

Workers *ACTION*

No.11 – March / April 2001 – Price £1.00

Israel out of the Occupied Territories!

- **Labour Party – end of term report**
- **PCS – left must unite after Serwotka victory**
- **Ireland – assessing the new situation**
- **Demystifying globalisation**
- **Bordiga on Italian fascism**

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EDITORIAL

Israel out of the Occupied Territories!

Workers Action calls for an immediate halt to the Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people and for the complete withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories. We demand that the British government makes this a condition for its continued relations with Israel and that it actively assists the Palestinians in establishing their own administration throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

We support the Palestinian Intifada – if the Israelis continue to wage war on the Palestinians and refuse to leave the Occupied Territories, then the Palestinians have every right to attempt to drive them out. While we do not oppose Jews living in the West Bank or Gaza, we are for the disbanding of every Jewish settlement that currently functions as an armed colonial outpost of Israel. We are for the ending of all Israeli military and administrative control in the Occupied Territories and for the ceding of control to the elected representatives of the Palestinian people.

We acknowledge that a West Bank and Gaza under full Palestinian control would be no more than a Palestinian 'mini-state', but we support the right of the Palestinians to exercise their self-determination via this option if they choose to. The establishment of such a state would make sense from the point of view of basic security since it would enable the Palestinians to live in an area where the Israeli Defence Forces could no longer brutalise them at will. But it would leave the question of Israel unresolved. As long as Israel remains a Zionist state – that is, one in which non-Jews have fewer rights in law and are the subject of officially-sponsored discrimination – it will be institutionally racist towards the Palestinians and a threat to the stability of the region. It will continue to exploit and oppress the Palestinian people. In addition, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would not address the plight of the Palestinians of the diaspora whose homes were in Israel.

The interests of the Jewish and Arab peoples of the region would be best served by the creation of a bi-national secular state covering the whole of Palestine/Israel, in which the rights of all minorities were guaranteed. To approach this goal a suc-

cessful fight on two separate fronts is necessary. The struggle to overthrow the reactionary Israeli state is primarily the task of Jewish workers; it must go hand in hand with a campaign by Palestinians to develop a principled socialist leadership to replace the group of nationalist opportunists around Yasser Arafat and to combat the influence of Hamas. If a Palestinian state were to come into existence in the West Bank and Gaza, there is a danger that it would remain an impoverished ghetto, a refugee camp ruled either by corrupt functionaries or fundamentalist clerics, or both.

But Israel has no intention of allowing the Palestinians to build a genuinely independent state on its doorstep. The evidence for this is in the rejection of former US president Clinton's proposals, the break-down of negotiations and the subsequent landslide win for Likud rightwinger Ariel Sharon in the prime ministerial elections on February 6. Although Clinton's plan didn't come close to meeting the demands of the Palestinians, it proved too radical for Israel since it envisaged the handing over of the whole of the Gaza Strip and up to 95 per cent of the West Bank to the Palestinians to make the resulting Palestinian state viable.

The immediate causes of the crisis in Israel are the mounting international pressure on the country for it to reach a settlement with the Palestinians and the new Intifada. The shift to the right looks ominous for the Palestinians. On February 26, the Israeli Labour Party voted to accept Sharon's offer to join a government of national unity by a two to one majority.

But although there are strong reservations in the Labour Party about going into coalition with Likud, the Intifada has few friends in Israel, where the progressive forces are small, disorganised and demoralised. Sharon has been elected on the basis of his reputation as the 'butcher of Lebanon' and Palestinian youths who confront the Israeli Defence Forces with slingshots run the risk of an even deadlier response than before. For this reason, there is an urgent need for international solidarity action with the Palestinians to force the Israelis to withdraw from the Occupied Territories.

WA

Demonstration

Stop Israel's War Crimes!

End the Occupation!

Support the Right to Return!

Saturday March 17, 11am
Hyde Park (Marble Arch entrance)
Rally at Trafalgar Square
Speakers: Tony Benn MP, George Galloway MP, Afif Safieh, Palestinian delegate to Britain, Bruce Kent, Ken Cameron (former FBU General Secretary)

Victory to the Intifada!

Israel out of the Occupied Territories!

For the right of return for all displaced Palestinians!

Labour gains from stable economy

by Richard Price

Approaching a general election, it's a good time to take stock of Labour's four years in office since its 1997 landslide. The most obvious feature of the political landscape has been the absence of credible mass opposition. In marked contrast to almost every government, Labour or Tory, since the 1960s, Blair has avoided significant challenges. With the exception of a wobbly week last September when the petrol protests ate briefly into Labour's lead, Blair has enjoyed an unprecedented mid-term advantage in the polls. Indeed, it only took Anne Widdecombe making a fool of herself over dope smoking at Tory party conference a week later to reverse Labour's dip in popularity. With the Tories in disarray, the Liberals failing to make significant gains, the Irish Republican cease-fire holding, the revolutionary left weakened and demoralised, and the absence of a serious fascist movement, we seem to be living in an ideology-free zone. A Labour victory in April or May looks as much of a certainty as another Manchester United league title.

At first sight, it looks as if – like the Premiership – it's not been a case of Blair's team playing well so much as the opposition performing badly. Yet if, as Socialist Alliance meetings up and down the country insist, there are vast clouds of working class anger waiting to find a lightning conductor to discharge, then this anger would surely find an outlet by now. The reality is that the general calm does have an objective basis – not for ever, but for the moment.

While there undoubtedly is anger among Labour's core voters, particularly in the industrial North, in Scotland and in South Wales, there is also widespread apathy and de-politicisation. Of course there are many traditional Labour voters who have expressed their disgust at New Labour's retreat from even the pretence of class-based politics, and stayed away from the polls out of feelings of betrayal. But if this was the *predominant* feeling, then

mass working class opposition to the New Labour project would have been making itself felt as soon as the immediate post-election honeymoon was over.

According to the Socialist Alliance world-view, masses of people are teetering on the edge of revolt against a deeply unpopular government, and propelled into action by a world economy on the brink of catastrophe. *Therefore* now is the time to stand as many candidates as possible against New Labour. If this is what the left has to counterpose to Blairism – dodgy perspectives, kitsch-Marxist economics and leap-of-faith conclusions – then it is doomed to irrelevance.

After a long period in which the left has become dislocated from, and lost influence in, the working class, it is vital it presents, both in analysis and agitation, a realistic understanding of what is taking place in the economy. Yet, although unemployment by any existing yardstick has fallen almost continuously under Labour, many on the left have never stopped crying wolf at every opportunity. ('Stop the jobs massacre' ran one memorable SWP placard in a month when unemployment fell for the umpteenth time in succession.)

Restructuring

What has been taking place for the past two decades in one form or another has been a neo-liberal restructuring of the economy. Basing themselves upon a new international division of labour, both the Tories under Thatcher and Major, and New Labour have replaced the fetish of nationally owned manufacturing industry with subservience to the City of London on the one hand, and multinational capital on the other. Both have sought to position Britain on the shoulder of Europe, while maintaining close political and economic ties with the United States.

The social effects have been dramatic. Since 1980, the number of manufacturing jobs has fallen by 39 per cent, while the number of service sector jobs

has risen by 36 per cent. IT-related occupations have risen by 45 per cent in the past five years. After the crisis-ridden years of Toryism, New Labour found itself at the helm of an economy on the cusp of the longest sustained boom since the 1960s. Long ago William Cobbett remarked: 'It is difficult to agitate a fellow who has food in his belly.' While this alone may explain some of the problems of the left in recent years, it is as much the stubborn refusal of the left to acknowledge this fact and to work out a viable perspective for this period which has been as much to blame.

In struggling to maintain a revolutionary perspective in a non-revolutionary period, the left has tended to substitute the experiences of the most embattled sections of the public sector and those at the sharp end of job losses in manufacturing for those of the working class as a whole. While the crisis facing industrial workers at Rover, Vauxhall and Corus, and local government workers in Hackney deserves full prominence in the left's agitation, it cannot serve as a template for the working class as a whole.

In the name of 'the struggle against empiricism', the left has tended to ignore statistics – unless bearing out pre-conceived analyses. From the 1920s onwards, the left has repeated the mantra of Britain's decline into an imperial twilight. But there is a danger in the present situation of overdoing it, out of a kind of perverse anti-patriotism.

In terms of per capita output, Britain stands fifth in the world league, behind the US, Japan, Germany and Italy. Growth in the British economy *slowed* to 2.4 per cent last year. This year the forecast is 2.8 per cent, with some analysts predicting 3.5–4 per cent. The numbers employed are at a near record of just under 28 million. This work force includes many more women than it did – 70 per cent of women of working age are now employed.

The unemployed claimant count, at just over 1 million, is at a 25-year low, and has fallen just over 600,000 under Blair. (The ILO measure, which includes those not claiming benefits, is 1.6 million.) Av-

erage earnings rose 4.2 per cent last year. Inflation is forecast to fall to 1.5 per cent this year. Average household income stands at £23,200, up 8.6 per cent on three years ago, and 19.6 per cent on four years ago.

A mini boom

There are numerous indicators within the economy of consumer confidence. House prices rose by an average of 11.2 per cent last year, while mortgage repossessions fell to their lowest level for over a decade. British nationals made a record 53.9 million visits abroad last year. Cinema audiences are at their highest for 26 years. Half the population now owns a mobile phone, while the same proportion has internet access at home or at work.

Turning to the fate of manufacturing industry, is it true that there is a generalised recession as a result of the strong pound and the failure to enter the Euro? The evidence is mixed, but it hardly bears out this widely held view. According to the *Financial Times*, 2000 was the best year for manufacturing since 1994, although there were considerable regional variations. The Engineering Employers Federation predicts 3.5 per cent growth in engineering output this year – above the average for the economy as a whole. Car production fell by 8.8 per cent last year, but redundancies at Longbridge and Luton have been partially offset by expansion by Ford in South Wales, and Nissan in Sunderland. Even before the announcement of 6,000 redundancies at Corus, it was said that manufacturing jobs were being lost in January at the rate of 30 per hour. Yet some branches of manufacturing were reporting acute labour shortages. In other sectors of the economy there is a similarly mixed picture. Machine tool production and the construction industry have been performing badly, but the retail sector, supposedly undergoing a mini-crisis, grew by 4.5 per cent last year.

These statistics ought to tell us that trying to persuade workers at large that everything is getting worse is not going to succeed under present conditions. If anything, it detracts from the specific sectoral problems some groups of workers face, while flying in the face of the rising living standards of the majority.

A tight labour market and relative stability in the economy ought to be the

best conditions for a trade union offensive on the wages front. Trade union and socialist agitation should concentrate not on claiming that workers' living standards are in absolute decline, but that the gap between rich and poor has widened under Labour – a fact backed up by recent studies by the DSS and the Fabian Society. While most workers' living standards having been rising slowly, those of the rich and the very rich have been growing rapidly. Under Blair, the rhetoric about equality of opportunity is a smokescreen behind which Britain is rapidly becoming one of the most unequal societies in Europe. Of EU countries, only Greece and Portugal have a higher proportion people living on less than 60 per cent of average income. With New Labour worried about its core vote, this must make it vulnerable to demands for far greater direct taxation of the rich, and for a reduction in indirect taxation which affects poorer people harder.

And while Blair never loses an opportunity to bang on about creating a meritocracy, in which the principle of equality of opportunity rules, very few measures have addressed to yawning inequalities in employment that do exist. The rate of unemployment for ethnic minority men stands at 13 per cent – nearly double that for all men – while female ethnic minority unemployment at 12.3 per cent is two and a half times the rate of white female unemployment.

Poverty

One of New Labour's trumpeted successes has been New Deal. It claims 69,000 lone parents have found jobs under the scheme. But very little has been done to develop affordable good quality childcare, with the result that many working parents with pre-school children continue to suffer acute hardship. Even more obscenely, under a government that came to office having made all sorts of noises in opposition about childcare, Labour local authorities continue to close nursery schools. Polly Toynbee of the *Guardian* – scarcely a socialist firebrand – has pointed out that a commitment to affordable childcare alone would be sufficient to swing hundreds of thousands of votes away from the Tories. Why? Because it is a real bread and butter class issue. It is working class women who

work in the greatest numbers, and who can least afford the exorbitant cost of childcare.

Blair has pledged to halve child poverty by 2005 and to eliminate it completely by 2010. It is difficult to take this with any seriousness. Adults with children are generally poorer than those without, and children cannot be drawn from poverty while their parents remain poor; the elimination of child poverty implies the elimination of all poverty. Meanwhile a recent study has shown that the number of children below the poverty line has grown by 250,000 since 1997.

Labour's introduction of the minimum wage did represent, despite its very low level, an uplift for several hundred thousand workers. Yet a committee of MPs recently found its level – and particularly the lower rate for young workers – to be far too low to sustain an adequate standard of life. Again, the fight to raise the minimum wage must become a major point on the trade union agenda.

In conclusion, socialist politics, while it champions all those most oppressed by capitalist society, cannot develop its agitation and propaganda effectively if it ignores the experience of the majority of workers. New Labour's main asset has been the relative stability of the economy – falling unemployment, low inflation, rising living standards for those regularly employed, and relatively stable interest rates – and the perception that it has managed the economy significantly better than the Tories. Much analysis on the left tends to see the current level of political apathy and abstention as wholly or largely the result of disgust at New Labour's shift to the right. Yet there are other potent factors at work, of which relative satisfaction with the state of the economy, compared with the permanent crisis of the Tory years, is one of the most important. It is surely naïve and self-serving to believe that these two sentiments are heading in the same direction.

For socialist agitation to be effective, it must address real concerns, and connect with genuine, if embryonic, class sentiments, and draw behind them less class-conscious workers. Crying slump in the middle of a boom – on the basis of the unevenness of the boom, and setbacks in some sectors – must rate as one of the least effective weapons in the socialist arsenal. **WA**

Environmentalist response to the fuel crisis

Few red faces among the Greens

by Nick Davies

During the September fuel crisis, a frequently asked question was: where are the Greens? It turns out that although the media were only interested in the views of blokes in lorries, the Greens were valiantly putting out press statements slamming New Labour's fuel policy as the worst of both worlds.

'High fuel taxes alone aren't going to solve the problem, when so many people are forced into car dependency by the government's inadequate transport policy. Tony Blair is failing to make the economic, social and environmental case for green taxation, while also failing to put the revenue from such taxation to effective use.' (Green Party press statement 10/9/00)

As well as urging Blair not to reduce the tax on fuel but to make the environmental case for it, and invest in public transport, Friends of the Earth looked at the bigger picture:

'This crisis has been fuelled by the lack of political leadership. Politicians of all parties, led by the Prime Minister must now help businesses and consumers wake up to the terrible consequences of global climate change, and the need to drastically cut back on our use of fossil fuels.

'Moving to a fossil-free economy through measures such as energy efficiency and the development of renewables will have huge economic benefits. The technology is already here...all that is lacking is the political will to develop it. Unless we take action to tackle this terrible problem, millions of people around the world, including Britain, will be either killed, made homeless, or face economic ruin.' (Friends of the Earth press statement 14/9/00)

It is not asking a lot to be more lucid or

intelligent than the rancid populism of Hague or the half fear, half arrogance of Blair, and the Greens and FoE manage it by some distance. The problem is not what they say, but what they leave out: the huge hole in the middle of the politics of the Green Party and FoE. Whether they are putting demands on a Labour government, or setting out the programme of a future Green government, who will carry them out, and how, and who will be mobilised to do it? How can the giants of the oil, car and road building industries be slain?

This problem manifested itself in a slightly different way during the Rover crisis in the spring of 2000. The *Guardian* columnist and environmental activist George Monbiot's contribution to the debate was 'Car Workers are Rightly Doomed' (*Guardian* 27/4/00). We can possibly put the headline down to a provocative bit of subediting, but Monbiot goes on to blame the continued existence of Longbridge on government generosity: £3.5 billion since 1975, together with the hidden subsidies of building roads, holding down fuel prices and stifling public transport. In protecting the British car industry in the face of its own inefficiency, and the saturation of the European market, Monbiot argues, the Government is locking the West Midlands into an economy that is environmentally unsustainable. Monbiot points out, quite correctly, how the economy and our health are damaged by reliance on the 19th century technology of the internal combustion engine at the expense of the investment in and development of alternative, sustainable sources of energy. But he ignores one colossal point: what about the workers who are dependent on the car industry for their jobs? If Rover goes down the tubes, the working class of the West Midlands would go the same way as the coalfield communities. Monbiot, who combines in his regular *Guardian* column and

his books a support for the interests of ordinary people with a healthy contempt for Britain's corporate tyranny would be offended at the suggestion, but didn't Thatcher and Hestletine's attack on the coalfields reduce fossil fuel dependence? For all his radicalism, Monbiot sees no role for the working class in the massive policy shift, which he advocates. On the contrary, they are either tragic victims, or an inconvenient obstacle.

Utopian

On either side of the 'hole' in green politics is much admirable grassroots campaigning, shamefully neglected by the would-be revolutionary left, on issues such as traffic-related asthma, attacks on public transport, and recycling. On the other is abstract propaganda for a sustainable society, exhorting people to change their ways of living. It claims to be above mere class interest: surely everyone has an interest in saving the planet? This thinking is not new. 150 years ago Karl Marx had this to say about a similar political animal, the utopian socialist:

'They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. Hence they habitually appeal to society at large without distinction of class...for how can people, once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible state of society?... they wish to attain their ends...by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, but by the force of example to pave the way for the new social gospel' (Marx & Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party*)

However, the East German dissident Marxist turned green activist Rudolf Bahro argued for a return to this utopian perspective: 'Like the utopian socialists and communists who Marx sought to dispense with, we must once again take the species interest as our fundamental point of reference' (Rudolf Bahro *Socialism and Survival*)

But the two world wars, the use by the USA of the defoliant Agent Orange in Vietnam, the nuclear first strike policy pursued by the US government in the cold war and the terrible destruction already caused to the planet by free market capitalism and Stalinism alike are not exactly in the interests of the species, so where

does this leave Bahro's 'species interest'? Environmental problems do not affect classes equally. Rich people can afford more choice about where they live; working class people tend to live nearer roads or factories. A working class child has a five times greater chance of being hit by a car, and the solidly working class community of Port Talbot, sandwiched between the M4 and the steelworks, has some of the worst air quality in Britain.

Environmentalism costs

The obvious point is that capitalism is a system based on the production of commodities, which are produced not for need but for profit. As a system, it is wasteful and destructive, and so it is hardly surprising the representatives of that system are prepared to be wasteful and destructive towards the environment to preserve the system from which they benefit. That is why under Thatcher Britain was known as the 'dirty man of Europe', why the Green Party is exasperated at Blair's refusal to take environmental questions seriously, and why George Monbiot said of New Labour's recent environmental initiative: 'Having promised us a green revolution you have offered instead a depoliticised technological vision which avoids confrontation with power' and, more succinctly, 'Deregulation offers dirty companies a competitive advantage over clean ones.'

Many of the concerns of green activists lead to anti-capitalist conclusions, or, to put it another way, the realisation of the green agenda means that greens must become red. Green activists who are socialists are frustrated with the relative conservatism of the Green Party and other environmental groups. On the other hand, many socialists have drifted into green politics because they are pessimistic about the ability of the power of the working class to change society. When fighting on green issues, socialists must argue for an orientation to the working class, making a link between everyday concerns and struggles facing the working class, and the need for a society based on a democratic plan of production, based on need. For example, the fuel crisis, the run-down of public transport, appalling pollution and gridlock are the end result of years

of destruction of the public rail and bus network, and the subsidising of the private, profit-hungry and environmentally disastrous roadbuilding and road haulage industries. To go back to the crisis at Rover, workers needn't be the passive instruments either of cynical governments and corporations, or of George Monbiot's desire for a sustainable society. The alternatives shouldn't be ever-rising car production or the dole. What about fighting to save jobs, sharing work on full pay, while drawing up plans, under workers' control, for an alternative use for the technology and expertise, such as making buses for an improved public transport network? What about developing the technology that already exists which avoids or reduces dependence on non-

renewable energy resources? Clearly, this is something Longbridge workers cannot do in isolation. It involves making links with car workers across Europe who are suffering from the capitalists' divide and rule tactics. This would challenge the capitalists' right to control production and to destroy the planet in the process. Given the present low level of militancy this is not an immediately realisable project, but along with the demand that Labour nationalise Rover, propaganda and demands along these lines can start to break down the divisions which exist between environmentalists and the labour movement. There should be no Chinese wall between fighting for the interests of the working class and fighting to defend the environment. **WA**

Dudley Hospitals demonstration

The workers at Dudley hospitals are now on a tenth round of strike action against plans for a privately funded hospital which will result in a loss of bed places and the handover of hundreds of jobs to the private health company Summit Healthcare. There are 600 plus workers involved in this action. They have faced sell out by the Unison bureaucracy, who tried to strike a deal with the government for an inquiry, promising that the strikers would call off their action whatever the outcome.

Mark New, secretary of the Unison branch, interviewed in *Solidarity*, told Greg Dropkin of Labournet 'Even amongst our own strikers, there is a battle to get people off the picket line and into the town centres. When they do that they see the level of support they have got. It raises the confidence. ... We want to stay in the NHS ... And the only way that we are going to do that, is to use the official support we have got, crank up the pressure on those officials, and try and activate our own members.'

A conference in Dudley passed a resolution which stated in part, the following:

'1. To call on union leaders to organise a serious campaign against PFI and privatisation. We should not allow one group of workers to be picked off at a time. A united response, up to and including, all out strike action, would show the government how determined we are to defeat PFI;

'2. Call on the union leaders to conduct a systematic campaign in the West Midlands to maximise the support shown in local opinion polls that 80% of local people back the strike.'

The demonstration is on March 3, assembling at 10.30am Chamberlain Square, Birmingham. Please download leaflets from: www.labournet.net

Messages of support and donations should be sent to: Mark New, Branch Secretary, Dudley Group of Hospitals UNISON, UNISON Offices, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5QX. Telephone / Fax 01384 244350. Cheques made payable to Dudley Group of Hospitals UNISON **WA**

TUC and Labour Party Conference

How the movement stands

Labour movement conferences offer a valuable snapshot of the state of the labour movement at that particular time. The TUC and the Labour Party conference also offer an insight into the relationship between the government and the movement which spawned it. **Pete Firmin** wrote this assessment shortly after the Greater London Labour Party conference last November

Despite the blip around the time of the 'fuel crisis', the government retains its steady lead in the opinion polls, although this is not sustained by real election results and is as much due to the dislike of the Tories as enthusiasm for Labour. When it comes to elections, Labour has great difficulty in persuading its 'natural' supporters (and, indeed, many members) to turn out and vote. Blair's personal standing in the polls has taken a dive since the fuel crisis.

Alongside this, and despite the anti-working class and authoritarian programme of the government, the labour movement remains very much in the dumps. Trade union membership and involvement are extremely low, membership only just having recovered from a long decline. Industrial action is still at an all-time low, with postal workers accounting for half of strikes which take place and disputes which last more than a few days being rare and then often drawn out defeats due to the lack of solidarity action.

In this situation, the trade union bureaucracy, while losing on particular policies at union conferences, has managed to retain control over the membership. While this has sometimes required neat footwork, shifting from last year's 'our government is wonderful' to 'this is the only Labour government on offer and we have to keep the Tories out' allied with discreet pressure on the government to provide more crumbs for the membership, this has worked in general, with the left unable to mount a serious challenge to the bureaucracy in most unions.

Social partnership

TUC Congress, where the union bureaucracies have strong control over their delegations, therefore provides an important picture of the relationship between the government and the unions. The TUC feels free to pass policy calling on the government to 'alter course' (ever so slightly), but with absolutely no commitment to do anything about this policy (such as on the level of the minimum wage), while rigorously pursuing 'social partnership' with the employers and encouraging early entry into euroland.

The two most important debates at the TUC indicate clearly the limits of its willingness to criticise the government. A very good debate on racism saw the unanimous adoption of a resolution proposed by the Transport and General Workers' Union strongly criticising the government's Asylum law, firmly arguing that it encourages racism. Yet when it came to the fuel crisis (at its height as the TUC met), not only did the union leaders back the government all the way, but they were prepared to give away their members' rights wholesale in doing so. Rejecting a proposal that tanker driver members (mainly of the TGWU) be forced to drive through pickets, they wholeheartedly accepted a worse proposal forcing the oil companies to send their tankers through. As with all such laws it is far more likely to be used against trade union action than a repeat of the fuel protest and provides legal backing to the employment of scabs. Since the protests the unions have looked on

passively as the army trains drivers to drive tankers, again something which would be used to bust trade union action.

Fuel crisis

The TUC statement on the fuel crisis was pushed through with no opportunity to discuss it on delegations, members being told by their general secretaries how to vote. Only in the Communications Workers' Union was there a revolt, resulting in abstention and a furious Derek Hodgson, the General Secretary. When it came to a central issue of government policy, the union leaders could not have been more craven.

Labour Party conference a few weeks later was the sort of affair we have become used to since the adoption of the 'Partnership in Power' proposals which remove the right from unions and Constituency Parties to submit resolutions on any issue they wish, instead replacing policy-making with a string of ministerial speeches, policy forum documents which repeat government policy and workshops. Organisations are permitted to submit 'contemporary resolutions' which fall outside the remit of the different policy forum reports and these are then submitted to a ballot to select four for discussion. However, even this restriction is not enough for the bureaucracy which ruled that resolutions calling for the reinstatement of Ken Livingstone to membership were out of order.

Conference has become so tame and boring that around 200 CLPs were

reported to have declined to send delegates. Within this bleak picture some small victories were notched up. In the ballot on resolutions to be discussed, as well as two anodyne ones which said 'we don't like the Tories' manifesto', pensions and asylum seekers came in the first four.

Pensions

In the pensions debate, intense pressure was put on the unions moving the resolution (UNISON and GMB) to remit (ie, consign it to the bin), including trying to get other union delegations to call on them to remit (most refused). The successful resolution only said that restoring the link between pensions and earnings would be 'one way' of improving pensions. The debate was an embarrassment to the government/Party leadership, but they faced it down in two ways – by spinning to the media that the resolution was only passed by the 'union barons' against the wishes of 'the membership' as represented by the CLP delegates and repeating the mantra used about the fuel protests, 'we will not be dictated to by a small section of society' (union leaders please note).

Under similar pressure Bill Morris, general secretary of the TGWU, agreed to remit the resolution on asylum seekers (similar to that passed by the TUC) in exchange for a commitment to a review of asylum law. This review has yet to see the public light of day and suspicion grows that Jack Straw intends to merely announce minor concessions, such as that change can be given when vouchers are used. While Morris must be criticised for remitting (one defeat for the government was enough for one year), he was very much alone in pursuing the issue at all.

Government to ignore voted policies

Other minor victories were won on amendments to the policy forum reports (which can only be amended by motions which get the support of one-third of the delegates at the meetings of the National Policy Forum), calling for the introduction of the CTP safety system

on the railways and for polluters to pay the cost of clearing up their mess. Again, government spokespersons immediately said they would take no notice. On these issues and pensions and the asylum law, union and Party bodies need to keep up the pressure, both by campaigning and sending in resolutions calling for their implementation.

On procedural matters minor concessions were made. A review of the procedure whereby Policy Forum reports are presented on a 'take it or leave it' basis with no right of unions or CLPs to submit amendments was promised, as was one into whether unions and CLPs should be separately balloted on the contemporary resolutions (at the moment the larger unions are virtually guaranteed to determine the outcome).

The Greater London Labour Party conference (now renamed 'biennial meeting') had many factors in common with the national conference. Two-thirds of the one-day conference were filled with speeches by MPs, Euro- MPs, Greater London Assembly members and the like. Despite there being provision for a ballot of contemporary resolutions all those submitted (including 11 on readmission of Ken Livingstone to membership and several on the government's 'Public Private Partnership' proposals for the London underground) were ruled out of order and therefore no ballot was held. Instead of putting this to conference as a standing orders committee report the outgoing chair ruled on it, which meant that a two-thirds majority was necessary to overturn it. While a simple majority was achieved, two-thirds was not possible.

Opposition to tube sell-off

Probably in an attempt to defuse protest, emergency resolutions were taken, two opposing the PPP for the tube and one condemning British Telecom's announcement of redundancies. All were passed overwhelmingly, and, in a breath of fresh air, the vice-chair, Loraine Monk, then announced that opposition to the privatisation of the tube was GLLP policy, even if the party leadership will take little notice.

Again, probably as a sop to prevent protest, workshops were allowed to take votes on resolutions which had been submitted. While these do not have the weight of votes in full conference, they do give an indication of the thinking of party and union members. The workshop on Party organisation voted, after a lengthy debate, by 45 to 26 that Livingstone should be readmitted to the Party. Another called for a moratorium on council housing transfers to other landlords, in contradiction to government policy.

In the crucial election for chair of the GLLP, the outgoing chair, Jim Fitzpatrick, who followed Millbank's agenda slavishly during the Mayoral selection and election, did not stand again (and even apologised, rather belatedly for his role). Geoff Martin, London region convenor of UNISON, stood with the backing of the left, while Chris Robbins was Millbank's candidate. While Martin secured a majority of union votes, he was defeated among CLP delegates by 3–1, giving a 60–40 victory to Robbins. However, the left did make several gains in the election to the regional executive (now referred to as the 'board!').

Dissent greater un unions

Several points can be made from this picture of the movement. Dissent is greater among the unions (though by no means all) than the CLPs, the more so the closer the delegates to the grass roots membership. Millbank rules much more firmly among the CLPs (though this was achieved, ironically through an alliance with the union leaderships) with many activists tiring of going through the motions only to be ignored by a government intent on carrying through reactionary policies. On the rare occasions votes are allowed, positive results can be achieved. The Party leadership is less concerned with these than keeping a firm grip on the machinery. If the movement is to overturn the machine and its policies it will have to link action against the policies with a fight in the structures. Such a fight, spreading initially from the unions, can also serve to galvanise CLP activists.

London Underground

Livingstone appoints a union-buster

In mid-February the media carried the story of John Prescott and Ken Livingstone's negotiations over the fate of London Underground. While the *Guardian* and *Evening Standard* presented the affair as a humiliation for Prescott, the reality is somewhat different

In the London Mayoral contest last year, the question of the privatisation of the Tube was paramount. Livingstone's stunning victory was in large part due to the fact that he gave the impression of being opposed to the privatisation of the Tube *per se*. He argued against the government's Public-Private Partnership scheme, which would see the system broken up and its various parts franchised to private companies. He called instead for the raising of investment finance through the issue of bonds – a position which was criticised by Workers Action since it would still have the effect of prioritising the generation of private profits from a public service industry. At worst, it would be privatisation by the back door.

The outcome of the Prescott–Livingstone negotiations has been a rightward shift in Livingstone's position; he is now claiming that the central issue for London Underground is not privatisation, but that there should be a unified management.

The episode has shown Livingstone in his true colours – pale pink with a streak of yellow. In the February 5 Tube strike he failed to honour his promise to be on the picket line. Since the strike was against privatisation this was to be expected.

Livingstone has appointed as the new Chief of London Underground the ex-chief of New York's system, Bob Kiley. But it would be a mistake to suppose that Livingstone's appointee would be a friend of the workers. The following is a slightly edited report from the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP) internet discussion list. The writer is a former employee of the New York City Transit Authority. **WA**

In the mid-1980s Robert Kiley was appointed chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. This is the quasi-independent agency that is responsible for running the New York City Transit Authority, the Long Island Railroad, the Metro-North Railroad (the last two are commuter lines that bring people from the suburbs into

the city), the Staten Island Railroad, and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (which administers most bridges and tunnels within the limits of New York City). The Transit Authority is by far the largest component of the MTA. Kiley's mission was explicitly to rebuild a system that was near collapse.

Following the near bankruptcy of New York City in the mid-1970s, a policy of disinvestment had been carried out with respect to mass transit. At the Transit Authority this was called 'deferred maintenance'. In practice, nothing was maintained until it broke. By the mid-1980s, the subway system was badly in need of major investments in infrastructure and rolling stock.

In the course of his tenure as MTA chair, Kiley successfully negotiated for billions of dollars for the MTA's capital budget. It is said that he is credited with getting a commitment of close to \$15 billion from the state government. This money was used to buy new buses and subway cars and replace most of the tracks and signals in the subway. Most of this work was done by private contractors, not TA employees. Clearly, it could be argued that, given \$15 billion, anyone could have vastly improved the system, and no one doubted that large amounts of money had to be put in or the subways would collapse, dragging NYC's economy down with them.

At the same time Kiley was securing money for the capital budget, hundreds of millions in operating subsidies were slashed. The federal, state, and city governments all cut back on the money that they provided for the day-to-day operation of the subway. This produced an increase in fares over time, which continues – under Kiley's successor, New York state is refusing to commit funds for capital or operating expenses. Any new capital spending has to be paid for with bonds that will be repaid from fare receipts.

The second part of Kiley's legacy is an increase in labour discipline. He hired an entire management team for the TA, mostly from outside NYC. Their job was to get more work for less money from the workforce. David Gunn was appointed to run the TA and he brought many senior managers with him from Philadelphia. They went after the workforce with a vengeance.

Wales: Another Labour stitch-up

by Laurence Barrett

First it was the imposition of Alun Michael as leader, and then it was the fixing of the party list for the Euro-elections. Would the Welsh Labour leadership make it a three-card trick or could something of the world outside Cardiff Bay and Millbank penetrate that rhinoceros-hide arrogance? To ask the question is to answer it. At the end of last year the Welsh Labour Party membership was in uproar once again. This time it was over Labour's Assembly pact with the Liberal-Democrats.

Because it was three seats short of having a working majority, Labour was having difficulty getting its programme through the Assembly. In October, the leadership announced that it was entering into a coalition agreement with the Liberal-Democrats. No special conference, no vote, no ballot of the members, just an announcement to the media. Labour Party members were furious, some left wing AMs did their best to pretend that they thought it was a good idea, and one cabinet member resigned in protest. Some members might have been persuaded of the merits of the arrangement, had the leadership condescended to ask them what they thought. Most were hopping mad at the sight of the Liberal-Democrats boasting to the media about how much they had gained out of the deal. The smallest party in the Assembly (4 AMs) now had two cabinet seats, including the key economic development portfolio, and Mike German, the Lib-Dem leader was Rhodri Morgan's deputy. The Labour leadership has tried to give itself left cover by arguing that the new arrangement would help fight the Tories and nationalists, but the Tories are marginalised, posing no threat, and many Labour Party members are all too aware that on a number of issues, Plaid Cymru is well to the left of Labour. It was of course a move not to the left but the cen-

Any work rule that had not been written down was considered void. Management took it upon themselves to set the pace of work and limited workers rights to choose their jobs by seniority in many areas. The number of trips operating personnel were expected to make in the course of a day increased.

Management sought to impose a two-tier wage structure, but had to settle for driving down the starting pay for new hires. Premium pay for working nights and weekends was reduced. The number of disciplinary write-ups soared, as did the penalties exacted for the violations. One of the managers brought in with Gunn was nicknamed Bullwhip Davis; he kept a bullwhip in his office and oversaw the breaking of resistance at one of the most militant maintenance shops in the subway. Hundreds of workers were written up and suspended for relatively minor infractions in the drive to break their control over their jobs. The hourly workforce was cut by about 10 per cent in the late 80s and early 90s. The number of supervisors and managers has increased throughout the last 15 years.

Kiley and Gunn brought private sector management practices into the transit system. Before their arrival, the ethos was to have enough staff to make sure the system could run under any circumstance. Their approach was to have just enough staff to run the system when everything was running smoothly. Then, when things went wrong, the workers were driven to make up for the fact that there weren't enough operators, cleaners, conductors, etc.

Kiley and Gunn also brought in the concessions bargaining approach that became common in the private sector from the mid- to late 70s.

For Kiley, the physical rebuilding of the system goes hand in hand with disciplining the workforce and making it more flexible, in order to extract more labour without conceding a corresponding increase in wages and increasing the authority of supervisors and managers over the work process. ■

tre, in line with what has happened in Scotland and what Blair would like to see in Westminster, bringing in a few left-wing Tories for good measure.

Since the fall of Alun Michael Labour has learned a few things, at least. Stung by the reaction, Rhodri Morgan toured the constituencies, speaking to members in question-and-answer sessions. He admitted that he should have called some sort of meeting of members, skilfully using his popularity and legitimacy among members to defuse the anger.

Labour in Wales is walking on thin ice. Many activists are already on an undeclared strike and the voters have been staying at home. The economic situation is deteriorating. Jobs have gone in the high-tech sector, principally because of the strong pound. But these problems are dwarfed by those in the steel industry, a massive employer in the south. For months there were rumours of impending closure, with lines and furnaces shut down or mothballed. Now Corus, just a few months after making a massive payout to shareholders, has announced that it is closing down Llanwern, Ebbw Vale and Bryngwyn, putting 6000 on the dole, not to mention thousands in dependent industries. To lapse into media jargon, Labour has another "heartlands" problem on its hands. Will Blair, Brown and Byers defend these jobs? They have made themselves look ridiculous, expressing "dismay" at closures. But when you play with fire you get burned. New Labour has helped to create a regime where companies can do what they like and are accountable only to their shareholders. Plaid Cymru does not have to try very hard to outflank Labour from the left on the defence of jobs. If Labour cannot defend these jobs, Plaid Cymru won't just keep the Assembly seats it won so spectacularly in 1999, it will win the Westminster ones as well. **WA**

PCS General Secretary Election

An important victory for the left

by Richard Price

Mark Serwotka's victory over leading right winger candidate, Hugh Lanning by 40,740 votes to 33,942 in the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) election for General Secretary is one of the most important successes for the left in trade union elections for years. Serwotka's victory reverses the trend of right wing victories in ballots in the 250,000-strong Civil Service union. It is all the more remarkable because a rank and file activist long associated with the left, and with fighting for industrial action not only defeated New Labour-friendly Lanning, (the current assistant general secretary), but in the nominating process, saw off the challenge of another leading right winger, Barry Reamsbottom, a sitting joint general secretary.

PCS is the result of a merger in 1998 between two Civil Service unions, CPSA and PTC. For the first two years of PCS, the merger appeared to be working against the left, with the right wing succeeding in making conference biennial instead of annual, getting conference decisions subject to referenda, and signing the union up to a toadying policy of 'partnership' with the government. A right wing majority in the last NEC elections, little in the way of campaigning or action, and the absence of any strategy to fight for the restoration of national pay bargaining in the Civil Service added up to a dismal record of complacency which the right wing hoped would serve to demoralise the left.

Right-wing infighting

But the merger had also brought problems for the right of the new union. The two predecessor unions had different

cultures and different groupings within them. The Moderate group of ex-CPSA right wingers are vicious red baiting Cold Warriors, who ran CPSA with an open contempt for the basic norms of union democracy. They re-ran elections until they got the right result, closed down sessions of conference when they didn't like the decisions it was taking, and affiliated the union secretly to sinister 'transatlantic' CIA front organisations. With both the Moderates and ex-PTC Membership First group proclaiming their loyalty to the government, there isn't too much to distinguish the two in terms of policy. But Membership First sees itself as modernising and in tune with Blairism, and regards the blatant tactics of the Moderates as something of an embarrassment. And then, there is the not inconsiderable issue of which group would control the union's lucrative full time posts.

There was a clear indication last September that relations between the two right wing groups had broken down. Two months before the general secretary election, a membership circular signed by joint general secretary John Sheldon announced the result of an internal inquiry headed by barrister Anthony White into unauthorised use of the union's membership records during elections for the National Executive Committee. In his report, White came to the conclusion that: 'On the basis of the evidence available to me and in the absence of an explanation from [former CPSA president] Mrs Chambers or any other member of the National Moderate Group involved ... I conclude that the correct inference to draw is that a person or persons unknown acting on behalf of the National Moderate Group surreptitiously extracted information from PCS membership records and deleted any record of the extraction to

cover their tracks.' This finding was no surprise to ex-CPSA activists, who long suspected such irregularities, but it was a public slap in the face for the Moderates. Not surprisingly, Reamsbottom, the other joint general secretary, refused to sign the circular.

Socialist Party lose confidence

The left in the union was also divided. The main grouping, Left Unity, voted in a members' ballot by 73 to 67 votes to adopt Socialist Party member Terry Adams, rather than Mark Serwotka, as its prospective candidate for General Secretary. A Left Unity delegate conference then voted by 44 to 39 not to stand in the election, with Socialist Party members urging withdrawal in favour of Membership First candidate Hugh Lanning.

Meanwhile, another big hurdle had been put in the way of an independent left candidacy. The NEC ruled that candidates would have to be nominated by at least 50 branches. Branches would have to call general meetings to nominate candidates, and it was assumed that the tight schedule and the large number of nominations required would rule out an independent challenge from the left, leaving Lanning free to concentrate on defeating Reamsbottom. This ruling was proposed by Membership First, and supported by Left Unity members on the NEC. Although Mark Serwotka had announced his intention of standing without Left Unity support, Socialist Party members assumed he would fail to reach the target of 50 nominations. Indeed, with only the support of the small Socialist Caucus grouping, the SWP and some independents, and with Socialist Party members attacking his candidacy as divisive, it looked like an uphill struggle.

But, contrary to the expectations

of the Left Unity strategists, a vigorous campaign succeeded in winning 71 branch nominations for Serwotka. Tens of thousands of leaflets were circulated outlining his programme, which proved very popular with many rank and file members. Its main points called for:

- Action to end performance related pay and reinstate national pay bargaining
- Action to stop privatisation
- Restoration of key elements of union democracy
- Opposition to the anti-union laws
- Opposition to 'partnership'
- Reduction of the £70,000 salary of the general secretary

Reamsbottom in contrast was struggling. The day before nominations were due to close, he withdrew from the race, having only succeeded, despite much haranguing of right-led branches, in getting 32 branches to nominate him. Cutting his losses, Reamsbottom agreed to withdraw a legal challenge to the NEC ruling on branch nominations, in return for being allowed to remain in post until June 2002, and draw his fat salary until 2004.

Hugh Lanning, despite the support of both the main right and left wing groupings in the union, as well as the small Stalinist 'Unity' group, had only gathered 20 more nominations than Serwotka. By now, had Serwotka and his supporters followed the Socialist Party's advice and stood down, Lanning would have been elected unopposed.

With nominations in, Left Unity now switched support to Serwotka, this correct decision being accompanied by Socialist Party members claiming that events had vindicated its line throughout! Reamsbottom, they claimed improbably, had withdrawn because he was 'demoralised' as a result of Left Unity's campaign.

Mark Serwotka's victory by nearly 7,000 votes on a turn out of 30 per cent – higher than that for the NEC elections – was a tremendous result, in which supporters of Socialist Caucus, the SWP, Left Unity as well as independents all played a role. The Socialist Party, which had nearly scuppered the chances of a left victory, now tried to claim the credit: 'The final outcome of the whole election campaign was a tes-

tament to the correctness of the position of Left Unity, including Socialist Party members.' Left Unity support 'was critical for his election success.' (*The Socialist*, December 15, 2000) It claimed to have offered only 'very critical support to Hugh Lanning' at the nominating stage. This support, it claimed, was 'on the basis of assurances given by

Lanning about his programme'. But the 'assurances' that the Socialist Party claimed to have been given by Lanning couldn't be found in his election statement or in his campaign material. What *could* be found, alongside claims that only Lanning was competent

to carry out the job, was an attempt by Lanning supporters to do a bit of red baiting themselves, by falsely claiming that Serwotka is a current member of the Alliance for Workers Liberty.

Left must organise

Comforting as it might be to believe that the left 'delivered' the election result, it's clear that only a proportion of Serwotka's 40,000 came directly as a result of the intervention of the left activists. Many members voted for Mark on the basis of simply comparing the two election addresses. While this is in many ways very encouraging, it is also a challenge to the left in the union to reach out and organise these forces, most of whom lie outside the organised left in the union. The credibility of the current and ex-members of the Socialist Party who are the dominant force in Left Unity, has been severely dented. What kind of 'Marxist' organisation is it, that claims it is a matter of principle to stand against Campaign Group MP Harry Cohen in the General Election, but which was prepared to allow a New Labour right-winger to stand unop-

posed by the left in a union in which it has traditionally had a strong base?

Clearly what is needed is a realignment of the left in PCS, which can gain a major impetus from this election result. In fighting to implement his programme, Mark will be opposed not only by the full time bureaucracy, but by the NEC, which is presently make up of 22

Membership First, 18 Moderates, 5 Left Unity and 1 Unity. An important part of realigning the left can be a campaign to support his programme, which reach out far wider than the limited numbers in the existing left groupings. 'PCS Must Fightback', the coalition of Serwotka's supporters which developed during the election campaign, will

hopefully play an important role in this process. To do so, it must not allow justified criticisms of the Socialist Party to turn into obsessive sectarian infighting.

Were this to happen, it could dissipate the new mood of optimism, and wouldn't be viewed favourably by a large majority of those who voted for Serwotka. In a post election statement to *Left Unity News*, Serwotka correctly called for uniting the left in PCS prior to next year's NEC elections. Voicing his disappointment at Left Unity's failure to stand a candidate, he called both for his supporters to join Left Unity, and for Left Unity to become 'more open and accessible'.

The right wing in PCS remains deeply divided. The Moderates greeted Lanning's defeat with undisguised pleasure, and while Membership First have indicated that they will accept the result, a further legal challenge on two counts from Moderate NEC member Pauline Abrahams is pending. The left however cannot assume the right wing's disarray will continue indefinitely. In the meantime, it must get its own act together. **WA**

Cutting his losses, Reamsbottom agreed to withdraw a legal challenge to the NEC ruling on branch nominations, in return for being allowed to remain in post until June 2002, and draw his fat salary until 2004.

Vermin in Barbours – the socialist answer

by Richard Price

After decades of controversy, the bill for the abolition of hunting with hounds in England and Wales has finally had its third reading in the House of Commons. Unfortunately the expected election timetable makes it unlikely to become law this parliamentary session. The labour movement has by a large majority taken the side of abolition, while most of the Tories and their shock troops in the Countryside Alliance have defended foxhunting as a valuable method of pest control, and as the inalienable right of true born Englishmen. All kinds of moral arguments have been deployed by both sides, with rural reactionaries using the language of democratic liberties and their liberal opponents appealing to the traditional if highly inconsistent British weakness for animal welfare. What position should socialists take?

Supporters of fox hunting claim that it is primarily a necessary means of keeping the fox population in check, and that sport is a secondary if justifiable part of the business. They warn that thousands of jobs dependent on field sports will go, and packs of hounds will have to be put down. Hunting, they claim, is necessary to protect the rights of foxhounds, while foxes themselves are no respecters of the rights of chickens and other animals.

The more that the left engages in round-the-houses arguments about animal 'rights', the more confusing the argument becomes. For a start, which animals (and other living things) have 'rights'? It seems to have something to do with occupying a fairly high position up the food chain, and it helps to be furry with large appealing eyes. Nobody so far as I am aware has suggested that organisms as lowly as amoebae or bacteria

should have rights. Perhaps it's because they aren't sentient. Modern research suggests fish have many more senses, perhaps even feelings, than was previously thought, and yet there are 'vegetarians' who eat fish. What is more, there is a certain logic in arguing that the more foxes that exist, the greater the number of smaller animals they will eat in the course of their naturally predatory existences. And foxes do undeniably take pleasure from time to time in killing far more poultry than they need simply to survive.

Does this mean that socialists should be indifferent to *human* cruelty towards animals? The single most obviously repugnant thing about fox hunting is the pleasure that its supporters take in disembowelling the animal. Cruelty as sport should have gone the way of bear baiting and cock fighting long ago. There does seem to be a correlation, borne out by studies of child mental health, between wanton cruelty to animals and the development of anti-social mental health problems, often including cruelty towards other children.

Uneatable

The waters become more clouded, however, when the defenders of hunting reply with some justice that it is no more cruel than many of the practices used in modern intensive farming. Yes, the opponents reply, but it is the *unnecessary* killing that is the key issue. This is shakier ground; people eat meat – at least in modern Western society – out of habit, and because they want to. Vegetarianism long since proved it is not necessary to eat meat. Giving 'rights' to foxes because they chime with our sense of what a gallant wild animal should look like, but denying them to cows and sheep, not to mention quite intelligent pigs, simply

because we want to eat them, is surely illogical.

Instead of getting lost in the moral maze of animal rights, socialists should take on the hunters on the terrain of their own claims about hunting. Rural unemployment? This from the people who gave us over three and a half million unemployed. Primarily pest control and only incidentally sport? Well, I haven't noticed my local rodent control officers charging down the high street on horseback following a pack of hounds. Foxhounds will have to be put down? If the huntsmen love their hounds so much, I'm sure they will find ways of finding them good homes – starting with their own. An efficient method of pest control? So why are there more foxes than ever? Destruction of the rural way of life? But the defenders of hunting are usually the allies of agri-business – the grossly subsidised, bloated juggernaut which has laid waste to huge areas of natural habitat, poisoning the land with chemicals and destroying rural jobs, animals and birds in vast numbers.

Socialists in fact don't need to appeal to animal rights to stand actively against the destruction of rare species, to uphold the interdependency of the natural world of which we are part, and to oppose vicarious acts of cruelty which can hardly uplift the human spirit. On the other hand, we don't fall victim to the kind of sentimentalism which gets very upset about foxes, but doesn't turn a hair when thousands of Iraqi children die from malnutrition and disease.

Unspeakable

But the most important reason to hail the abolition of fox hunting is because it gets up the noses of the vicious Barbour-jacketed vermin. This might be the class struggle in a fairly primitive and concealed form, but the sight of those red faced bullies bellowing about the erosion of their liberties – and the demonstration that they are hopelessly outnumbered and regarded with disgust, not only by the vast majority of urban Britain but by many rural workers too – has been one of the more enjoyable spectacles of recent times. **WA**

The 'peace process' and the new Republicanism

Ireland: peace . . . but not justice

by Charli Langford

Quietly, in the background, with only occasional forays into the British front pages, the Northern Ireland question is becoming 'normalised' within capitalist world politics. Still aware that there is the potential for further outbreak of armed intervention, New Labour has been muted in its triumphalism – though Blair has not been above using Ireland to defend his ally Mandelson in the latest round of leadership squabbles. For Socialists, though, the traditional analysis needs to be extended to relate to a new situation. Previous positions have tended to argue around the form of the struggle by Republicans, the role of Britain as the oppressor, and the need to build working class solidarity with Republicans and against Loyalism and Unionism.

The 'peace process' has changed that. Britain remains the oppressor, in the sense that it is historically the nation-state, which will have the role of policing the six-county working class, but economic oppression is becoming more international. There has been great growth of European and US capitalism in the south of Ireland. There has been less internationalisation of capitalism in the north, but foreign companies – Hitachi, Samsung – are now moving in.

The major changes

The Republican struggle effectively ended with the IRA cease-fire in 1992 – the Canary Wharf and St Mary's Axe bombs excepted. There is little point in speculating whether these were a) the work of Republican dissidents, b) illustrative of a difference in view between the Army Council and Sinn Fein, or c) gentle reminders to the British bourgeoisie that the IRA had made their concession and were now looking for

something in return. The Republican bombings that have continued sporadically are the work of small groups with little resonance in the Nationalist community.

The other important change in the situation has been the referenda; in the south there was a heavy majority for amending the constitution to remove the article claiming jurisdiction over all 32 counties of Ireland. Meanwhile in the north there were majorities among both Nationalists and Loyalists for the 'peace process'. The Nationalist 'Yes' vote was around 95%, the Loyalist around 56%. While it is possible to find many faults in the wording of the votes for these referenda, in the propaganda barrage surrounding them, and in the pressure put upon those in the north for acceptance, these votes did occur and cannot be simply dismissed. Albeit under duress, the Irish people have expressed a view on their self-determination.

Republicanism's role

These two changes are consequences of the politics of Republicanism. The Republican leadership is not socialist, no matter how much it has adopted socialist slogans in the past. Class for them is merely a sociological description of groups of people; it does not contain a concept of a struggle between classes for dominance. Their oppressed group is the 'Nationalist family', which incorporates Nationalist workers, but also the Catholic petit-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. When it became obvious to the Republican leadership that the military struggle was getting nowhere, they were unable to evolve an alternative tactic. Mass action was out because it did not fit with the existing secretive, elitist, organisation, and also because it had a dynamic that would split the Nationalist family by class. The situation they found them-

selves in, having to abandon one tactic in struggle while having nothing to replace it with is commonly known as a defeat. The magnitude of the 'Yes' vote among Nationalists is a consequence of this defeat – for what tactics could the Republican leadership offer to a Nationalist community that said 'No'? The 'peace process' is the settlement after the defeat and surrender of the main current of Republicanism.

What we have in the six counties is the shallow peace of defeat rather than the deep peace of social justice; the basic cause of the struggle – the relative privilege enjoyed by the Loyalists – has been lessened over 30 years of struggle but has not been eliminated. The peace process itself has given no benefits to the Nationalist working class over and above those won during the struggle from 1968 onwards. It has done effectively just one thing – it has set up a pro-capitalist governing body for the six counties where Nationalists are represented. It remains to be seen whether Nationalist workers can make any gains from the presence of Nationalists in the new Northern Ireland Assembly.

Loyalism and Unionism

Meanwhile, the Loyalists have also suffered changes. They have over the period of the troubles lost part of their relative privilege as the Catholics have gained. In some areas, such as Derry, the end of the extreme gerrymandering now means that the local council has a Nationalist majority. There is still housing and job discrimination, but to a far lesser extent than before. While some sectarian Loyalist triumphalist parades are still permitted, there has been a scaling down of the numbers and those that are permitted have in the main been re-routed away from Nationalist areas. The most

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Ireland: peace without justice *Continued from previous page*

reactionary parts of Loyalism oppose the peace process on the grounds that all reforms have favoured Catholics. Any objective observer would register that this claim is probably true, but would also note that since the Nationalists started from such an inferior position, even after all the pro-Nationalist reforms the Loyalists still retain relative privileges, and that the equalisation process has not gone far enough.

The mechanisms of the Northern Ireland Assembly still favour the Unionists. Assembly members have to define themselves as 'Green' or 'Orange', and they then enter into the Green or the Orange caucus. Any measure passed by the assembly must also be passed separately by both the caucuses. Far from removing the 'Orange veto', the peace process has added a 'Green veto' as well. The Green veto was introduced to prevent backsliding by the Unionists. The Orange veto will play its usual role – prevention of the adoption of any progressive decisions by the assembly. The dual veto system is likely to paralyse the assembly from making any socially progressive change in the six counties.

It is worth noting that both the Nationalist and Loyalist communities have in the past been extremely reactionary on social policy. The laws on both abortion rights and gay rights in the six counties are far less progressive than even the limited freedoms allowed in Britain – a case of Loyalists only wishing to be British when it accords with their own views – and we may well be faced with the prospect of discovering Green and Orange unity in yet further repression of women and gays.

Surrender, but to whom?

The nature of the Republican surrender is closely linked to their failure to perceive clearly who their enemy is. Who has gained from the Republican defeat? Clearly not the Loyalists, since the social imbalance in the north favours them much less than it did 30 years ago. Nor is it 'the Brits' – whether that refers to the British Army or the British state directly. The six-county state was

originally set up with a working class divided into two groups by national aspirations, religion, and to a lesser extent between urban and rural, and this divide and the distrust engendered was exploited ruthlessly by the predominantly Unionist capitalist class. The resultant violence eventually reached such a scale that the normal functioning of the state – which guaranteed the continuing ability to make profit – was threatened, which led to the occupation by the British Army. Now a new balance is in the process of being struck, and the main beneficiaries are those who will profit from the normalisation of the economy. The true victor is capitalism; the British state accepts the surrender in its role as guarantor of the profits.

The Catholic middle class

Over the period of the struggle there have been various reforms – the gerrymandering of voting districts has been overturned, the franchise has been extended to all irrespective of property-ownership status, and moves have been made towards reducing discrimination in jobs and housing. This has narrowed the divide in expectations between Protestant and Catholic, and has allowed the Catholic bourgeoisie to grow larger and more vociferous. This layer favours a 'normalisation of capitalism', an opening of the north to normal exploitation of the working class. Their argument – which has a kernel of truth – is that with ample job opportunities the remaining job discrimination and Nationalist poverty in the north will dwindle.

This layer's party has been the SDLP, but as it has grown in importance Sinn Fein has taken more of its concerns on board. Unanchored by a socialist understanding of the class antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie, Adams and MacGuinness, with the SDLP representatives, are now effectively the agents of the Catholic bourgeoisie in the new Northern Ireland Assembly.

Normalisation

There is now very little activity among Nationalists in the six counties. We

should of course support Nationalists in their opposition to Orange marches. But we have to recognise that as yet there is no mass Nationalist campaign against the remaining Loyalist privilege. Still less is there any reflection of such a campaign in a nascent solidarity movement in Britain. Any such movement in Britain is contingent on a struggle existing in Ireland.

The British policy for the six counties is now the continuation of the Northern Ireland state, but in a form normalised for capitalist exploitation. One necessity for this is an end to the military struggle, and this presupposes a reduction of the Loyalist privilege to a level that will not trigger a Nationalist response while at the same time not completely eliminating this privilege for fear of a Loyalist reaction. At the time of writing there is sporadic violence from splinter groups, but the main military forces are all at cease-fire status; this status quo is to be maintained as far as possible by the paralysed NI Assembly.

As part of this normalisation, Britain also is attempting to disengage the Army and to build a police force 'acceptable to both communities'. Ironically, it is the untrustworthy nature of the Loyalist sectarian RUC which has led Britain to use troops to 'back up' (trans: guarantee the reliability of) the RUC in enforcing the dictum of the Parnes Commission on the attempted Orange march down the Garvaghy Road in Drumcree. While no one should be fooled into seeing this as the British Army guaranteeing Nationalist rights, consideration should be given to the consequences of not using these troops; the Orange march would be likely to take place against token resistance from the RUC. This would expose the Parnes Commission and hence the NI Assembly as incapable of enforcing their rulings, ie, incapable of governing, bringing the British normalisation plan to nought.

And in Britain?

Under the pressure of events in Ireland and the shifts in the Republican leadership, the Irish solidarity movement in Britain broke up. The long-term leadership grouping tended to take its lead

from the Republicans – who are now welcoming the enforcement of Parades Commission rulings against Orange marches by British Troops – and should now be renaming their movement TIM. That strand of the TOM that treated the whole peace process with suspicion has in the main gone into inactivity. A very small group – among whom we number ourselves – opposed the peace process directly and continue to hold the position that Britain can play no progressive role in Ireland.

What is now to be done?

The main strand of the Republican leadership, Gerry Adams and Martin MacGuinness, are now 'constitutional Nationalists', essentially the same as the SDLP. Their move towards appeasement of the British has been plain for some time: such processes tend to have fuzzy boundaries, but a Rubicon was crossed when they accepted the Unionist veto. They can no longer claim to be leading a struggle for national liberation and therefore we must withdraw all support from them.

Although there is a continuing need to report on the situation, without there being any active struggle in Ireland there is very little prospect of growth of Irish solidarity work in Britain beyond the anti-peace-process remnant of the Troops Out movement and the socialist organisations.

Some long-held views will have to be modified; it is now clear, for example, that the slogan 'No peace without justice' has been proved incorrect – there is now peace, but injustice remains. The argument that the Republican leadership would be unable to maintain hegemony over their base under conditions of no military struggle also looks to have been proved wrong in both short and medium term.

We need to denounce strongly the inter-Republican feuding and killing. There is a danger in the possibility that the active supporters of Adams and MacGuinness should take it upon themselves to attempt to appeal to the British by policing Republicans. Blair's ultimate resolution of the RUC question – to demonstrate its new anti-sectarian nature by incorporating tame Republicans into it for their special knowledge of the Nationalist community – is at

present a pipe dream. We need to ensure it remains so.

We have to re-emphasise the position of 'critical but unconditional support' for the national liberation struggle. In the past the critical side of this formulation has been lacking. We should still defend unconditionally national liberation fighters against the British state, but we should learn from the experience of having been apologists to the working class for IRA bombings. The position Workers Action took on the Omagh bombing was to criticise publicly the action as anti-working class and ineffective while making it clear to all readers that we did this in the context of supporting the national liberation struggle and holding the British state fundamentally responsible for all actions caused by their presence. We now have to extend our attitude to other such bombings, whether carried out by a splinter group such as the 'Real IRA' or by the real IRA. We need to point out publicly that these tactics have already proven a failure.

Instead, we need to promote class-based tactics and a socialist solution to the Irish situation. We need to develop an understanding of the economic fac-

tors at work in Ireland – both north and south, for the economic factors will not recognise such borders. Within the economic factors we also need to watch closely the demographic factors – the Catholic population of the north was about 33% in 1968 but is now almost 40% and still rising; this is likely to alarm loyalists and so trigger further instability in the future.

The damage done to the 'self-determination' slogan as a weapon for uniting Ireland by the results of the referenda has already been noted above. We now have to reformulate a socialist position on Ireland. This will be a long-term process, but the bare bones of such a position must be:

- For decolonisation by Britain
- For a complete military and political withdrawal by Britain
- For British financial aid with no strings for the rebuilding of Nationalist communities
- For the self-defence of Nationalist communities through democratically-controlled forces
- Against the decommissioning of Republican weapons and for these to be turned over to Nationalist self-defence forces

WA

Book bargains

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Workers Action

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Palestine/Israel:

The collapse of the Oslo agreement

by **Simon Deville**

The election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's prime minister undoubtedly marks a shift to the right amongst the Israeli Jewish population. Though Barak has his share of blood on his hands, Sharon is renowned as the war criminal responsible for the Sabra and Chatila massacres during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Whilst Barak has at least paid lip service to negotiations with the Palestinians, Sharon does not even bother with the pretence. From this point of view the elections do mark a growing number of Israelis who either didn't vote, disillusioned with the apparent failure of the 'peace process', or those who simply don't feel it's worth even negotiating with the Palestinians. From a Palestinian point of view however, there is little to choose between either. If anything, Barak seemed more competent since he was able to win the support of the

Palestinian leadership for his colonial policy.

Provocation

The 1992 Oslo agreement was claimed to be a historic deal to bring peace to the Middle East. At the end of 1999 this deal came to an abrupt end with the second Intifada sparked by Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Asqua mosque, accompanied by 5000 Israeli troops. While this was a clear provocation, it was not the cause of the Al-Asqua Intifada. The root cause of failure of the Oslo agreement was that the most the Israelis were prepared to offer was less than the minimum the Palestinians were able to accept.

There are approximately 3.7 million Palestinian refugees living in camps in the Arab states neighbouring Israel, and there are a further 2 million who aren't formally registered as refugees with the UN. The 'peace' deal makes no mention of their fate, though Clinton did try and get Arafat

to accept a deal which negated their right to return. While Arafat prevaricated, because even large sections of his own Fatah organisation condemned it, in the end the strength of opposition did not allow him to sign this deal. Even if he had signed it, it is clear that most Palestinians wouldn't have accepted it, and it would have had dubious legal status since it gave away rights enshrined in the Geneva Convention. At the same time both Barak and Sharon have said that they wouldn't even contemplate allowing Palestinians driven out of Israel the right to return.

Discrimination

Of Israel's 5.5 million inhabitants, around a million are 'non-Jewish citizens', predominantly Palestinians who have remained there since the formation of the state. They are essentially third class citizens who face legal discrimination (apart from all the other forms of discrimination they face) in terms of the right to own property, and in education. These Palestinians, too, are not covered by the Oslo agreement and the Israeli government have no intention of ending the apartheid system that exists within the Israeli state, however the borders are drawn up. To paraphrase the head of the Israeli Defence Force 'Israel must be an apartheid state or it will cease to be a Jewish state'.

What is Arafat doing?

The Oslo agreement was lauded as a deal to provide a permanent settlement to the disputed territories within the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. According to most accounts, Arafat has refused to listen to any advice from Palestinians with any knowledge of what was being negotiated. He was convinced that an independent state was on offer when it clearly isn't. He has appeared either not to understand, or else to be completely disinterested in,

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what he is actually negotiating. While the Israelis and the USA had their overall strategy and detailed plans for the talks, the Palestinian negotiating team didn't even have their own maps. Throughout the 'negotiations' Arafat has made more concessions without gaining anything in return for the Palestinian people (though he may have amassed vast amounts of wealth for himself in the process). Meanwhile, Israel has attached strings to every inch of land they have returned to the Palestinians.

At the same time, throughout the process, Israel has escalated the illegal settlement of the 1967 occupied territories. At the end of 1999 there were 13,000 homes for settlers in the occupied territories. From 1998 to 1999, 42 new settlements were added to the 144 al-

ready existing. A network of roads that criss-crosses the occupied territories allows Israelis to travel without having even to see Palestinians. In total 350,000 Israeli Jews live in the occupied territories. Barak stated as part of the Oslo agreement that he intended to dismantle 13 or 14 of the settlements, though he later halved that number in the face of protests from settlers. Throughout the negotiations the Israelis have refused to give specifics or timetables for their responsibilities, while at the same time insisting on yet further conditions from the Palestinians, both in terms of more land and on insisting that the Palestinian Authority polices and locks up dissidents. Arafat has even reintroduced the British emergency legislation of 1936, which banned dissent, making it illegal to criticise the peace process.

Current status

The negotiations divide the occupied territories up into three categories. There are fourteen areas under Palestinian Authority control, except that Israel

controls borders and water (and effectively security as well, since Israel has never respected security agreements). These are the greater part of the Gaza strip on the Mediterranean coast, and thirteen separate areas within the West Bank comprising a group of four in the north, a group of three 100 miles away in the south, and a further six in the area between. There are a large number of areas in the West Bank nomi-

nally under joint control, though in reality the Israelis control everything. Both the Palestinian Authority areas and the Joint Control areas are non-contiguous areas within a large area of the West Bank 'still to be negotiated' (which means under complete Israeli control), and about 40 per cent of the Gaza strip is also 'still to be negotiated'. The rest of the country, includ-

ing a wide corridor into the West Bank linking to Jerusalem, is not occupied territory according to the definition in the negotiations. But even within the Palestinian Authority areas Israeli security forces have intervened whenever it has suited them. The most recent agreement still only permits Palestinians control over 18% of the West Bank, in non-contiguous Bantustans.

Life in the West Bank and Gaza has deteriorated significantly for the majority of Palestinians since the beginning of Oslo. Unemployment has increased drastically, reaching somewhere between 38% and 60%, depending on which figures you believe, and GDP has almost halved since 1993. Whilst the agreement was supposed to have allowed Palestinians free access between the West Bank and Gaza, Israel still insists they apply to the Israeli forces to travel; only 40% of such applications are agreed.

The Palestinian Authority

Corruption and patronage are rife within the Palestinian Authority. Arafat

has refused to allow any drafted legislation to be passed, preferring everything to have to be agreed by him personally. An enormous bureaucracy has been established, most of which doesn't actually do anything (this does not mean that it doesn't do anything *productive*, but doesn't do anything *literally*). Fictitious ministries are being given out as reward for favours. The most productive elements within the PA are the 13 different security forces that Arafat established. These are both to protect him and to root out and lock up dissidents. The last thing that Israel and the CIA want is a democratic Palestinian Authority that represents the Palestinian people. As such they have fostered and developed the Arafat leadership into a tame ally. Occasionally Arafat is forced to be seen to stand up to Israeli, as his autocratic rule would be swept aside by the Palestinian people if he didn't.

Peace Now

The fact that the Peace Now movement within Israel collapsed when the Al-Asqua Intifada began showed that it was a movement built on sand. It was only prepared to campaign for peace within the framework of Zionism, that is on the basis that the Palestinians accept their role as second or third class citizens. A new movement within Israel must be built that learns the lessons from this – that is built far more upon the oppressed sections of Israeli society than on the middle class liberals of Peace Now. **WA**

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Workers Power

Ten years in the pit of centrism

by Richard Price

Limitation, it is said, is the sincerest form of flattery. Being flattered – albeit indirectly – by Workers Power is a fairly rare experience, so, this article is an exception to Workers Action's usual editorial policy of not filling its pages with Trotskyist sectarianism.

The November 2000 edition of *Workers Power* carries a two-page resolution passed by the Fifth Congress of Workers Power's international tendency, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) in July. Entitled 'Capitalist Restoration and the State', it throws overboard the entire theoretical baggage accumulated by the LRCI in the eleven years since the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. It does so, what is more, in terms which directly echo, and in a number of passages openly plagiarise, the analysis of the collapse made by, the Workers International League (the predecessor organisation of Workers Action) and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), to which it was affiliated.

Of course, a break with the absurd theory that, because of the incomplete restoration of capitalism, the former Stalinist-led states of eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union remained Moribund Workers States, is in general to be welcomed – even if the theoretical inspiration for the new line is only referred to once in an aside. (The resolution admits that the LRCI's response to the LTT's criticisms was 'specious, unconvincing and unhelpful'.)

The LRCI's resolution accepts:

- That the key determinant in deciding the class character of a state is not the dominant form of property, but 'the class and economic system that the state power promotes and defends'.

- That the state cannot be analysed 'as a mere passive reflection of impersonal economic forces'.

- That the LRCI's previous dating of capitalist overturns in eastern Europe after the Second World War was wrong, and that 'we should recognise them as workers' states from the point at which the governments and states began to move decisively against capital and capitalism and to create bureaucratically planned economies on the Stalin model, i.e. in 1948/49'.

- That the decisive points of rupture in 1989/91 took the form of a political crises within the ruling bureaucracy, leading to the abolition of 'leading role' of the Stalinist parties, rather than an arbitrary point at which capitalism could be declared to have been restored. (Until now, the LRCI believed such a position could only be held by 'a tendency that in all essentials abandoned Trotsky's analysis'.)

- That the category of Moribund Workers State, developed by the LRCI, is the product of an 'absurd theory', which 'brings nothing but confusion'.

All these points, as well as most of the quotations used to back them up, can be found in the LTT's resolution 'The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism', reprinted in the LTT's journal *In defence of Marxism* No 3. (How odd that one leading member of Workers Power should recently deny all knowledge of this text!) Gratifying as it is to see arguments previously rubbishised by Workers Power adopted as LRCI policy, this change of heart surely has wider implications. Up to now the LRCI's positions on Eastern Europe have informed its understanding of world developments since 1989, and have been the cornerstone of its struggle against 'centrism'.

Sure enough, September's *Workers Power* carried an article reporting

on the LRCI congress, which carried out some urgent damage limitation work on the tricky question of perspectives. The LRCI had, after all, understood the period ushered in by 1989 as a 'world-historic revolutionary period', albeit prefaced by a 'counter revolutionary phase'. Flowing from this, it expected the collapse of Stalinism to destabilise world capitalism, and it took the French General Strike in December 1995 and the Asian economic crisis of 1997 as evidence of the unfolding of the revolutionary period. It turns out that the LRCI had failed to take into account such factors as the influence of social democracy and the strength of the US economy. It now sees the 1990s as 'a transition period towards a new revolutionary period'.

You might think that getting the fall of Stalinism – arguably the most important political event since the Second World War – badly wrong, predicting a generalised economic crisis when none materialised, and wildly overestimating the class struggle in Western Europe would seriously undermine the credibility of any group of Marxists. And these are, let us remind ourselves, not just any group of Marxists, but by their own account, the only consistent strugglers against 'centrism' on the planet.

Collapse

Indeed, in its polemics with other groups, and in its writings on Trotskyist history, the LRCI has often adopted a 'one strike and you're out' policy. The failure of the Fourth International to correctly analyse events in the late 1940s, for example, is seen as leading directly to a 'programmatic collapse' into centrism. But true to its finger pointing '*we make mistakes, you carry out betrayals*' method, the LRCI is consid-

erably softer on itself. Ten years of moribund theorising radically wrong perspectives and specious polemics against others were, it seems, just the result of misjudging the tempo of developments: 'We got the tempo wrong but not the direction of development.' (*Workers Power*, September 2000)

This political U-turn also highlights where a wooden version of democratic centralism can lead. Until this year, those in a minority had to argue loyally for theoretical positions diametrically opposed to their own convictions. Now the line has shifted 180 degrees, it's the turn of the former majority to grit their teeth and stress that the new line – previously considered to be the hallmark of 'centrism' – is merely

confirmation of a healthy internal democracy.

Between 1990 and 1991, the WIL conducted extensive discussions with the LRCI. These foundered primarily because of diverging estimates of the collapse of Stalinism. The more the LRCI based itself on an optimistic reading of the collapse – that it would fuel a crisis for capitalism and an upturn in the class struggle internationally – the more it became apparent its grip on reality was taking a back seat compared to keeping the LRCI's spirits up. Attempts within *Workers Power* by Brian Green and others to restore a measure of sanity, by arguing that the 'big bangs' in the eastern economies marked a point of no return for the workers' states, were dismissed out of hand. The WIL,

which defended many of the positions now set out in the LRCI resolution in its press, in public forums and in extensive correspondence with the LRCI, was written off as 'pessimistic'. We hope the LRCI comrades will now reconsider these positions.

So many similarities exist between the LRCI's resolution and the LTT's text that proving the point would present little challenge, but it would also try the patience of our readers to an unacceptable degree! Instead, we are reprinting below two sections of the LTT text, 'The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism', based on a 1993 draft, adopted by the April 1995 LTT World Congress and published in *In defence of Marxism* no 3, June 1995. **WA**

Mechanical materialism and the theory of the State

Those who still regard the countries of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union as deformed/degenerated workers' states rest their case – with varying degrees of sophistication – on the continued existence of predominantly nationalised economies. Despite the existence of bourgeois restorationist governments, the state remains, they argue, the superstructural reflection of the base. Taken in isolation, some of Trotsky's writings can appear to support such a position. Those who care to look will find numerous examples of 'political shorthand', where Trotsky appears to equate the existence of the workers' state with the survival of nationalised property; for instance: 'So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class'.¹

The task of Marxists, however, is not to mindlessly repeat sacred texts, but to grasp the underlying method of Marxism. To begin to provide a definition of the class nature of the ex-Soviet Union, it is necessary to return to the most basic question – what is a workers' state?

According to Trotsky's succinct definition, 'The class character of the state

is determined by its relation to the forms of property in the means of production' and 'by the character of the forms of property and productive relations which the given state guards and defends'.² This implies a dialectical rather than a mechanical relationship between base and superstructure: it is not merely a question of the *existing* forms of property but of those which the state *defends and strives to develop*.

Underlining this approach, Lenin argued in early 1918 that: 'No one, I think, in studying the question of the economic system of Russia, has denied its transitional character. Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic system is recognised as a socialist order'.³

Thus, despite the fact that between 1917 and 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled over a bourgeois economy, only economic pedants would deny that the infant soviet regime was a workers' state. Not only did workers hold state power directly through soviets, but the Soviet regime was committed to expropriating the bourgeoisie.

Elsewhere, we have attempted the following definition: 'At root, a workers' state is one in which the bourgeoisie is politically suppressed, leading to its economic expropriation as a class. This is what such apparently disparate events as the October Revolution of 1917 and the bureaucratic overturns in eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba after 1945 have in common... We reject both purely "economic" and purely "political" definitions of a workers' state'.⁴

History abounds with examples of contradiction between the state and economic forms, which demonstrate that the class character of the state cannot be defined in purely mechanical terms. For instance, feudal states continued to exist during the formative period of merchant capital in Europe. In this century, Marxists have recognised as bourgeois states both countries which contain many survivals from pre-capitalist economic formations and countries in which substantial sections of the means of production have been nationalised (eg, Algeria, Angola, Burma, Ethiopia, Libya, Mozambique, Syria, etc). Among what we previously recognised as deformed workers' states were countries with numerous pre-capitalist survivals and/or significant private sectors within their economies. Moreover, most of the countries of Eastern Europe had large state sectors prior to 1947–48 – the period most Trotskyists

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Ten years in the pit of centrism

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identify as marking the emergence of deformed workers' states.

The cutting edge of distinction between bourgeois states and workers' states is not some decisive degree of nationalisation (Militant/CWI), nor the existence of 'central planning' (Workers Power/LRCI), nor the alleged 'commitment' of the state apparatus to defend the socialised forces of production (ICL and IBT), but which class interests the economy and the state apparatus ultimately serve.

Neither elements of private ownership on the one hand, nor extensive nationalisation on the other, in and of themselves, determine the class character of the state, because the state is at least partly autonomous from the economy. This is why the character of the state and the economy can change at different speeds. For example, the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1920s was a concession to private capital forced on the Bolsheviks in the difficult circumstances of the period, which was – at least initially – within the overall framework of defending working class interests. In contrast, the

Chinese Stalinists' policy today of encouraging private enterprise in the special economic zones is preparing the restoration of capitalism.

Militant's theory of 'proletarian Bonapartism'⁵ is the most crass example of vulgar materialism in awe of nationalised property. Angola, Burma etc, were capitalist states from their inception. The high degree of nationalisation carried out by the nationalist petty-bourgeoisie or army officers were the basis for the emergence of a bourgeois class, whose interests were defended by the state apparatus and the legal system. **WA**

Workers Power: Economism and the state

On the face of things, the most sophisticated 'economist' attempt to theorise the origin of the deformed/degenerate workers' states and defend the view that, along with the ex-Soviet Union, the countries of Eastern Europe remain workers' states, has come from Workers Power and the LRCI.

According to Workers Power, the degenerate workers' state is characterised by three main features: 'statification of the decisive parts of the means of production; their co-ordination and functioning according to the objectives set by the ruling bureaucratic caste, which necessarily involves the negation of the law of value within the state; the protection of this system from disruption by the external law of value through a state monopoly of foreign trade.'⁶

Faithful to this 'economist' method, Workers Power has tried to isolate a defining moment to 'date' the emergence of deformed/degenerate workers' states. Thus, 'by the spring of 1947, with the inauguration of the first five year plan, the process of the creation of a bureaucratically degenerate workers' state in Yugoslavia was complete'.⁷ Similarly China: 'The introduction of planning in 1953 on the clear basis of subordinating the operation of the law of value, marks the establishment of a degenerate workers' state in China.'⁸ And although 'by the

summer of 1960, Castro had broken decisively with the Cuban and US bourgeoisie', Workers Power places the formation of the Cuban workers' state as 1962, 'from the implementation of the first five year plan'⁹ – the intervening two years being occupied by a 'bureaucratic anti-capitalist workers' government', which finally resolved 'dual power'. (Quite how dual power could exist with the bourgeoisie already suppressed and expropriated, and the working class demobilised remains a mystery!)

In its quest to discover elaborate new, watertight schema, Workers Power has only succeeded in piling up further problems. If everything necessary for the functioning of the 'post capitalist' economy must be in place *before* the workers' state is created, it raises the question of why the workers' state is necessary, and what its function is.

History shows that the state is the pioneer of future economic relations represented by the class which controls it. Or as Engels puts it, 'The proletariat seizes state power and to begin with transforms the means of production into state property.'¹⁰ The English bourgeois revolution of 1640 did not spring from an already developed capitalism; it swept aside the obstacles (or, at least many of them) which stood in its way.

For Workers Power, the opposite is

the case: the state is *always* the expression of pre-existing productive and property relations.¹¹ This leads to the ludicrous notion of 'dating' the formation of the deformed/degenerate workers' states from the day the Stalinists proclaimed five year plans. But in most eastern European countries these were not inaugurated until 2-3 years after 1947/8 – the point at which what remained of the bourgeoisie was suppressed, its property largely expropriated and its political parties outlawed.

Workers Power's claim to be able to analyse 'at every stage the class nature of the state and the programmatic and tactical implications which flow from it'¹² doesn't hold water. Armed with its theory, it is far from clear what special insight revolutionary parties in Eastern Europe between 1948 and 1950 would have had. How exactly would they have tested that the law of value had been suppressed? Presumably they would have had to wait on the Stalinist planning organs to announce their intentions before amending their programme accordingly.

Indeed, the idea of planning being the key determinant of the class character of the state places a question mark over the nature of the Soviet Union down to 1928. No doubt Workers Power would reply that the working class held power *directly* through its soviets after 1917. But the soviets, as organs of direct workers' democracy, had largely decayed by 1921 – fully seven years before the Stalinist turn to industrialisation, collectivisation and full-scale 'planning' – with the majority of workers either mobilised in the Red

Army, drawn into the administration, atomised by exhaustion, disease and famine, or dispersed into the countryside.

No Trotskyist would deny that a gulf exists between the revolutionary workers' state of 1917 and the Stalinist regimes of 'already existing socialism'. Nevertheless, by using two entirely different sets of criteria, Workers Power is left with the conundrum that, according to its theory, the concepts of a 'healthy workers' state' and a 'degenerate workers' state' have nothing at all in common.

Workers Power's model of the deformed/degenerate workers' states is no more than a superficial *description* – and, what is more, only at a certain stage of their development. It has broken down in the face of real events. It is in any case highly questionable whether their economies functioned 'according to the objectives set by the ruling bureaucratic caste'. Aside from the overtones this carries of a 'bureaucratic mode of production', it contrasts with the picture conveyed in much Soviet literature, not of an economy proceeding to plan, but one constantly frustrating its would-be planners by shortages and break-downs – themselves the consequence in large part of bureaucratic misplanning. Even at the level of formal description it is inaccurate. Yugoslavia, for example, was a deformed workers' state, which for many years lacked both central planning as a determining factor of the economy as a whole, and a monopoly of foreign trade.

As for the suppression of the law of value, it too is defective as a determinant

of the workers' state. The very nature of transitional society down to 1989-91 ensured that the law of value never entirely disappeared, and lurked behind the apparently monolithic statified economies – which, in any case, from the standpoint of distribution, had always retained bourgeois norms.

Even under capitalism, the proposition that the value of commodities is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour time required to produce them does not operate according to a set of ideal norms (free competition), but within living contradictions. What is 'normal', in fact, is that capitalism 'violates' the law of value at the particular level so as to realise it at the general level. It is very common for entire branches of industry in capitalist states to be subsidised in the interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

In countries in which the bourgeoisie is weak, it frequently resorts to state capitalist methods. The law of value can hardly be said to have operated 'normally' in Angola, with much of its economy militarised. And what about countries, such as Ethiopia, which have experienced such acute famines that very few people are producing anything? In neither case, we suspect, would any Marxists seriously propose that the bourgeois state had ceased to exist.

How has Workers Power's theory of the degenerate workers' state held up since 1989? Initially, in the case of the GDR, events seemed to provide a neat 'economic' cut-off point, with the monetary union with the Federal Republic on

July 1, 1990.

But in all other cases, the attempt to theorise a 'purely economic' point of no return for the workers' state has been doomed to failure. In 1991 Workers Power could still write that 'it is the destruction of planning as the determinant of the whole of the economy which marks the destruction of the proletarian character of the property relations and, therefore, of the state which defends them.'¹³

But the election of bourgeois restorationist government throughout Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union has been accompanied by the destruction of Stalinist planning organs and the monopoly of foreign trade. Private capitalist accumulation is actively promoted, and the legal obstacles to it removed. What remains is a substantial legacy of state property, which, despite its origin, now performs approximately the same function that it does in weak semi-colonial capitalist states.

It would seem logical, given the stress it lays on 'planning,' for Workers Power to acknowledge that social counter-revolution – at least at the level of the state – has already taken place. But at this point, one strand of Workers Power's theory collides with another. Since its conditions for retrospectively baptising a degenerate workers' state include not merely the existence of planning, but 'the complete elimination of the bourgeoisie'¹⁴ – and since neither a numerous bourgeoisie nor a 'normal' functioning of the law of value exists – Workers Power has decided, for the time being, that bourgeois states have not been restored.

Its addiction to formal-logical categories did not allow for the contradictions of the real world – a situation in which the Stalinist economic mechanisms would break down, but there would be no developed bourgeoisie to fill the void. Workers Power has continued to fit reality around its schema, unconvincingly arguing that printing bank notes to subsidise state enterprises constitutes a residual form of planning¹⁵ – although it must be obvious that it is impossible to 'plan' the economy of a country such as Russia which is experiencing hyper-inflation.

In order to prepare the evacuation from such untenable positions and to accommodate evident internal opposition,

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Notes

1. L. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1933-34)*, Pathfinder, 1972, p.104.
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3. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, Moscow, 1965, p.335.
4. CWG/LTT Fusion Declaration, *Workers News*, No. 44, Mar-Apr 1993.
5. T. Grant, *The Unbroken Thread*, Fortress, 1989, pp.342-70.
6. K. Harvey, 'Poland's Transition to Capitalism', *Permanent Revolution* 9, Summer/Autumn 1991.
7. Workers Power/Irish Workers Group, *The Degenerated Revolution: The Origins and Nature of the Stalinist States*, WP/IWG, 1982, p.53.
8. *Ibid*, p.59.
9. *Ibid*, p.72.
10. F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, cited in A. Richardson (ed), *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: A Selection of Bolshevik Writings 1917-1923*, Porcupine, 1995, viii.
11. *Trotskyist International*, No. 11, May-Aug, 1993, p.45.
12. *The Degenerated Revolution*, p.97.
13. *Permanent Revolution* 9.
14. *The Degenerated Revolution*, p.46.
15. *Trotskyist International*, No. 11, p.47.
16. *Trotskyist International*, No. 16, Jan-Apr 1995, p.24.
17. *Trotskyist International*, No. 11, p.45.
18. L. Trotsky, *Writings 1934-35*, p.182.

Ten years in the pit of centrism*Continued from previous page*

the LRCI's 3rd international congress, held in August 1994, developed a new category – 'moribund workers' states' (MWSs). These are defined as 'degenerate workers' states that have restorationist governments in power which are actively demolishing the foundations of planned economy. The objective of all governments inside the MWS is clear; the complete destruction of the system of command planning and the transformation of the economy into a functioning capitalist market economy.'¹⁶

But in line with Trotsky's definition of the state in terms of the property it 'guards and defends', this is clearly a description of a bourgeois state! As a category the MWS is every bit as much of a fudge as the 'transitional state' position of the FI in 1948 – it is a 'bourgeois state form' whose social content remains undecided.

The attempt to define the state in purely economic terms leads Workers Power to the following conclusion: 'A change of leading personnel within the already bourgeois-type state machine – from objective to subjective restorationists – is not the qualitative moment of transition from a workers' to a bourgeois state. Only a tendency that had in all essentials abandoned Trotsky's analysis could identify the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorship with the collapse of the workers' state itself.'¹⁷

In which case, among those who have 'in all essentials abandoned Trotsky's analysis', we must include . . . Trotsky! : 'The inevitable collapse of Stalinist Bonapartism would immediately call into question the character of the USSR as a workers' state. Socialist economy cannot be constructed without a socialist power. The fate of the USSR as a *socialist* state depends upon that *political* regime which will arise to replace Stalinist Bonapartism.'¹⁸

In the meantime, it is sobering to consider that, had Nazi Germany succeeded in conquering the Soviet Union, it might well have retained a substantial state sector. According to Workers Power's theory, the workers' state would have survived – albeit with a fascist government. **WA**

Early days of the Spanish Revolution

The Asturian uprising: Fifteen Days of Socialist Revolution, by Manuel Grossi, Socialist Platform, 140pp, £5.00

Reviewed by **Nick Davies**

In October 1934 the working class in the industrialised northwest Spanish region of Asturias staged an insurrection in response to the threat from the right wing posed by the entry of the proto-fascist CEDA into the Republican Government. The insurrection was led by the Workers' Alliance, a workers' united front consisting of trade unions, principally the SMA (the miners' union) and the UGT (the trade union organisation), and also political organisations, principally the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (BOC), the Communist Left (supporters of the Left Opposition), and the Young Socialists. The Anarcho-Syndicalist CNT also participated. One notable absentee was the Communist Party (PCE) which was then at the tag end of its 'third period' phase and so denounced the Workers' Alliance in the most virulently sectarian terms. Events outside Spain supervened, however, shortly before the insurrection in the form of the alliance between the USSR and France, which ushered in the Popular Front. The PCE joined the Workers' Alliance and some of its members ended up as participants in the insurrection.

The uneven development of workers' leadership and consciousness throughout Spain meant that although there were strikes elsewhere, the insurrection remained isolated. After holding out for fifteen days against the Spanish army and airforce, it was crushed. In 1935, in a prison cell and awaiting what turned out to be a death sentence, Manuel Grossi wrote this account of the Asturian uprising, which is now available for the first time in an English translation. Grossi was a miner and a revolutionary, leaving the PCE in 1932

to join the BOC and playing a leading role in the uprising. His testimony has no pretensions as a work of literature, but is a matter-of-fact account of how the revolutionary workers armed and defended themselves, organised the distribution of food and supplies, and dealt with profiteers. It is a warts-and-all account, highlighting the problems as well as the successes. The treatment by the Asturian Commune of enemy prisoners, especially when compared to the punishments meted to the defeated workers, shows that workers' power was not only more efficient, but also more humane than that of the bourgeoisie.

Grossi was released under a general amnesty in 1936 and went on to command a POUM battalion on the Aragon front. He only died in 1989. However, this story does not have many happy endings. The POUM, formed in 1935 by the BOC and the Communist Left, and which produced the original edition of Grossi's account, fought heroically against fascism from 1936-39 but committed suicide, literally as well as politically by entering the Republican government. The Spanish revolution itself was betrayed and crushed by Stalin and his proxies in the PCE by the mechanism of the Popular Front. When compared to the Popular Front of 1936, the Asturian Uprising and the Workers' Alliance can be seen as the high water mark of socialist revolution in Spain. This book throws some light on this unjustly neglected episode in the history of the Spanish labour movement. Anyone interested in this subject, or in an account of workers' democracy in action, should buy it. **WA**

Sweden: Radical legislation hides austerity drive

Right attacks pro-gay laws

by **Gustav Mowitz**

After Denmark and Norway, Sweden was one of the first countries to recognise gay partnerships in law, giving them the same rights as married straight couples. The Swedish church is compelled under law to give gay couples a church wedding if they so wish. Subsequently, in 2000, homophobia was outlawed as 'instigation of slander of specific communities' – ie, on the same basis as the banning of racism just after the Second World War. Under this legislation homophobia in print, public speeches, or in audio or video recordings can lead to a jail sentence. If Ann Widdecombe had said in Sweden, as she did after the Tory Conference last year, that homosexual couples aren't natural, she could expect three months behind bars.

Nevertheless, we need to distinguish between official legislation and people's attitudes in general to conclude whether or not the day-to-day life of gay people has got better. The gay movement lobbied for the legislation, but it also served a purpose for the government in that it provided radical cover for economic attacks on the working class.

In 1976, for the first time since 1932, Sweden did not elect a Social Democratic government. Since then there have been continuous attempts to roll back the gains of the labour movement. The general strike of 1980, over pay rates, was defeated, marking the end of the classic period of Swedish reformism and in 1982 a mass rightist street movement emerged and the government swung to openly attack the welfare system. From being in the forefront of welfare and tolerance, Sweden is now the most ethnically segregated country in the western world (with 99 per cent unemployment among certain ethnic communities – such as the Iraqis and Somalis) and the international neo-liberal project is being realised extremely quickly.

Minorities – be they ethnic, sexual or disabled – have class divisions within them and it is the workers from minorities that face most hardship when the welfare state is attacked. Their special needs are completely ignored by austerity politics; the rights to mother-tongue teaching and to special educational measures for children with learning difficulties have been curtailed. Similarly, gay sauna clubs (not sauna clubs in the British sense, ie brothels, but meeting places for gay people) have been outlawed using the AIDS risk as an excuse. The fact that the Swedish government now has adopted a policy of representation of minorities on television shows, outlawed homophobia, and brought in enlightenment campaigns in schools amounts to little to minorities, because their day-to-day lives under austerity have become so much worse.

The most controversial measure is the legalisation of adoption by gay couples. This is very likely to be passed. The debate has split the country, and the reactionaries are arguing that children of gay couples will be bullied at school because their parents are gay, that they are likely to turn out gay if that is their only role model, etc. Sweden is generally a very 'politically correct' country, so the reactionaries are limited in what they can argue, but the far right is attempting to harden up those opposing the measure, using as argument the 'naturalness' of heterosexuality, and saying that funding for 'deviants' should be used to alleviate working class poverty. This can only increase homophobic violence, which is already a big problem. A recent questionnaire organised by the gay lobby showed that at least 25 per cent of gay people in Sweden have been the victims of 'queer-bashing'; over the past ten years 28 gay people have been murdered.

The government for its own reasons has been quick to accept the demands of the gay lobby, and the result has been that the legislative process has moved faster

than the views of society as a whole. The gay lobby has not felt pressurised to go out into the community to argue its case. The socialist response has to go further than mere support for the legislation; we must use the question to promote further integration of gays into society. We also have to disarm the right, and the best way to do that is to kill the austerity programme which is acting as their recruiting sergeant.

We also have to be aware that even this gay adoption legislation has problems. It assumes implicitly that two people forming a couple are the best way to bring up a child, presumably on the basis that this is the idealised way it is done among heterosexuals. But almost everybody will be able to recollect from their own experiences that there are serious down-sides to family life. Once a couple has a child, the way society operates forces a division of labour between the wage-earner and the nurturer and the woman almost always plays the role of nurturer, for both reactionary biological reasons and for job discrimination reasons. Having far less income makes her dependent on her partner and permits him a far greater say in the decisions the couple must make. Bringing into this already unequal relationship a child who will have even more problems than the woman in terms of income and dependency, and who will be far less equipped to deal with them, will exacerbate the existing tensions.

However, the family structures our lives, establishes many of our closest relationships, and provides care and support that are nearly impossible to find elsewhere. For these reasons most people still see the family as an ideal and are very resistant to alternatives even though their own experiences may not have been particularly good. There is little wonder that many gays want to be part of such a structure. And given that gay couples are by definition same-sex and therefore don't have sexist role-expectations, they may well be better at families than heterosexuals.

Socialists need to do the groundwork for alternative forms of living. This is why demands such as free childcare and the socialisation of domestic work are important not just to women as part of their liberation from sexist oppression, but to men as well.

WA

Excusing the neo-liberal agenda

Globalisation: Neoliberal Challenge, Radical Responses by Robert Went, Pluto Press/
International Institute for Research and
Education, London, 2000, 170pp.

Reviewed by **Jonathan Joseph**

This book is highly recommended for those interested in looking into the question of globalisation. This has become a key debate, not just in an academic context but also in the political, social and cultural sphere. Leading politicians and bankers sit in comfortable hotels and conference centres discussing globalisation while protesters battle the police outside. Academics discuss globalisation in half-empty lecture halls as their students stay at home and look up the material on the internet. They all agree the question is not whether globalisation is taking place, but how should we respond to it. To an extent, the left also takes this approach. I want to argue, in relation to this book, that maybe we've got a bit ahead of ourselves.

The key idea to question is that

'globalisation', in itself, is what makes this as a new and qualitatively different period of history. I do not want to question the idea that this is a new period, but I want to question the idea that globalisation is the best way to describe this period because:

- 1) Globalisation over-emphasises economic factors and falsely claims that we are now living in one big global market.
- 2) Theories of globalisation usually downplay the role of the state and other political bodies, and ignore the

role of class struggle.

- 3) Yet at the same time the globalisation debate is the class struggle in theory. The globalisation debate is in fact an ideological façade used by the ruling class to legitimise their neo-liberal policies and the politics of TINA (there is no alternative).

Globalisation: the economic story

Supporters of the globalisation thesis are a diverse bunch ranging from the neo-liberal right with their positive, almost gloating view of the process, to the more

cautious attitude of social democrats, to the negative view of the left political activists who gathered in Seattle and Prague. What unites all these people is their shared view

that capitalism has entered a qualitatively new phase marked by the development of a single, global economy and revolutions in the fields of communications and technology (sometimes called the New Economy). Robert Went goes along with this view, pointing to developments in trade, finance systems, technology, multinationals and mergers and the growth of international bodies.

The claim that we are living in an era of globalisation can be examined in relation to trade figures. Went makes the point that world trade has reached an

unprecedented level and this is certainly true in terms of volume. But Went's figures (p.11, reproduced in Table 1), showing exports and imports as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in current market prices, show other interesting trends.

If looked at in terms of the ratio of trade to GDP, these figures show that the world economy was as 'globalised' in 1913 as it is today. The big growth in international trade is in part due to the intervening period when, following depression and war, states turned to national regulation of their economies and Keynesian demand management policies. Of the two biggest players, the United States' ratio has grown while Japan's has significantly declined! And neither figure is very large, which indicates that most of the production in these countries is consumed domestically. What the figures do not show is who the trade is with, and this again undermines the view that the world market is truly globalised.

We can get some idea of who trade might be with by looking at figures for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In looking at volumes of trade and FDI, Went rightly makes the point that globalisation is not at all an even or linear process and it is not leading to a truly harmonious unification of world's economies. This point should be made against those positive globalists who argue that we are all benefiting from the creation of a single global market. As Went says: 'In reality we are witnessing a vertical restructuring of the world's economies around three poles, the so-called Triad – the EU, Japan and the US – which marginalizes most of the world: the countries kept in underdevelopment' (p.44). Looked at in terms of FDI we can see that the great majority of the world's direct investment comes from and ends up in industrialised countries, in the Triad (p.45, reproduced as table 2).

If we bring this data together, we can make a number of points that contradict the central ideas of globalisation. First, despite their liberal and open atti-

	1913	1950	1973	1994
France	30.9	21.4	29.2	34.2
Germany	36.1	20.1	35.2	39.3
UK	47.2	37.1	37.6	39.3
Netherlands	100.0	70.9	74.8	89.2
US	11.2	6.9	10.8	17.8
Japan	30.1	16.4	18.2	14.6
Average	42.6	28.8	34.3	39.5

Table 1

Inward FDI stock 1997:		
Developed countries 68.0	Developing countries 30.2	Central and East Europe 1.8
Outward FDI stock 1997:		
Developed countries 90.2	Developing countries 9.7	Central and East Europe 0.2

Table 2

tude towards international trade, the economies of the USA, Japan and the EU are surprisingly 'closed' and a lot of their trade is domestic or regional, not global. We might therefore describe the current period as regionalisation rather than globalisation with three competing and often hostile markets, not one global economy. In addition, we should note these three spheres account for nearly three quarters of all economic activity, so 85 per cent of the world's population is almost written out of this 'globalisation' process.¹

If the idea of a global economy is undermined by figures on trade and investment, it is then clear that significant changes are occurring in certain areas. Most significant is the development of the financial sector which is the most advanced of the global processes. Daily turnover on international currency exchanges has risen from \$500 billion in 1990 to \$1200 billion in 1998.(p.13) These developments clearly go hand-in-hand with the development of technology which has revolutionised these markets allowing instant transactions and twenty-four hour access.

Some have claimed that technological developments are the most significant aspect of globalisation but Went reminds us that:

'Technological possibilities play an important role in globalisation, but technology by itself does not change the world. That only happens when institutional, economic, social, legal and other barriers to new applications are cleared out of the way. Political decisions and changes in social relationships of forces are prerequisites for this.'(p.5)

This is important when it comes to assessing the role of the state. The truth is that technology has only facilitated a globalisation process set in motion by conscious political decisions – policies that were pioneered by the right-wing governments of Britain and the US.

Others have claimed that the extent of globalisation is indicated by the growth of multinationals and the power that they now hold. Some, like General Motors, Wal-Mart, Ford and Daimler-Chrysler, have greater sales than the GDPs of Norway, Poland, Indonesia, Greece and South Africa. BP's turnover is greater than Ireland's(p.19) This has led some to take the view that multinationals are now more powerful than nation states.

But multinationals are still heavily dependent on their own domestic economy and the resources, technology and facilities of their place of location. Of the world's top 100 multinationals 38 have their headquarters in the EU, 29 in the US and 16 in Japan. Between 85 and 90 per cent of high-tech products are consumed in the Triad, most of the rest in the newly industrialising countries(NICs)(p.45) Companies depend heavily on national or regional markets, on local education and training, the infrastructure, the enforcement of national (or EU) law, on relationships with governments, unions and other national institutions and organisations. So contrary to the popular view, multinationals are not really international. They nearly all have a home country on which they depend, and, although they can certainly set up production in different parts of the world, they cannot just get up and go wherever they want; they are dependent on the facilities and resources of the host

state.

The growth of multinationals, like the more general development of global trade, is not something especially new to this period, but is an inherent tendency of capitalism itself – the tendency towards expansion and monopolisation. What is new is the change in how these tendencies are regulated. Went argues that a new productive order is emerging, perhaps best described as transitional. Economic growth is still moderate, but there has been a rise in the rate of profit. This is shown by the figures in Table 3 (adapted from Went pp.86 and 99) where we can clearly see that something occurred in the 1980s that arrested the fall in the rate of profit (it would be interesting to see how many on the left recognise this fact).

We can relate this to the implementation of the neo-liberal model which got

	Rate of profit	Moving average rate of GNP growth
1965	22.4	4.0
1970	20.3	5.2
1975	16.5	3.6
1980	15.2	3.0
1985	16.8	2.7
1990	18.1	3.3
1995	18.8	2.5
1997	19.1	2.2

Table 3

profit rates rising again, but did not do much to help economic growth. The figures on economic growth might again be used to challenge the fact that globalisation is a new period of rapid expansion.

Areas like financial trading have shown staggering growth, but overall output has not. In fact the overall low growth rate is a major factor in persuading governments to make further cuts in public spending.

Globalisation and the state

All the above would indicate that states are not becoming powerless, as many globalisers would have us believe; it is more the case that the relation between state and economy has changed. But the relation between the two remains the crucial factor in global developments.

This book is absolutely right to say that: 'The state's influence is not being reduced; it is being given different tasks, but by no means necessarily fewer.'(p.48) Went quotes Steven Vogel who writes that: 'In most cases of "deregulation", governments have combined liberalisa-

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Excusing the neo-liberal agenda

Continued from previous page

tion with re-regulation, the reformulation of old rules and the creation of new ones.' (Vogel quoted in Went, p.48). There may be a movement towards a more international system of regulation, but these processes require nation states to establish the legitimacy of decisions.

Globalisation theorists claim that national states are becoming – or making themselves – less effective. But are they really less effective at economic regulation, or are they practicing a different type of (flexible) regulation? International bodies like the G7, WTO, IMF and EU have acquired new powers, but these bodies are not independent of states; they are in fact dominated by them. These bodies have allowed the dominant states like the US state to present their own agenda as an international agenda. In this sense the globalisation process represents that internationalisation of the neo-liberal agenda of the dominant states and their ruling classes. Policies like privatisation, changes in work practices, flexibilisation and the spread of inequalities are global developments that are the result of conscious state policies.

This book has a section that examines the political consequences of these policies including how the globalisation agenda has discriminated against women in terms of attacking health and welfare and other social gains, has integrated women into the workforce as cheap labour, has destroyed the environment, eroded democratic processes and promoted greater social inequalities, migration, attacks on working conditions, wages, welfare and social benefits. All these can be said to be the products of globalisation. But they can equally be said to be the result of the neo-liberal agenda pursued by the dominant states.

Long waves and regulation theory

One problem with this book is that it attempts to understand the process of globalisation through the theoretical framework of long waves. Went makes the theory of long-waves as palatable as possible, but, in my view, this is because he turns towards a theory of economic

regulation, while the long-wave question only returns to give support to the problematic idea that it is the epoch of globalisation which is upon us. I want to question this latter idea and suggest that we can do away with the long-wave theory and retain the thrust of Went's argument.

Long wave theory, as argued by Kondratiev and Mandel, maintains that the economy goes through a number of long-term cycles. The period of globalisation would represent the kicking in of one such long-wave, the collapse of the post-war settlement the ending of another.

The problem with the long-wave theory is that it can easily become deterministic so that history is seen as having a number of definite stages of development, which are determined by revolutions in the productive forces rather than by developments in the class struggle. Long-wave theory can take a decidedly technicist turn and I have argued previously (in WA no.7) how Mandel's theory looks to identify definite stages of technological development – the steam period of the late nineteenth century, the electric period of the early twentieth century and the more generalised application of electrical equipment to the production process that occurs in the post-war period. It would be easy to see globalisation in these terms too – as a period characterised by developments in electronics and computing which in turn ushers in the information and communications revolution.

It would be a mistake to see history in this way, and Went is reluctant to go down this path. He therefore attempts to make the long-wave theory as social and political as he can. His historicised version of the long-wave theory does quote Mandel, who argues that history goes through turning points but that it is '[not] the laws of motion of capitalism but the results of the class struggle of a whole historical period [which] are deciding this turning point.' (Mandel quoted in Went, p.73). Chris Brooks' letter in WA no.8 makes a similar point to this, but I am still not convinced that Mandel's theory goes much beyond this statement. Went, on the other hand, does go significantly beyond this. He argues, as Mandel does,

that the post-war Golden Age was made possible by the renewal the of stock of capital goods, the large amounts of cheap labour and raw materials made available, by technological and organisational innovations and by military revelation. But he also emphasises more socio-political factors such as the development of Taylorist and Fordist production methods, Keynesian state policy and the international development of US hegemony.(pp.76-78) In making these arguments, I believe that Went, if not rejecting the long-wave theory, is changing its nature by combining it with a theoretical framework closer to regulation theory with its emphasis on forms of accumulation and state regulation:

'Summing up, we can understand global economic developments since the Second World War with the help of Marxist long-wave theory. Since each long wave is characterised by an entirely distinctive constellation of a model of accumulation, material forces of production, a way of organising social relationships and an international division of labour, every facet of the post-war productive order came under material and ideological pressure once the economy turned around in the mid-1970s. Nothing worked automatically any more. This set an extensive, far-reaching process of economic, social, political and institutional change in motion, including, as we shall see, the process that later became known as globalisation.'(p.84)

Everything in this passage suggests that Went is not talking about a new long-wave so much as a period of economic expansion brought about by a reorganisation of social relations, a new set of class alliances leading to the institutionalisation of a 'hegemonic fix', and more generally a new mode of capital accumulation and economic regulation. Then, when this fix started to unravel and was unable to contain the general crisis tendencies of the capitalist system, new neo-liberal policies of 'de-regulation' and flexibilisation were brought in.

Went argues that the current trend towards increasing globalisation is product of two interlinked processes. The first is the long-term development since 1870 towards uninterrupted accumula-

tion and increasing international concentration and centralisation of capital. The second is the policy of liberalisation, privatisation, deregulation and dismantling of social and democratic gains since 1980.(p.94)

This is true, but it leaves us wondering exactly what role is left for long-wave theory. Can we not leave our explanation at this? Thus the period of 'globalisation' is not the product of a new long-wave, but the first process (accumulation) combined with a particular form of the second (neo-liberal policies). What long-wave theory seems to do is add an inevitability to this process (that it is the product of a cycle) and this plays into the hands of globalisation theorists who argue that the current process is intrinsic to the development of capitalism itself – something which allows them to claim that globalisation has nothing to do with the actions of states or the policies of the ruling class.

Politics and ideology

The essential question is one of theoretical framework. Went argues that the process of globalisation represents a qualitatively new phase in the development of capitalism even if he goes on to qualify this and say that the extent and the effects of the changes are often exaggerated(p.43). I would oppose this view and say that the economic aspect of 'globalisation' is in fact nothing particularly new, but is the continuation of the basic trends of capitalism (expansion and monopolisation) entirely in keeping with its intrinsic nature. But I would also say that there is a new extrinsic aspect of this process and it is important to emphasise that this aspect is extrinsic or external – that it is not something inherent to capitalist development, but is the result of conscious interventions by states and political agents. For this reason it is preferable to call the process, not globalisation, but neo-liberal flexibilisation. This is not an inevitable economic tendency, as the globalists believe, but a qualitatively new phase in the way that economic regulation is carried out. Those who see this process as external (albeit an external intervention into intrinsic tendencies) place their emphasis on the role of the state, politi-

cal factors and class struggles. Those who see this process as intrinsic are forced to resort to economic and technological determinism and ideas about long-waves of development and other hidden hands.

Why is it important to oppose the theory of globalisation as the globalists present it? Because it represents the ideological package used by neo-liberal politicians to justify their policies. They present their policies as the only possible response to a situation that is beyond their control. They say jobs and welfare must be cut in order to fit in with a flexible world market, but it is the policies of these politicians that have helped create that flexible world market. As Went says, 'politicians of various stripes are eager to point to the increasingly internationalised economy in order to justify harsh, unsaleable and unpopular policies.'(p.3) Politicians across Europe now appeal to the Maastricht convergence criteria in order to justify cuts in spending. They claim that their hands are forced, yet the hands that drafted and approved the criteria in the first place are their own. The growing interpenetration of world's economies is the excuse used to justify turning over more and more power to international institutions like EU and WTO, but these institutions do not reflect the 'world economy'; they are the tools of the dominant economic nations. The globalisation agenda is therefore an ideological façade which excuses the actions of the ruling class and legitimates their neo-liberal policies. In this sense, globalisation is real, but what lies behind the globalisation discourse is in fact neo-liberalism.

So to confront globalisation we need first to see it for what it really is. Not some out of control economic process, but the conscious actions of states and actors. To confront it we do not need anything particularly new or flashy, but rather, we need some clear class struggle demands. The book ends with a number of useful demands that social-

ists can use. These include:

- Regulation of the financial sector including a redistributive tax on financial transactions,
- Cancellation of third world debt, a break with export-led growth to give priority to domestic needs,
- Sustainable production to protect the environment,
- Cuts in working hours and redistribution of income,
- An emphasis on democratic planning to counter the anarchy of the market

These are all rather partial demands, and there is not really much of an emphasis on the fact that it is capitalism as a system, rather than aspects of the capitalist system, that needs to be changed. In other words, it is important to keep sight of the fact that we require a socialist transformation of society in order to take control of the economy. Where these demands are useful is in relating to concrete issues that face people in the here and now and in this sense they can be used to mobilise existing levels of consciousness, while posing questions which would require more radical solutions.

Generally, the politics of the book are quite good, but I do have one serious gripe. The book is written for the International Institute for Research and Education, which is connected to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. But why do we have to have this USFI double-speak when it comes to pointing the way forward? Went writes that 'In the face of cynicism, fatalism and the dominant market orthodoxy, a social, ecological, feminist and internationalist alternative must win back credibility and offer new hope.'(p.127) Did you spot the missing word? Why is it that we can mention all things except socialism? 'Social' is a meaningless word; the point is surely to explain why we are revolutionary socialists and why these ideas are the best way to understand and act within a changing world. **WA**

Notes

1. For more arguments see Grahame Thompson 'Economic Globalisation' in *A Globalising World*, David Held (ed.), London: Routledge and Open University, 2000. It is also worth looking at *Globalisation in Question* Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, Cambridge: Polity, 1996, which is the main text against globalisation from a social democratic viewpoint.

John Archer (1909–2000)

The longest serving British Trotskyist, John Archer, died on December 23 at the age of 91. From joining the Marxist Group working in the ILP in 1934, he was continuously active in Trotskyist politics for six and a half decades. Despite political differences with John, supporters of *Workers Action*, and before that the WIL, were on friendly and comradely terms with him for many years up to his death.

Although never afraid to hold pungent opinions of his own, he took an active interest in encouraging comrades much younger than himself to study the history and ideas of the movement, and carried out a great deal of translation work, bringing the writings of French Trotskyists to a British audience. He carried out a tireless correspondence with many activists, and was a regular reader of our press. He was also the author of a substantial PhD thesis on the formative history of the British Trotskyist movement, which to date has sadly not been published.

At its outset, the Marxist Group consisted mainly of intellectuals, and a number of its leaders including Denzil Harber, Margaret Johns and Stewart Kirby had, like John, connections with the LSE. Working as a civil servant, John left London to live in Leeds in an attempt to build the group's working class base. By 1937, work in the ILP had become increasingly unrewarding, and with the Marxist Group beginning to break up, John left to join up with the Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party. At this point, the Bolshevik-Leninist Group was discussing setting up a left centrist current on a partial programme, within which it hoped its members could find a broader audience. The Militant Labour League was the largely stillborn result, and John was opposed to its creation. In August 1937, Archer and Denzil Harber proposed Gerry Healy as a full member of the 'Militant' group (as the Bolshevik-Leninists were now known). This was something for which he would feel a responsibility in years to come, although

of course nobody could have known in advance the role that Healy would play in the future.

In late 1937 a small group of members including Healy split from the 'Militant' group as a result of slanders spread about Ralph Lee. But although Archer and Healy would spend the next few years in rival organisations, their political lives would be interwoven for the next four decades.

During the Second World War, John was a leading member of the official section of the Fourth International in Britain, the RSL, although the International Secretariat was much more sympathetic to the unofficial section, the WIL. The RSL rejected the 'Proletarian Military Policy' proposed by Trotsky, and supported by the SWP in the United States and the WIL in Britain, preferring a more abstract anti-war propagandism. As the war progressed, the RSL's membership stagnated while that of the WIL grew. The IS sharply criticised the Harber leadership of the RSL, accusing it of 'unheard-of bureaucratic manipulations' in expelling 'a majority of the organisation'. It was also under pressure from the WIL and an opposition within its own ranks, which supported fusion with the WIL.

The upshot was the fusion congress in 1944, which produced the Revolutionary Communist Party. John proposed a motion to the congress advocating Labour Party entry, which was defined as 'taking its place on the inside of the United Front'. While allowing for an emphasis on industrial work in the short term, it correctly predicted a mass radicalisation of the Labour Party's ranks, and warned of the dangers of missing the boat. In the event, the motion was rejected and a large majority adopted the WIL's motion, which committed the RCP to open party building. For the rest of his life John would remain remarkably consistent with the core ideas contained in the position he put forward in this motion, which could be characterised as 'shallow entry'. He was elected to the Central Committee of the new party, and

attended the ill-prepared 1946 conference of the Fourth International in Paris as its delegate.

Within a few years, the open party building project had come to grief. After the collapse of the RCP in the late 1940s, John remained loyal to 'the Group', led by Gerry Healy, which operated within the Labour Party, and he played a prominent role in it during the 1950s. During this period he worked as a lecturer for the National Council of Labour Colleges and was Labour candidate for Scarborough and Whitby in the 1955 general election.

From the split in the Fourth International in 1953 until his death, John saw himself as a partisan of the 'orthodox', 'anti-Pabloite' tradition of the International Committee, the continuity of which he saw as represented by the Lambertist tendency. After breaking with Healy's SLL in 1971 in solidarity with the French section of the International Committee, the OCI, he helped form the Bulletin Group with other ex-SLL dissidents. When in 1974-5, an opposition developed in the Western Region of the WRP around Alan Thornett, he took part in the discussions with the oppositionists, although he never joined the WSL, which took much of the WRP's industrial base.

John's views on the Fourth International were spelled out in a polemical article he wrote in 1991 for *Workers News*, No.29, 'For Trotsky's International!' However critical he was of the IC tradition, he tended to view its limitations as, if not unavoidable, largely imposed by history. While distancing himself from Healy's internal regime, he saw much of the 'Group's activity in the 1950s, as positive. This favourable assessment extended to episodes such as the 'Blue Union' struggle on the docks, in which he had played a leading role.

For decades, John's wife Mary, who died in 1983, was also his close comrade and co-worker. His son Peter was active as a Trotskyist in the Labour Party Young Socialists in the 1960s, until he was tragically killed in traffic accident in 1967, while his other son, Bob, has been active on the left for many years. Our condolences go to his second wife Win, to Bob, and to his comrades around the journal *Socialist Newsletter*.

Richard Price

Bordiga on the rise of Mussolini

The archive piece this issue is from Amadeo Bordiga. It originally appeared in English in two parts in the February and March 1923 issues of *Labour Monthly*, under the title 'The History of Fascism', Italian fascism being the only variety to have arisen at that date. **Richard Price** introduces

This article appears from internal evidence to have been written in late 1922, and is noteworthy as an early attempt to make a theoretical balance sheet of Italian fascism before it had consolidated its rule.

In March 1922, the Rome congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had passed a set of theses by Bordiga and Umberto Terracini, which accorded little specific significance to fascism; indeed they tended to see reformism as the main enemy. The editor of one of the most representative collections of Marxist writings on fascism notes that the Italian communists grasped its significance as a complex new phenomenon only with considerable difficulty. Writing in *L'Ordine Nuovo* in the course of 1921, Antonio Gramsci described fascism variously as 'the symptom of a specifically Italian political decay and as a form of international reaction; as a criminal conspiracy and a broad social movement; as the instrument of the petty-bourgeois masses and the agent of the most reactionary elements among the major owners of land and capital; as an essentially urban phenomenon, and as a movement to subordinate the towns to the countryside'.¹

Even after Mussolini's March on Rome in October 1922, Italian communism still tended to see fascism as different from other forms of bourgeois reaction only in its use of terrorist methods. The present article shares this weakness, seeing fascism as 'a great united movement of the dominant class', and arguing that

'the state was the main factor in the development of fascism'. Correspondingly less attention is paid to fascism's mass base in the petty bourgeoisie – a feature Trotsky would stress in his writings on fascism – although Bordiga does mention that the fascists 'gained the assistance of elements belonging to the strata only just above the proletariat'. He does however surely underestimate the novelty of fascism's fusion of various contradictory elements when he writes that 'fascism has added nothing new to the ideology and traditional programme of bourgeois politics'. Yet there are also flashes of real insight, for instance when he argues that fascism is 'placing itself above all the traditional parties'.

Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) was one of the main founders of the PCI in 1921, and was the most important leader of the left wing of Italian communism in the 1920s. Arrested in 1926, he was expelled from the Comintern for 'Trotskyism' in 1929, and released from prison under close supervision in 1930. Although Bordiga's faction did co-operate with the Left Oppo-

sition for several years, it was an uneasy relationship. Writing in 1931, Trotsky argued that 'the nature of this group has been fully revealed: it is a culture of pure sectarianism, hermetically sealed ... A haughty and sectarian spirit is the characteristic trait of these people.'² Not surprisingly, given their fundamentally different approaches to the united front and parliamentary work, the relationship had broken down completely by 1932.

The history of Italian communism in the 1920s is most easily approached through the large number of books devoted to Gramsci's life and work. A useful summary of the revolutionary movement in Italy is found in A. Davidson, *The Theory and Practice of Italian Communism* (Merlin, 1982), and the historical background is covered in A. Cassels *Fascist Italy* (Routledge, 1980). *Revolutionary History* Volume 5, no 4, Spring 1995, 'Through Fascism, War and Revolution: Trotskyism and Left Communism in Italy' contains much useful information on these two tendencies down to the 1940s. **WA**

The history of Italian fascism

by Amadeo Bordiga

The origin of the fascist movement may be traced back to the years 1914 – 1915, to the period which preceded the intervention of Italy in the world war, when the foundation for this movement was laid down by the groups which supported intervention. From a political point of view, these groups were made up of several tendencies. There was a group of the right, led by Salandra and the big industrialists, who were interested

in the war and who had even supported the war against the Entente before the decision to fight on the side of the Entente. On the other hand, there are also the tendencies of the left wing of the bourgeoisie, the Italian radicals, ie, the democrats of the left, the republicans who had been by tradition in favour of liberating Trieste And Trento. Finally, the interventionist movement included also certain elements of the proletarian movement: revolutionary syndicalists and

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Notes

1. D. Beetham (ed.), *Marxists in Face of Fascism*, Manchester University Press, 1983, p.5
2. L. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky, Supplement (1929-33)*, Pathfinder 1979, p.84

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anarchists. From a point of view of personalities, it is worth mentioning that the movement was joined by the leader of the left wing of the Socialist Party, Mussolini – the manager of *Avanti*

It may be stated approximately that the centre groups did not participate in the formation of the fascist movement, but returned to their traditional bourgeois political parties. The only groups which remained were those of the extreme right and those of the extreme left, ie, the ex-anarchists, the ex-syndicalists and former revolutionary syndicalists.

These political groups which in May 1915 scored a big victory in forcing Italy into the war, against the will of the majority of the country and even of parliament, lost their influence when the war was brought to a close. Already during the war one could foresee the inevitable waning of the influence of the interventionists.

They had represented the war as a very easy enterprise, and when the war became prolonged they lost their popularity. Indeed, one might doubt whether they were ever popular.

In the period that followed immediately after the war, we saw the influence of these groups reduced to a minimum.

From the end of 1918 to the first half of 1920, the period of demobilisation and slump, this political tendency was completely defeated owing to discontent caused by the consequences of the war.

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of political organisation we may connect the origin of the movement which seemed so insignificant at first with the formidable movement which we see today.

The 'fasci di combattimento' did not disband. Mussolini remained the leader of the fascist movement, and their paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* continued to be published.

Elections

At the elections in Milan in October 1919, the fascisti were completely defeated, in spite of having their daily

newspaper and their political chief. They obtained a ridiculously low number of votes; nevertheless, they continued their activities.

The proletarian revolutionary and socialist movement, which was considerably strengthened by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses after the war, did not make full use of the favourable situation, for reasons I need not go into now.

The revolutionary tendencies lacked the backing of a revolutionary organisation and of a party that would lend them permanence and stability, and thus the favourable psychological and objective circumstances were not utilised. I do not assert – as Comrade Zinoviev accused me of saying – that the Socialist Party could bring about the revolution in Italy, but at least it ought to have been capable of solidly organising the revolutionary forces of the working masses. It proved unequal to the task.

We have seen how the anti-war socialist tendency has lost the popularity which it enjoyed in Italy.

To the extent that the socialist movement failed to take advantage of the situation and the crisis in social life in Italy, the opposite movement – fascism – began to grow.

Crisis

Fascism benefited above all by the crisis which ensued in the economic situation and which made its influence felt in the labour organisations.

Thus the fascist movement at a most trying period found support in the D'Annunzio expedition to Fiume. The Fiume expedition in a sense gave to fascism its moral support, and even the backing of its organisation and its armed forces, although the D'Annunzio movement and the fascist movement were not the same thing.

We have spoken of the attitude of the proletarian socialist movement; the International has repeatedly criticised its mistakes. The consequence of these mistakes was a complete change in the state of mind of the bourgeoisie and the other classes. The proletariat became disorganised and demoralised. In view of the failure to win the victory that was

within its grasp, the state of mind of the working class changed considerably. One might say that in 1919 and in the first half of 1920 the Italian bourgeoisie to a certain extent became resigned to the idea of having to see the triumph of the revolution. The middle class and the petty bourgeoisie were ready to play a passive part, not in the wake of the big bourgeoisie, but in the wake of the proletariat which was to march on to victory.

This state of mind has undergone a complete change. Instead of submitting to a victory of the proletariat, we see on the contrary how the bourgeoisie is organised for defence.

The middle class became discontented when it saw that the Socialist Party was unable to organise in such a manner as to gain the upper hand; and losing confidence in the proletarian movement, it turned to the opposite side.

Capitalist offensive

It was then that the capitalist offensive of the bourgeoisie started. This offensive was to a certain extent the result of capable exploitation of the state of mind of the middle class. Fascism, by reason of its heterogeneous character, offered a solution of the problem, and for this reason it was chosen to lead this offensive of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism.

Our Communist Party, from the moment of its inception, consistently criticised the situation and pointed out the necessity of united defence against the bourgeois offensive. It advocated a united proletarian plan of defence against this offensive.

To get a full view of the capitalist offensive, we must examine the situation in its various aspects in the industrial as well as in the agrarian field.

In the industrial field the capitalist offensive in the first place exploited the direct effects of the economic crisis. The economic crisis caused the shutting down of a number of factories, and the employers had the opportunity of discharging the more extreme elements of the organised workers. The industrial crisis furnished the employ-

ers with a good pretext for cutting down wages and withdrawing the disciplinary and moral concessions which they had been forced to make to the factory workers.

Resistance

At the beginning of this crisis we saw in Italy the formation of a General Confederation of Industry, an association of the employing class which took the lead in this fight against the workers and submitted every individual employer to their discipline. In the large cities it is impossible to start the fight against the working class by the immediate use of violence. The workers of the cities are generally organised in groups: they can easily gather in a large mass and put up a serious resistance. The employers therefore started by provoking the proletariat into actions that were bound to end unfavourably for them, because the economic struggle in the industrial field was bound to transport the activity of the movement from the trade unions to the revolutionary domain, where it would need to be under the dictates of a political party which was really communist. But the Socialist Party was nothing of the sort.

At the decisive moment of the situation the Socialist Party proved incapable of giving a revolutionary lead to the action of the Italian proletariat. The period of the great success of the Italian labour organisation in the fight for the amelioration the workers' conditions gave place to the new period in which the strikes became defensive strikes on the part of the working class, and defeats became the order of the day.

At the same time, the revolutionary movement of the agrarian classes, the agricultural labourers and other peasant elements which are not completely proletarian, compelled the ruling classes to seek a way of combating the influence acquired by the red organisations in the rural districts.

Communes

In a great part of Italy, for instance in the most important agricultural districts of the Po Valley, a state of affairs prevailed which closely resembled a local dictatorship of the proletariat or of the groups of

agricultural labourers. The communes, captured by the Socialist Party at the close of 1920, carried on a policy of imposing local taxes on the agrarian bourgeoisie and the middle class. The trade unions flourished. Very important cooperative organisations and numerous sections of the Socialist Party grew up. Even in those rural districts where the working class movement was in the hands of men who were reformists, it took a definitely revolutionary trend. The employers were even forced to deposit sums of money to guarantee the carrying out of the agreements imposed by the trade unions.

A situation was reached where the agricultural bourgeoisie could no longer live on their estates and had to seek refuge in the cities.

Certain errors were committed by the Italian socialists, especially on the question of occupying the vacated lands and with regard to the small farmers, who after the war began to buy up land in order to become big proprietors.

The reformist organisations compelled these small farmers to remain somewhat the slaves of the movement of the agricultural labourers, and in this situation the fascist movement managed to find important support.

Violence

In the domain of agriculture there was no crisis of such dimensions as to enable the landed proprietors to wage a successful counter-offensive on the basis of the simple economic struggles of the labourers. It was here that the fascisti began to introduce their methods of physical violence, of armed brutal force, finding support in the rural proprietor class and exploiting the discontent created among the agricultural middle classes by the blunders of the Socialist Party and the reformists. Fascism benefited also by the general situation, which daily increased the discontent among all these groups of petty bourgeoisie and petty merchants, of petty proprietors, of returned soldiers, and of ex-officers disappointed in their lot after the glories of war.

All these elements were exploited and organised, and this was the beginning of this movement of destruction of the red organisations in the rural districts of Italy.

The method employed by fascism

is rather peculiar. Having got together all the demobilised elements which could find no place for themselves in post-war society, it made full use of their military experience. Fascism began to form its military organisations, not in the big industrial cities, but in those which may be considered as the capitals of Italian agricultural regions, like Bologna and Florence. The fascists possessed arms, means of transportation, assured immunity from the law, and they took advantage of these favourable conditions while they were still less numerous than their revolutionary adversaries.

The mode of action is somewhat as follows. They invade a little country place, they destroy the headquarters of the proletarian organisations, they force the municipal council to resign at the point of the bayonet, they assault or murder those who oppose them or, at best, force them to quit the district. The local workers were powerless to resist such a concentration of armed forces backed by the police. The local fascist groups which could not previously fight by themselves against the proletarian forces have now become the masters of the situation, because the local workers and peasants have been terrorised and were afraid of taking any action for fear that the fascist expedition might return with even greater forces at their command.

Fascism thus proceeded to the conquest of a dominant position in Italian politics by a sort of territorial campaign, which might be traced on a map.

The fascist campaign started out from Bologna, where in September–October 1920, a socialist administration was the occasion for a great mobilisation of the red forces.

Several incidents took place: the meeting of the municipal council was broken up by provocation from without. Shots were fired at the benches occupied by the bourgeois minority, probably by some agents-provocateurs.

That was the first grand attack made by the fascisti.

Police backing

From now on militant reaction overran the country, putting the torch to proletarian clubs and maltreating their leaders.

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In their dastardly work the fascisti enjoyed the full backing of the police and the authorities. The terror started at Bologna on the historic date of November 21, 1920, when the Municipal Council of Bologna was prevented by violence from assuming its powers.

From Bologna fascism moved along a route which we cannot outline here in detail, but we may say that it went in two chief geographical directions, on the one hand towards the industrial triangle of the northwest, viz, Milan, Turin and Genoa, and on the other hand towards Toscana and the centre of Italy, in order to encircle and lay siege to the capital. It was clear from the outset that the south of Italy could not give birth to a fascist movement any more than to a great socialist movement.

Proletarian

Fascism is so little the movement of the backward section of the bourgeoisie that it could not make its first appearance in southern Italy, but rather in those districts where the proletarian movement was more developed and the class struggle was more in evidence.

Having just described the prime elements of fascism, how are we to interpret the fascist movement? Is it purely an agrarian movement? That we would not say, although the movement originated in the rural districts. Fascism could not be considered as the independent movement of a single group of the bourgeoisie, as the organisation of the agrarian interests in opposition to the industrial capitalists. Besides, fascism has formed its political as well as military organisation in the large cities, even in those provinces where it had to confine its violent actions to the rural districts.

We have seen it in the Italian parliament, where the fascisti formed a parliamentary faction after having precipitated the parliamentary elections of 1921, which did not prevent the formation of an agrarian party independently of the fascisti.

During recent events we have seen that the industrial employers have supported the fascisti. A deciding factor in

the new situation was furnished by a recent declaration of the General Confederation of Industry in favour of entrusting to Mussolini the formation of a new cabinet.

But a more striking phenomenon in this respect is the appearance of fascist syndicalism.

The fascisti have taken advantage of the fact, which we have already mentioned, that the socialists never had an agrarian policy, and that the interests of certain elements of the countryside which are not purely proletarian are in opposition to those of the socialists.

Callous

Fascism is an armed movement which employs all methods of the most brutal violence. It also knows how to employ the most callous methods of demagogy. The fascisti endeavoured to form class organisations among the peasants and even among the agricultural labourers. In a certain sense they even opposed the landlords; we have examples of the syndicalist struggle, led by fascisti, which resembled greatly the old methods of red organisation.

We cannot consider this fascist syndicalism, which works through the use of force and terror, as an anti-capitalist struggle, but neither can we, on the other hand, draw the conclusion that fascism, in an immediate sense, is a movement of the agricultural employers. The fact is that fascism is a great united movement of the dominant class, which is capable of using for its final aims any and all means, including the local interests of certain groups of employers, agricultural and industrial.

The proletariat has not properly understood the necessity of forming a united single organisation for the common struggle by sacrificing the immediate interests of small groups. It has not yet succeeded in solving this problem. The ruling class created an organisation which could defend its power; this organisation was completely in its hands, and it followed the plan of the capitalist anti-proletarian offensive.

Fascism participates in trade unionism. Why? In order to take part in the class struggle? Never! The fascisti took part in the trade union movement saying

all economic interests have the right to organise; one can form associations of workers, peasants, businessmen, capitalists, landowners, etc. But all organisations should in their activities, be subordinate to the national interest, national production, national prestige, etc.

Class truce

This is nothing but a class truce, and not a class struggle. All interests are directed towards a certain national unity. This national unity is nothing more than the counter-revolutionary conservation of the bourgeois state and its institutions. In the makeup of fascism I believe that we can count three principal factors: the state, the capitalist class, and the middle class. The state is the principal constituent of fascism.

The news of the successive government crises in Italy have led one to believe that the Italian capitalist class possessed a state apparatus which was so unstable that it could be made to fall at one blow.

This is not at all the case. Just at the period when its state apparatus was consolidated, the Italian bourgeoisie formed the fascist organisation.

In the period immediately following the war the Italian state underwent a crisis. Demobilisation was the obvious reason for this crisis. Numbers of those who had taken part in the war were suddenly thrown into the labour market, and at this critical period the state machine, which had previously been organised to its highest pitch to resist the foreign enemy, now had suddenly to transform itself into the defensive machinery guarding capitalist interests against internal revolution. This is a formidable task for the bourgeoisie. They could not solve this problem of the struggle against the proletariat in a military or technical manner; it had to be done by political means.

Therefore we saw the radical governments of the post-war period; that of Nitti, that of Giolitti.

It was just the policy of these two politicians which rendered the subsequent victory of fascism inevitable. They started by making concessions to the working class in the period when the state mechanism had to be consolidated. Fascism came afterwards. The fascist criticism of these governments, which

they accuse of cowardice in the face of the revolutionaries, is merely demagogic rhetoric.

As a matter of fact, the fascist victory has been possible precisely because of the first cabinets of the post-war period.

Militarist

Nitti and Giolitti made certain concessions to the working class. They acceded to certain demands of the Socialist Party: demobilisation, a democratic regime, and amnesty for deserters. They made these concessions in order to gain time to re-establish their state on, a solid basis. It was Nitti who organised the 'Royal Guard', an organisation not purely of the police type, but of the new type, the militarist. One of the great errors of the reformist socialists was that they did not consider important the question, which they could have presented on constitutional grounds, of the formation by the state of an auxiliary army. This point was not grasped by the socialists, who regarded Nitti as a man with whom they could very well collaborate in a left government. This is one more proof of the fundamental incapacity of the Socialist Party to understand the development of Italian politics.

Giolitti completed the labours of Nitti. It was Bonomi, minister of war in the Giolitti cabinet, who fostered the beginning of fascism; he placed at the disposal of this young movement demobilised officers who, although re-entered into civil life, were still in receipt of a large portion of their army salaries.

He placed at the disposal of the fascisti the state machine in as large a measure as possible. He gave them every possible facility for organising their fighting forces.

The government realised that it would be an error to engage in a real struggle in the period when the armed proletariat occupied the factories and the agricultural proletariat showed signs of being about to seize the crown lands.

This government, which had done the preliminary organisational work of that reactionary force with which they desired one day to destroy the proletarian movement, was aided in its strategy by the treacherous leaders of the General

Federation of Labour, who were then members of the Socialist Party. By conceding the law of workers' control, which has never been applied or even voted, the government was able to re-establish the stability of the bourgeois state.

The proletariat was seizing the workshops and the landed estates. The Socialist Party once more failed to bring about united action of the industrial proletariat and peasants. And it is precisely this inability to secure united action which enabled the master class to achieve counter-revolutionary unity and so defeat the industrial workers on the one hand and the agricultural workers on the other.

State intervention

After the Nitti, Giolitti, and Bonomi governments, we had the Facta cabinet. This type of government was intended to cover up the complete liberty of action of fascism in its expansion over the whole country. During the strike in August 1922, several conflicts took place between the workers and the fascisti, who were openly aided by the government. One can quote the example of Bari. During a whole week of fighting, the fascisti, in full force, were unable to defeat the Bari workers, who had retired into the working class quarters of the old city and defended themselves by armed force. The fascisti were forced to retreat leaving several of their number on the field. But what did the Facta government do? During the night they surrounded the old town with thousands of soldiers and hundreds of carabinieri of the Royal Guard. In the harbour a torpedo boat trained its guns on the workers. Armoured cars and guns were brought up. The workers were taken by surprise during their sleep, the proletarian leaders were arrested, and labour headquarters were occupied. This was the same throughout the country. Wherever fascism had been beaten back by the workers the power of the state intervened; workers who resisted were shot down; workers who were guilty of nothing but self-defence were arrested and sentenced; while the magistrates systematically acquitted the fascisti, who were generally known to have committed innumerable crimes.

Thus the state was the main factor in the development of fascism.

The second factor was the cooperation, as I have already said, of the great capitalists of industry, finance, and commerce, and also of the large landed proprietors, who had an obvious interest in the formation of a combative organisation which would support their attack upon the workers.

But a third factor has also had a very important influence on the formation of the forces of fascism.

In order to form an illegal reactionary organisation outside of the state, one is compelled to recruit other elements than those belonging merely to the highest circles of the dominant class. They gained the help of these elements by appealing to those sections of the middle class of which we have spoken, and, in order to draw them into their ranks, endeavoured to express their interests. One must confess that fascism has well understood how to do this and has succeeded well in so doing. They gained the assistance of elements belonging to strata only just above the proletariat, even among those suffering from the effects of the war – all those petty bourgeois, semi-bourgeois, tradesmen, and, above all, those intellectual elements of the bourgeois youth which, in adhering to fascism, discovered in this struggle against the proletariat a new energy and the exultation of patriotism and Italian imperialism. They brought to fascism a considerable contribution in supplying it with those human elements necessary for its militaristic organisation.

These are the three factors which have permitted our adversaries to confront us with a movement whose ferocity and brutality we may denounce, whose solidarity we must recognise. We have also to recognise the political intelligence of its leaders. The Socialist Party never understood the importance of this growing antagonistic movement. The *Avanti* never understood that the bourgeoisie was preparing, while profiting by the criminal errors of the working class leaders. They did not wish to denounce Mussolini, fearing that by so doing they would be giving him publicity.

No programme

Fascism, of course, is not a new political

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doctrine. It has managed to build up a strong political and military organisation, a considerable press conducted with a good deal of journalistic ability. But there is no semblance of a programme; and now that they have arrived at the control of the state they find themselves confronted by concrete problems and are forced to apply themselves to the organisation of political economy. Now that they have to pass from negative to positive activities, despite the strength of their organisation, they commence to show their weakness.

We have examined the historical and social factors influencing the birth of the fascist Movement. We shall now discuss the fascist ideology and the programme by which this movement has drawn to it the various adherents following it.

In reality fascism has added nothing new to the ideology and traditional programme of bourgeois politics. Its superiority and originality consist only in its organisation, its discipline, and its leadership. Behind this formidable political and militarist apparatus there looms a problem which it cannot solve, namely, the economic crises which will continually renew the reasons for revolution. It is impossible for fascism to reorganise the bourgeois economic machine. They do not know how to find the way out from the economic anarchy of the capitalist system. They endeavour to carry on another fight, which is the struggle against political anarchy, the anarchy of the organisation of the master class in political parties. The stratification of the Italian master class has always thrown up certain political groups which did not base themselves on soundly organised parties and which have been continually engaged in struggles among themselves. This was above all the political reflex of the private and local interests, competition between professional politicians in the field of parliamentary backstairs intrigue. The bourgeois counter-revolutionary offensive has dictated to the bourgeois class the necessity of achieving unity of action in

the social struggle and the parliamentary field. Fascism is the realisation of this. Placing itself above all the traditional bourgeois parties, it is gradually sapping their membership, replacing them in their functions and – thanks to the mistakes of the proletarian movement – is including in its political crusade the human elements of the middle class. But it cannot construct an ideology, nor a concrete programme of social reforms, going beyond those of the traditional bourgeois policies which have been bankrupted a thousand times.

Fascist doctrine is anti-socialist and also anti-democratic. So far as anti-socialism is concerned, it is obvious that fascism is the movement of all anti-proletarian forces, and that it must therefore declare itself against all socialistic or semi-socialistic tendencies, without being able to present any new justification of the system of private ownership, unless it be the well used one of the alleged failure of communism in Russia. But their criticism of the democratic regime – that it has not been able to combat revolutionary and anti-national tendencies and that therefore it should be replaced by the fascist state – is nothing more than a senseless phrase.

Fascism is not a tendency of the right wing bourgeoisie which, basing itself upon the aristocrats, the clergy, and the high civil and military functionaries, is to replace the democracy of a constitutional monarchy by a monarchic despotism. In reality fascism conducts its counter-revolutionary struggle by means of an alliance of all bourgeois elements, and for this reason it is not absolutely necessary for it to destroy democratic institutions. From the Marxian point of view, this fact need by no means be considered paradoxical, as we know well that the democratic system is nothing more than a scaffolding of false guarantees, erected in order to hide the domination of the ruling class over the proletariat.

National supremacy

When the fascisti turn from their alleged criticism of liberal democracy to proclaim to us their positive conception, inspired by patriotic exultation

and a conception of the historical mission of their country, they base it upon an historical myth which has no basis in fact, if one considers the gravity of the economic crisis which exists in this Italy, falsely called 'the victorious'. In their methods of influencing the mob we see nothing more than an imitation of the classical attitude of bourgeois democracy: the conception that all interests must be subordinated to that of national supremacy, which is nothing more than the collaboration of classes, and is a means of protecting bourgeois institutions against the revolutionary attacks of the proletariat.

The new feature which fascism has revealed is the organisation of the bourgeois governmental machine. Recent Italian parliamentary development almost made us believe that we were in the presence of such a crisis in the evolution of the bourgeois state machine that one more blow would have shattered it. In reality we were only faced by a critical period of change in bourgeois governmental matters, due to the importance of the old political groupings and of the traditional Italian politicians.

Fascism has constructed the organ capable of conducting the counter-revolutionary struggle, even during a disturbed period of transition, if placed at the head of the state.

But when the fascisti wish to place, side by side with their negative anti-proletarian campaign, a positive programme and concrete proposals for the reorganisation of the economic life of the country and the administration of the state, they were only able to repeat the banal platitudes of traditional democracy and even of social democracy. They have furnished us with no trace of an original and coordinated programme.

For example, they have always said that the fascist programme advocates a reduction of the state bureaucracy, starting from above, with a reduction in the number of ministers, and extending into all the branches of the administration. Now it is true that Mussolini has withdrawn the special train usually allotted to the Premier, but on the other hand he has augmented the number of cabinet ministers and of as-

sistant secretaries of the state, in order to give jobs to his legionaries.

Monarchist loyalism

Fascism, after having temporarily adopted republicanism, finally rallied to the strictest monarchist loyalism; and after having loudly and constantly cried out against parliamentary corruption, it has now completely accepted conventional parliamentary procedure.

They departed so far from the tendencies of pure reaction that they even made use of syndicalism. In their congress at Rome in 1921, where they made almost ridiculous attempts at formulating their doctrines, they endeavoured to explain fascist syndicalism theoretically as being the supremacy of the movement of the more intellectual categories among the workers. But even this theory has been denied by their practice, which bases their trade union organisation upon the use of physical violence and the 'closed shop' sanctioned by the employers, with the object of breaking up the revo-

lutionary trade unions. Fascism has not been able to extend its power in those organisations where there is the least amount of that technical specialisation of labour which facilitates the control of the job. Their methods have had some success among agricultural workers and certain sections of the less skilled city workers, such as for example the dockworkers, without having attained success in the more advanced and intelligent sections of the proletariat. It has not even given a new impulse to the organisation of office workers and metal workers. There is no substantial theory of fascist syndicalism. The fascist programme is a confused mixture of ideas and of bourgeois and petty bourgeois demands; and the systematic use of violence against the proletariat does not prevent them from making use of the opportunist methods of social democracy.

One proof of this is contained in the attitude of the Italian reformists, whose policy, during a certain time, appeared to be dominated by an anti-fascist principle and by the illusion

of forming a bourgeois-proletarian coalition government against the fascisti, but who at present have rallied to the support of triumphant fascism. This combination is not paradoxical; it has been produced by a series of events, and there were many early incidents which made it easy to foresee this alliance. One may mention, for instance, the D'Annunzio Movement, which on the one side is related to fascism, and on the other endeavours to attract to itself working class organisations on the basis of the programme of the Vienna International, which claims to have a labour or even socialist basis.

I have still to deal with the recent events in Italy.

On October 24, a national fascist council was held in Naples. Everyone knows at present that this event, which was advertised in the entire bourgeois press, was only a manoeuvre to divert the general attention from the 'coup d'Etat'. At a given moment the parliamentarians were told: 'Cut short your debates, there are more important things to do, every man to his post!' This was the beginning of the fascist mobilisation. It was October 26, and everything was still quiet in the capital.

Facta had announced his determination not to resign before at least another meeting of the chamber, in order not to offend against the traditional procedure. However, in spite of this declaration, he handed in his resignation to the king.

Salandra was summoned to form a new cabinet. In order to countenance fascism he was expected to refuse to do this.

At this time it was quite possible that the fascist armies might have behaved like brigands and might have pillaged and destroyed everything in the towns as well as in the rural districts, even against the will of their chiefs, if satisfaction was not given them by calling Mussolini to power. Then there came a period when public opinion was rather perturbed. The Facta government decided to proclaim martial law. Martial law was proclaimed and a collision between the forces of the state and the fascist forces was ex-

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The history of Italian fascism

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pected to take place. For a whole day public opinion awaited developments. Our comrades were very sceptical about such a possibility.

March on Rome

The king refused to sign the proclamation of martial law, which was tantamount to accepting the conditions of the fascisti, who wrote in the *Popolo d'Italia*: 'In order to obtain a legal solution it is only necessary to ask Mussolini to form a new cabinet. If this is not done, we shall march on Rome.' A few hours after the declaration of martial law was revoked it was known that Mussolini was on the way to Rome. The military defences were already prepared, advance forces were concentrated, and the town was surrounded with barbed wire entanglements. However, an agreement was arrived at, and on October 31 the fascisti entered Rome triumphantly and peacefully.

Mussolini formed the new cabinet, whose composition you know. The fascist Party, which had only thirty-four seats in parliament, had an absolute majority in this government.

Mussolini reserved for himself the position of President of the council and the portfolios of the Ministry of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs.

The other important portfolios were divided among the members of the fascist Party.

However, as the severance from the traditional parties was not complete, the cabinet comprised also two representatives of the social democracy, viz, left bourgeois elements, and also liberals of the right and one adherent of Giolitti. During the war we had General Diaz and Admiral Thaon de Revel at the admiralty, both of them representatives of the monarchy.

The Populist Party, which carried great weight in the chamber, was very clever in its compromise with Mussolini. Under the pretext that the official organs of the party could not meet in Rome, it deputed to a semi-official assembly of some of the party's parliamentarians the responsibility to accept Mussolini's offers.

Some concessions were at least obtained from the latter, and the press of

the Populist Party was able to announce that the new government would not make many changes in the electoral system and in parliamentary representation.

Great national coalition

The compromise was extended to the Social Democrats. Mussolini did not accept a representative of the reformist General Federation of Labour, principally because the right elements in the cabinet were opposed to it. But Mussolini thinks that he must eventually have a representative of this organisation in his 'Great National Coalition' now that he has become independent of all revolutionary political parties.

We can see in those events a compromise between the traditional political cliques and various sections of the ruling class, landed proprietors, financial and industrial capitalists, who are rallying to the new state regime, which has been established by the fascisti, and assured of the support of the petty bourgeoisie.

What has been the effect of these events upon the proletariat? The latter has been recently in such a position that it has not been able to play such an important part in the struggle but has been compelled to remain almost passive.

Shot in cold blood

The only example of the struggle against the power of the state and the fascisti was the battle at Cremona, in which there were six killed. The workers fought in Rome. The revolutionary working class forces hurled themselves against the fascisti; many were wounded. The following day the Royal Guard invaded the working class quarters and deprived them of all means of defence, permitting the fascisti to follow and to shoot down the workers in cold blood. This is a most striking episode of this struggle.

The General Federation of Labour disarmed the Communist Party by proposing a general strike, and begging the proletariat not to follow the dangerous path indicated by the revolutionary group. At a moment when our press was prevented from appearing they even published the news that the Communist Party was on the point of dissolving.

The most striking incident concern-

ing our party in Rome was the invasion by the fascisti of the editorial offices of the *Comunista*. On October 31, while the city was occupied by 100,000 fascisti, the printing plant was entered by a band of fascisti just when the paper was to come out. With the exception of comrade Togliatti, our editor in chief, all the staff were able to evade the fascisti by emergency exits. Comrade Togliatti was in his office when the fascisti entered. He boldly declared that he was the chief editor of the *Comunista*. He was stood up against the wall to be shot, and our comrade was only able to escape because the fascisti, who were informed that the other editors were escaping over the roofs, started in pursuit.

But this example is quite isolated. The organisation of our party is in good condition. The publication of the *Comunista* is suspended – but not because the printers refuse to publish it. We have published it illegally at another printing plant. The difficulties in publishing it were not of a technical nature, but economic.

They seized the building of the *Ordine Nuovo* in Turin and confiscated the arms which had been kept on the premises for its defence. But we are publishing the paper elsewhere.

In Trieste the police also took possession of the printing plant of our paper, but we are still publishing it illegally. The possibilities of legal work still exist for our party and our situation is not very tragic. But it is hard to foresee future developments.

I have not exaggerated the conditions under which our party has been fighting. This is not the time to be sentimental.

The Italian Communist Party has committed certain errors, which we are entitled to criticise; but I believe that the attitude of our comrades at present is proof that we have really worked towards the organisation of a revolutionary party of the proletariat which will form the base of working class revolution in Italy.

Although one may consider certain steps which they have taken as being incorrect, the Italian communists are well entitled to feel that they have done nothing with which to reproach themselves before the revolutionary movement of the workers of the whole world. ■

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