recovery farce, the Iraqi invasion was a classic example of the carrot/stick approach used this time towards Iran. They can have had few illusions about the capabilities of the Iraqis in their attempt to oust Khomeini but, they must have reasoned, any damage the Iraqis did would force the Iranian bourgeoisie to moderate their tone, cease their threatening behaviour towards the Gulf States and realise that economic recovery could only come from a renewed dependence on the West. It would also in the short term focus Iranian attention against Iraq and not against the vital Gulf States. The utter failure of the Iraqi offensive and the hysteria of the rants of the Mullahs against Great Satan (the USA) filled the West with profound disquiet therefore. The war merely consolidated the power of Khomeini and the Mullahs further isolating those in the Iranian bourgeoisie who sought an accommodation with the West and threatening, with the possibility of the defeat of Iraq and the capture of Baghdad, not merely the collapse of the Iraqi regime but its replacement by a Shiite regime committed, like Khomeini to an extension of messianic rule throughout the region and the replacement of the 'godless' regimes of the Gulf.

Massive transfusions of finance and military equipment from Saudi Arabia and France stemmed



the Iranian tide however while the USA kept well out of any direct supply of arms so as not to harden further Iranian attitudes towards them. The war was thus stabilised on the borders. Though such a situation has allowed the Russians to reemerge as a potential supplier of arms to Iraq the main effects has greatly favoured the West. The drain of the war on the shattered economy of Iran has forced the Iranian bourgeoisie to face up to reality and has driven them to reform their links with the west in which effort Japan and other 'safe' junior partners in western Capitalism have been playing a prominent part in recent months.

The elimination of the Tudeh party and the slaughter of thousands of its militants stands testimony to the realisation in Iran that the Russians couldn't come up with the goods and was a bloody testimony to the Iranian commitment to mend their ways. The Russians of course had hoped that continued war would allow them to influence Iran via arms grants allowing the Tudeh to persuade Iran on a more leftwards and pro-Soviet path (and this

also explains the reluctance of Russia to provoke specifically anti-Iranian nationalist groupings) but now the situation looks irretrievable for Moscow. All that is needed now is for Khomeini to die, an event which cant be far away, and the bourgeoisie in Iran will tread a more 'realistic' path into the arms of American capitalism. We can expect a regime in Iran which, while still probobly mouthing anti US slogans is busy making deals with western states and trying once more to take up a profitable position within the constellation of American clients.

Ingram.

\*\*\*\*\*  
part two of this article will appear in the next issue of the Bulletin and will look at recent events in the Lebanon before analysing the key ideological weapons used by the bourgeoisie against the peoples of the Middle East.  
\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*