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ANGER IN RUSSIA MOUNTS

The Boris Yeltsin regime in Russia is in deep crisis. It is meeting growing resistance from the working class, professional people and others and faces insoluble problems.

In the first five months of the year, prices shot up by 755%, while wages only increased by 275%. Production has slumped by up to 20% and many enterprises have no cash to pay wages.

Strikes against the government have come from miners, oil workers, teachers and many others against the policies of the IMF-sponsored regime.

Editorial Statement

Yeltsin's pro-capitalist government has been warned that the ending of state credits to enterprises will produce civil war conditions.

The Yeltsin government, which has no inherent strength or historical role to play, came to power following the break-up of the Stalinist bureaucracy. After the failure of the Stalinist putsch in August 1991, Yeltsin's group seized its opportunity in a second, successful coup against Gorbachev.

Stalinism as an organised counter-revolutionary party-state bureaucracy

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Moscow demonstration against the Yeltsin government

with a total grip on society emerged only after a bitter struggle within the Bolshevik Party.

The opponents of Stalin's group inside the party were led by Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition. The death of Lenin in 1924 and the defeat of revolutionary struggles outside Russia swung the struggle in favour of the most conservative forces in the party.

Trotsky (illegally expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929) continued, with his supporters, the theoretical and practical struggle against Stalinism and its betrayal of the revolution.

GLASNOST AND PERESTROIKA

Khrushchev opened the way for the defeat of the bureaucracy with his secret speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956. This movement was renewed by the Gorbachev group within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985. The Stalinist bureaucracy as a social formation was finally destroyed by perestroika and glasnost.

The Gorbachev-led period of the political revolution ended last year because, as Gorbachev himself now admits, it was a mistake to leave unresolved the contradictions inside the CPSU and state.

The lag in political development in the working class and the domination of the CPSU apparatus by Stalinists, gave the anti-

communist "democrats" the chance to consolidate their political influence on the Soviets. Now the "democrats", who illegally banned the CPSU, are trying to undo the gains of perestroika in terms of democratic rights, glasnost and the election of Soviets.

In 1917, the overthrow of the Tsar put a bourgeois government in power led by Kerensky. But because Russian capitalism was weak, the Kerensky government was doomed and was quickly threatened by those who wanted the Tsar restored.

Kerensky was overthrown by workers and soldier-peasants in the October Revolution led by the Bolsheviks. The Yeltsin government fulfils a Kerensky-type role in the midst of a continuous revolutionary process.

There is no possibility in Russia or any other republic of a peaceful transition to some idealised version of modern capitalist society. That period of capitalism passed away at the turn of the century with the development of imperialism.

The loss of authority and the constant reorganisation of the Yeltsin regime is a sign that its life will be short-lived and it must yield power.

Under the banner of "democracy", the Yeltsin regime is moving towards open dictatorship. Demonstrations are attacked by police-military forces, newspapers and TV are tightly controlled and

opponents are threatened with arrest and court action.

Yeltsin's illegal government, which broke up the Soviet Union last December, is now whipping up civil war and internecine strife throughout the republics with threats of military intervention.

As in 1917 the choice is between reactionary, fascist and chauvinist forces or workers led by a renewed revolutionary leadership.

COMBINED AND UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT

Problems caused by the combined and uneven development of world economy in 1917 still hold good today. The international division of labour is an objective process from which it is impossible to escape. Productivity in the capitalist countries and gross output is still far higher than in the former USSR.

This gap cannot be closed by the brutal imposition of a "market economy". In fact, this would lead to the destruction of the Russian economy, just as the operation of "market forces" has resulted in the destruction of much of British industry in the face of international competition.

It is not possible to analyse the revolutionary process in the former USSR without understanding that it coincides and interacts with the crisis of world capitalism.

A slump in the major countries takes the form of an uncontrollable debt crisis. The world's largest debtor nation is the USA itself. The printing of money and provision of credit in the post-war period was a bid to overcome the contradictions of the capitalist system - expressed in the falling rate of profit - and avoid an open confrontation with the working class.

The creation of fictitious value on a vast scale turned into its opposite and has led to mass unemployment in all the major countries and the collapse of many financial institutions.

The crisis of overproduction is leading to trade war, the rise of nationalism and the paralysis of

state structures, of which Italy is a classic example. Denmark's rejection of Maastricht has thrown the European Community into turmoil.

The farce of the Rio summit on the environment shows once again that imperialism sees developing and non-capitalist countries like Russia only as areas for exploitation.

Those who want to restore capitalism in the former USSR systematically lie about the real history of their country. In this they are warmly supported by their Western capitalist sponsors. All those opposed to working class power and socialist democracy lyingly assert that the only alternative to Stalinism was and is capitalism.

These lies are based on a formal method of thinking based on simple "identity" taught by both bourgeois education and Stalinist dogma. The reality of the first workers' state was and remains a contradictory process.

In spite of terrible distortions imposed by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the real power of socialised property as against private ownership of the means of production was shown in practice, notably during World War II.

Independently of capitalism, there was scientific development, the emergence of world's largest intelligentsia and an economy transformed from peasant-dominated to industrial-dominated.

Nationalised property created the conditions for a socialist society, which could not, however, be achieved in isolation from revolutionary changes in the major capitalist countries.

Socialism is not identical with state control but requires the development of social ownership. Stalinism merged the two concepts and deprived the working class of real ownership and control.

CONCEPT OF PLANNING

It is not the concept or practice of planning that was responsible for the distorted growth of the Soviet economy or the crisis it faces today. It was the self-perpetuating needs of



A woman urges passengers at a train station to join the demonstration, defying a policeman

the Stalinist bureaucracy that dominated the planning systems of the former USSR, not the needs of the masses or the recommendations of those who struggled to make planning into a real science.

Capitalist companies, especially multi-national corporations, themselves employ many forms of advanced planning systems involving techniques such as computerised market research and stock assessment systems.

To suggest that any large-scale economy can develop without planning systems is an absurdity. By deriding the real and monstrous bureaucratic distortions of planning, capitalist economists try to deflect from their own anarchic inability to plan their own system.

We welcome the collapse of Stalinism. It crumbled rapidly because it had no essential function in society.

In the bureaucracy's hands Marxism became a crude dogma and the 3rd Communist International built by Lenin and Trotsky was destroyed. Trotsky founded the Fourth International to continue the revolutionary internationalist tradition of October.

The Stalinist political superstructure, or form, that collapsed stood in contradiction to the historical content of the October

revolution embodied in the existence of the Soviet Union as a workers' state.

We reject, therefore, those who say that the overthrow of Stalinist regimes throughout Eastern Europe is the collapse of communism, Marxism or socialism, or that we are in the era of "post-communism". The question about the destiny of the 1917 revolution is not yet settled. The working class has yet to have its say.

The perspective for revolutionaries in Russia must be to finish the uncompleted business of the political revolution, to fight for a socialist alternative to both Yeltsin and the nationalist-fascist forces.

It must be based on the transferring of political and economic power to the producers in society. Alienation from property and political power must be overcome.

The collapsed bureaucratic planning apparatus must be replaced with a plan drawn up by the producers, not the directors of enterprises, but by the workers in the factories with the assistance of technical staff.

The needs and requirements of the workers in one part of the former USSR coincide with those of workers in other parts of the country and

other republics. This is the basis for democratic planning and control.

State ownership must be replaced not with privatisation and rich owners, but with full workers' control. Administration and state functions must be subordinate to the people, not dominant. The overcoming of the technical backwardness of industry is an international question which the building of a socialist leadership in the workers' movement must address concretely.

INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

"Socialism in a single country" is a reactionary pseudo-theory. In the USSR it led at one point to the disastrous Nazi-Soviet pact and at another to an arms race with the USA and grotesque distortions in the Soviet economy. All the great socialists from Marx to Lenin and Trotsky understood that socialism could not be constructed on a national basis. Those building a new leadership in the former USSR must begin with an international outlook,



Riot police confront anti-Yeltsin demonstrators in Moscow

separating themselves from nationalist and chauvinist forces. They must support struggles by workers in other countries, and build international political links. Work on the history of the USSR is vital. Inseparable from the fight for leadership is the fight against the lies of the anti-communists who lump Lenin and Stalin together, the Bolsheviks with the bureaucrats. To win the leadership of the working class, that party must reject dogma

and struggle to explain the rise of Stalinism.

Marxism is a guide to action. As Lenin insisted, truth is always concrete and requires skilled dialectical analysis of the new situation and not formulas dredged up from books or memory. It is not possible to overthrow the IMF-sponsored regime and build a socialist democracy without rejecting dogma disguised as pseudo-Marxism.

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Building workers organise to defend jobs and wages

The worldwide slump is seen at its sharpest in the construction industry. Nowhere else have wages and jobs been hit so hard, with earnings for a many skilled workers having dropped as low as one third of their previous levels. Labourers in London are working through agencies for as little as £18 per day.

This is the background to unrest sweeping building sites in London, and this dissatisfaction is reflected throughout Britain, and the rest of the capitalist world, as the international property boom turns into slump.

One of the main props of decaying capitalism was the creation of fictitious capital, based on property values. The government aimed to split workers in the construction industry by encouraging so-called "self-employment". And they were helped in this by the trade union leadership, by those who refused to recruit the "self-employed" into the unions. The slump has changed all that. The self-employed are also at the very centre of the fight on sites in London.

At its recent conference in Southport, the construction workers union UCATT voted to embrace the self-employed. The employers in the industry wanted the self-employed in the union in order to keep wages down during the boom of the late 1980s. Under its old right-wing leadership, they wanted to use UCATT as a policeman in the industry. The employers and the right-wing encouraged amalgamation with the EEPTU (the electrical trades union, now merged with the AEU).

This has now backfired on the employers. The old leadership has been removed and the union has moved to the left. At Southport, a

large number of delegates attended a fringe meeting run by the Joint Sites Committee, including some UCATT officials. Conference also endorsed the Labour MPs Gould and Prescott for leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party. The union also successfully passed a motion calling for the repeal of all Tory anti-trade union laws.

DANGEROUS ILLUSIONS

But there are also those who pedal dangerous illusions. George Brumwell, general secretary of the union, greeted the National Contractors Group decision not to recognise the EEPTU enthusiastically. This development, he said, "brings to an end a sorry chapter in trade union relations". Brumwell was referring to the bitter conflict with the EEPTU, who have been poaching UCATT members and trying to set up their own building section.

Within two weeks the dangers for workers in these words was made clear. On the Vascroft site in West London, after a struggle over wages and union recognition of UCATT and the TGWU, the employer imposed sole recognition of the EEPTU. It is clear that as the slump continues, the employers will rely more and more on right-wing led unions to impose wage cuts and job losses on the workforce.

The JSC (Joint Sites Committee) a rank and file organisation, which started in London through a determined fight for union recognition and against wage cuts and wage losses, has had requests from other cities in Britain to create similar organisations and form a national organisation. The JSC is in the process of forming its demands and aims. In this period of the drive to capitalist dictatorship, the

Our History

THE JULY DAYS: PETROGRAD 1917

The Russian Revolution of 1917 did not take a straight line from feudal Tsarism to Soviet government. There was a stop along the way - or rather a blind alley - which was the Provisional government, placed in power by the first revolution, in February. The represented the rule of Russian bourgeois class, and it lasted just eight months - until October. Incapable of ending the war or feeding the masses, it quickly became clear to workers and soldiers that this was not their government. In the famous July Days, they began an uprising. The Bolsheviks under Lenin found themselves in the unenviable position of trying to halt this movement, for it was premature.

The uprising was led by the Machine Gun Regiment, and most of the regiments in the City supported them, as did the workers of the industrial Vyborg District. But the Provisional called in other troops and convince them the uprising was a counter-revolution. The movement was bloodily suppressed, a hard lesson for workers and soldiers about organisation, agitation and political leadership. They learned the importance of the Soviet as their own specific form of government, and they also joined the Bolshevik Party in thousands.

defence of wages and conditions must be connected with the socialist demands of full nationalisation of the building trade under workers' control without compensation to the former owners. Along with this ultimate demand must go the transitional demand of a sliding scale of hours and wages, all work to be shared out equally among all building workers.

LABOUR AFTER E

Why did Labour lose the election, and what are the implications of a fourth defeat for Labour?

In one sense it is not surprising. We had a double problem in that we had no economic policy and the leader was completely unsuited to the role of Prime Minister, and people detected that.

But it was still stunning, because we been ahead in the polls for the best part of three years. People believed they should vote Labour, but went into the polling stations and voted Tory.

All the warnings of the left that you had to cut military spending rather than increase taxes on workers, were ignored. We went in to the election with a policy which meant tax increases for a skilled single man on an average income.

It doesn't, I believe, mean Labour can never win. Given a left leadership and policies, I have no doubt we could win a general election tomorrow.

So it was not a question of the Tories winning from a position of strength but of Labour losing?

Never before has a government been re-elected in the depth of a recession. Thatcher and Reagan were re-elected in 1983 and 1984 coming strongly out of recession, after the worst was over. But I can't think of any party in a modern democracy this century which has been re-elected in the depth of a recession. We just let victory slip through our fingers.

Was this a result of the move begun in the mid-1980s to change the Labour Party, and alter its appeal so that it would "win the middle ground". Hasn't this proved to be an illusion?

Yes, of course. If we had pursued the line called for by the left - defended the miners, defended



Ken Livingstone, MP for Brent East

Labour councils, we would have won votes by it.

Kinnock spent more of his time attacking the left than he ever did attacking Mrs. Thatcher. We only put down a censure motion against Thatcher in the House of Commons right at the end, in the last days before she resigned, when her own Party were ready to dump her.

The first censure motion Kinnock made was against the Militant in Liverpool, then against the miners. He then endorsed the Daily Mirror's state-inspired witchhunt of Arthur Scargill.

The truth is Labour should be able to win support from 60 per cent of the British people. The idea that a middle class person in Harrow has nothing to gain from socialism is nonsense. Everyone, for example, is affected by environmental degradation; everyone suffers from transport problems; many people are now asking themselves whether their pension fund will be one that survives or whether it is being misused by their employer. People are asking themselves if perhaps hip replacements will be rationed by the time they are elderly. There are a number of problems that everyone

**Ken Livingstone MP's
Future about Labour's
defeat - why it happened
should go from here.**

faces, and that Labour could answer.

But to do that would mean taking on the City of London and the military establishment in Britain and reducing their wealth and their power. And no Labour government has ever done that, and no Labour Party in opposition has advocated it. Labour has spent the last four years sending John Smith to have lunch in the City of London and tell them up there that they will be "O.K. under Labour". And that is the same as telling the rest of the country that they are not going to be "OK under Labour", nothing is going to change.

You described the leadership election as a stitch-up and claimed you were prevented from standing. How did this happen?

The Smith supporters have been manoeuvring for several years to push him in as soon as we lost the election. And for them, of course, the longer any debate or discussion goes on the more problems they would have.

Smith has not said what he believes in, where he is going to take the Party, and trying to find out is like gripping a blancmange. At a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, I asked him if he supported universal benefits, and he said he had not yet made up his mind. This is a man who wants to be the leader of the working class!

They were very desperate to stop you standing. Why was that?

The establishment wanted a nice election where that nice Mr. Gould

ELECTION DEFEAT

**Breaks to Socialist
fourth election
and where Labour**

lost in a sporting fashion to that nice Mr. Smith. They did not want people like myself and Bernie Grant running around talking about socialism. The twenty per cent rule was used to keep the left from standing, and it worked. But the public support was enormous. People were stopping me in the street, hundreds of letters came in. Now it is clear nobody in the country is really interested in the outcome. The majority of people don't mind, don't care or don't know.

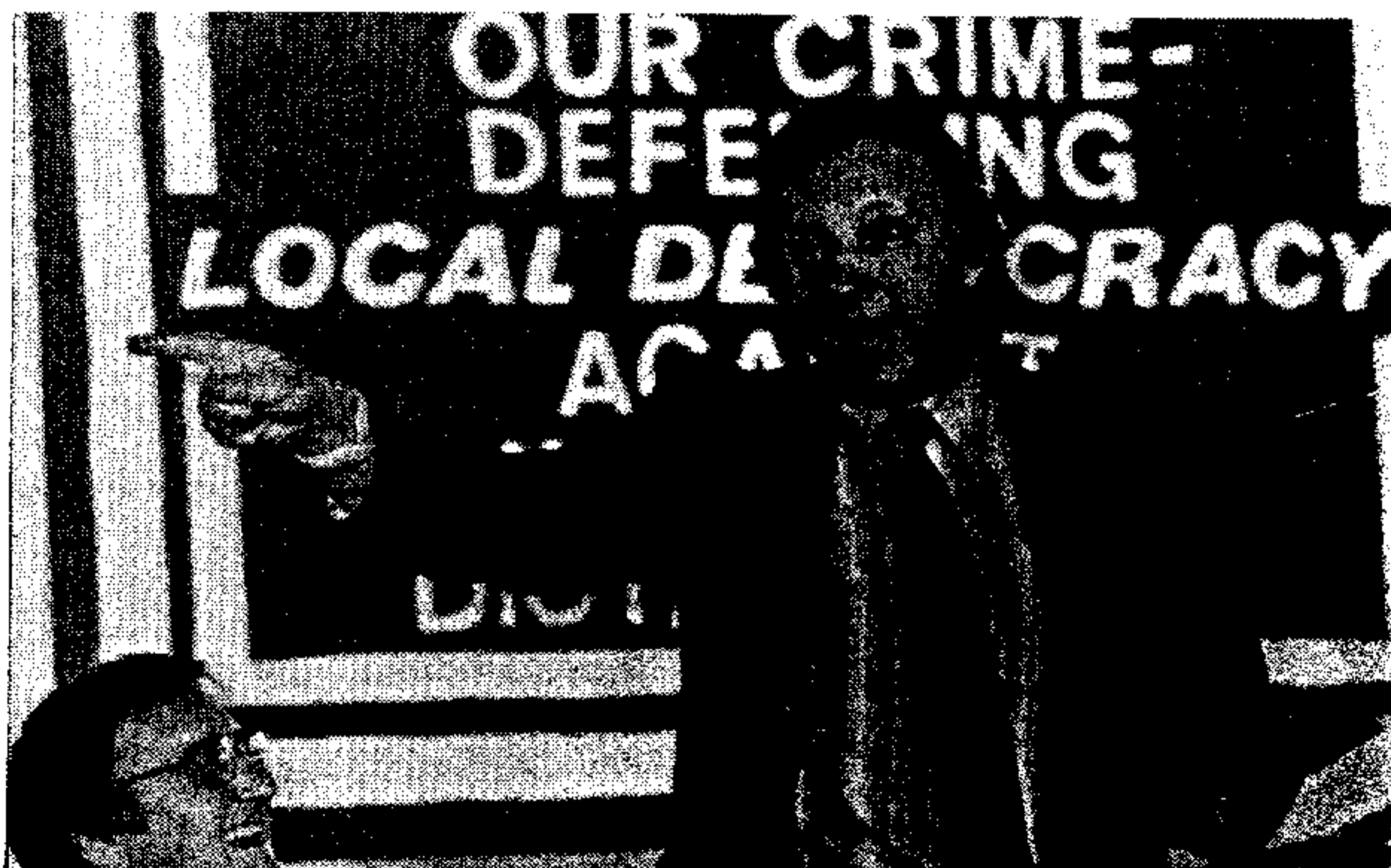
We knew we would get a derisory vote. But we had to stand otherwise they would have changed the rule and in ten or fifteen years we would not have been able to stand.

Would you agree that the new leadership will want to break the link between the Labour and the unions?

The strategists of the Smith campaign are Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, and they believe that the only way to modernise British capitalism in the 1990s is to switch resources from the welfare state to investment.

To do this they will have to unpick a 50-year commitment to the welfare state. It is the great unmentioned idea behind the Smith election campaign. They say we must get rid of mortgage tax relief, grants for students, state pensions, child benefit.

They call it targeting the poor. What it means is a major reduction in the living standards of skilled workers and poorer middle class families. But trade union leaders won't go to Labour Party conference



Labour leaders joined the attack on miners and Labour Councils

and vote to get rid of universal benefits. The social wage is as much part of their members' standard of living as the wage they are paid by their employer.

So you would argue that Labour wants to break away from the unions because the link is embarrassing. It is really that they want to pursue policies that trade union leaders could not accept?

I think the trade unions will vote against breaking the link, and that it will remain. In the last five years Neil Kinnock was able to take on the left on what were largely minority issues, and defeat them. But now the right has to take on the centre of the Party, people like John Prescott, and defeat them on our strongest ground, our commitment to the welfare state.

This offers an opportunity to create a broad opposition and defeat the right-wing on these critical questions. The isolation of the left would end; around a third of the Parliamentary Labour Party would oppose these moves to ditch the welfare state.

In fact it ties in very much with opposing the Maastricht Treaty

because the treaty creates the economic mechanism for states to wind down the welfare state in their countries. It is already happening in Spain.

The rule included in the treaty is that no country is allowed to run a budget deficit of more than three per cent of the Gross National Product. Well, in Italy, for example, the deficit is currently ten per cent of GNP, in Britain about five per cent. This is what Danish people voted against in their referendum, and one can just imagine some future Labour government telling people: "We'd love to do all these things we were committed to, but the Commission won't let us."

It has been said that we now have a one party state, and that the electoral system is fixed to give the Tories permanent rule. Do you think extra-parliamentary resistance to their rule will develop as a result.

There must be trade union resistance to what the Tories will propose. Our membership of the exchange rate mechanism at an overvalued level, means every company is going to be squeezed even further, and people will resist. ■

➤ I don't think it is a one-party state. You can't call it that when 42% of voters supported the Tories. It is merely the absence of opposition that has allowed the Tories into government. There is no positive support for them.

And the fact that Major has no strategy and deals with problems on a day-to-day basis means he will make more mistakes than Thatcher did. She never conceded an inch. Once you start to concede the ideological ground you are lost, as Labour discovered throughout the 1980s.

If Major fails, as I expect he will, as well as a shift to the left you will get a real right-wing backlash in the Tory Party, of people who want to carry on the true faith. And because of Major's style there is now space for an openly fascist party to grow. There was never room for a fascist party with Thatcher as Prime Minister - it was not needed.

The combination of the upheavals in Europe, the crisis in the global economy and in the environment, actually gives us the possibility of winning in the next decade.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

A few days ago I overheard a conversation, voicing views which I have heard a couple of times since the General Election. A pseudo-intellectual said: "The working class is a dying breed." A member of the working class, who believes that there is nothing the working class can do to save itself, responded: "Capital holds all the aces".

I explained to the speaker how I felt. And to all those who at best see the working class as an old tree-trunk, a cloth cap, unchanging, I say the following:

The working class helps you to be born, keeps you alive, and will eventually bury you. That last is not a threat, but a fact.

The working class is all around you, and if you keep on saying that it is a "dying breed" it may be all over you. How very convenient for capital if the workers themselves can be persuaded to believe that "nothing can be done for them".

If before a battle the soldiers on

the opposing side can be persuaded they are a "dying breed" and there is nothing they can do about it, the battle is won before it has begun. The losing side, conned into believing itself worthless, has to swallow its pride and surrender all its present and future rights.

But again, I say, look around you. Who's growing the food? Who's sailing the ships? Who's manning the oil rigs? ... Mining the coal, the gold? Staffing the hospitals, driving the transport, working the sewers, making the computers? The answer is clear enough - the working class all over the world does these things, and more. It is very much alive and changing in tune with the rest of the world. It is the essential class, and if it ever dies life itself dies with it. The working class is producer of all the wealth. Some may say: "What about the unemployed?". Well? What about them? Money can be shared out more fairly, and so can work.

Fraternally

A South London Reader

What we stand for

Grave dangers now confront millions of workers and young people as the world economic crisis of capitalism drives the Tories to destroy living standards. The vital question is how to defeat the Tory plans to create a violent police - military dictatorship.

It is clearly not possible to vote out the Tories and elect a Labour government again. The Tories have fixed the election system to ensure they stay in office.

The Tories could not have succeeded in their plans without the assistance of the right-wing Labour Party and trade union leaderships.

The election of the right-winger John Smith as the new leader will propel Labour even further to the right, towards a merger with the reactionary Liberal Democrats and a complete break from the trade unions.

The end of parliamentary politics means alternative forms of struggle must develop. Real power has, in any case, always been exercised behind the scenes in the boardrooms and banks, in the higher reaches of the civil service, by property companies and landowners.

To challenge the Tory dictatorship it is necessary to engage in a struggle for power itself. Denied the right to political expression by a Tory dictatorship, workers have every right to organise independently of the state.

There is now a vital need to build Councils of Action

throughout Britain, in every locality, to bring together all those in the Tory firing line.

Every organisation opposed to the Tories, representing trade unionists, the unemployed, young people, ethnic groups, students and small businesses should be represented in Councils of Action.

They would defend and organise health, education, housing and other services and jobs, and protect communities from racist attacks. Workers organisations would struggle for their policies in Councils of Action.

The Communist League's view is that such Councils should be ready to assume power itself, to destroy the Tories' dictatorship throughout Britain. It is the only way forward for workers in England, Scotland and Wales. Reject the nationalists who want to divide and rule and leave the Tory enemy intact.

Class, not religion, race, nationality or gender, is the fundamental basis for the struggle for power. It should be the perspective of Councils of Action to transfer power from the ruling class, to break up and overthrow the capitalist state and its institutions.

Power must pass to the working class, out of the hands of the employers who sack thousands, building societies who make people homeless, and banks that wreck small businesses

July Exhibitions around London



"The barricade" by Edouard Manet 1871

Manet: The Execution of Maximilian. Painting, Politics and Censorship. Manet is best known as an Impressionist painter, but he was a fierce opponent of the French government of Napoleon III. The paintings shown in this exhibition show an event which was a severe humiliation for the government of the day, which prevented them from being shown. Three large paintings of the same subject are shown together for the first time.

July 1 - September 27, at the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery. Admission £3 and £1.50 for concessions.

DUTCH DIFFERENCES

For a free "Brief Encounter", go to the main building to see "**Vermeer - De Hooch**", where two paintings of a similar subject are brought together to reveal both affinities and differences between two Dutch painters.

At the **Imperial War Museum**, work by Wyndham Lewis has been brought together from three countries, for an exhibition called "**Art and War**". (Until October 11).

William Blake's early work can



be seen until August 16 at the **Tate Gallery, Millbank** (Admission free). Also at the Tate Gallery, a major show of work by **Richard Hamilton** running until September 6. Starting with oil paintings of 1940, some 100 works can be seen. Hamilton has recently focused on social and political issues — Northern Ireland, the National Health Service and the Gulf War in his paintings. (Admission £3, & £1.50) Hamilton's prints will be on view at **Waddington Graphics, 19 Clifford Street, London W.1** until July 25. (admission free) A new catalogue is being prepared including two texts by Hamilton about printing techniques.

At the **Serpentine Gallery** in Kensington Gardens, there is a free show of the brilliant Catalan painter **Antoni Tàpies'** work, called "**Writing on the Wall**". (Open daily

10a.m. to 6p.m., until August 9) Combine this with a pleasant walk around the Serpentine.

In the **Cafe Gallery** by the pool in Southwark Park, Bermondsey, the Southwark Children's Foundation is showing work by children in schools around south east London, called "**Creative Children**". Admission free. Gallery hours: Wednesday-Sunday 10a.m. to 5p.m. Until July 19.

OPEN MECHANISM

German installation artist **Rebecca Horn** is showing her "poetic projections of intense abstraction" at the **Mayor Gallery, 22a Cork Street, W.1.** until August 31. (tel 071 734 3558) Admission free.



"Civil War" by Edouard Manet 1871-4

Horn reveals the human body as an "open mechanism in constant inter-relationship with the physical, historical, cultural and spiritual environment".

More installations can be found at the **Riverside Studios** in Crisp Road, Hammersmith. New work by three young British artists, **Edward Lipsky, Jason Brooks and Katherine Clark** examine attitudes to making art in a changing social reality. Until August 2. Gallery open Tuesday-Sunday 1-8, Foyer and Alcove, daily 10a.m. to 11p.m.

Please note: last month's listing in Socialist Future for the Whitechapel Open for a programme at Canary Wharf has been cancelled and transferred to the other venues of the "Open".

England's first revolution

The 350th anniversary of the English Civil War

Three hundred and fifty years ago the English Civil War engaged every class of society in a struggle which overthrew for ever feudal property and social relations and established the dominance of capital and a new class, the bourgeoisie.

None of the men and women who took part in this great revolutionary upheaval could have said that was what they were doing. Some historians have used this fact to try and distort the history of the civil war, saying it was a battle over religion or an uprising against one unjust king.

But as the great historian of the period Christopher Hill has said, the English Revolution can be understood only by examining what people did, not what they said they were doing.

What they did was to destroy the executive power of the monarchy. All the instruments by which the king ruled - the Star Chamber courts, church courts, unelected councils, and feudal property rights - were smashed and power vested in Parliament.

The revolutionary Parliament itself was split between the Presbyterians and the Independents. These could be described as compromisers, who continued to hope the king could be brought to heel, and non-compromisers, who recognised that it was impossible to compromise with a state structure that was backward-looking and was preventing England from developing.

In the first battles of the Civil War, it was the "Cavaliers" who were more successful, with their experience of fighting. The Parliament at first relied on the traditional militias from counties which were loyal to them, but these were organised in the old way, with



Statue of Oliver Cromwell outside the House of Commons

officers appointed on the basis of their position in the gentry, not on merit or talent.

Cromwell then created an army which was more democratic than any in the world, until the Red Army in the Russian Civil War period. "I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain who knows what he fights for and loves what he knows, than that which you call 'a gentleman' and is nothing else," Cromwell said. And he encouraged free discussion of ideas amongst the troops.

NO COMPROMISE

This army knew what it wanted, and it was not compromise that it sought. But many of the Presbyterian commanders and Parliamentarians had a different view. "If we beat the king ninety-nine times, he is King still," said the Earl of Manchester. "My Lord, if this be so, why did we take up arms at first?" Cromwell asked.

Throughout, Cromwell had to resist the compromisers in the Parliament, and it was his New

Model Army that gave him the power to do so. The soldiers were paid regularly, fed and clothed so that they had no need to loot, and supplied with modern weapons.

All this cost vast sums of money, and the new bourgeoisie paid taxes two or three times more to fund this army than the King had ever tried to levy on them, which gives the lie to the schoolbook history view that the war was about a refusal to pay taxes.

The bourgeoisie made war on the whole system. The monarchy kept a monopoly on certain types of lucrative trade. It sustained feudal land ownership which prevented the modernisation of agriculture.

Its foreign policy was based on sustaining its own rule and alliances, not expanding trade or winning new colonies. The royal charters needed for towns to engage in certain types of trade were expensive and hard to come by. The religious narrowness monarchy imposed on the educational system stifled scientific and technological research. The censor stifled debate and knowledge could not advance.

A new class of merchants and manufacturers, and modern landlords and farmers was coming of age, and it was time for it to impose its rule. It financed Cromwell's army for as long as it served this purpose.

But contained in this was a contradiction. Because if the capitalist class was coming of age, so too was the working class coming into being as a class. You cannot have capitalism without its opposite, workers torn from the land and available for exploitation in commodity production.

Within this New Model Army other forces, forces that the bourgeoisie

liked no better than they liked the king, were tasting political power for the first time. These found their expression in a new political party, the Levellers, a group of small producers and artisans, strongest in London, and with support inside the army. In 1647, five years into the Civil War, the army liberated itself from the vacillating Parliament and set up an Army Council, made up of "agitators" delegated from each regiment. Army and Parliament became dual powers in the state.

The Army marched on Parliament, and the Presbyterian compromisers withdrew. Using the army as his power base, Cromwell filled Parliament with uncompromising Independents. The king who had been captured by the Scots and handed over to Parliament, was tried, found guilty of being "a public enemy to the good of this nation" and executed.

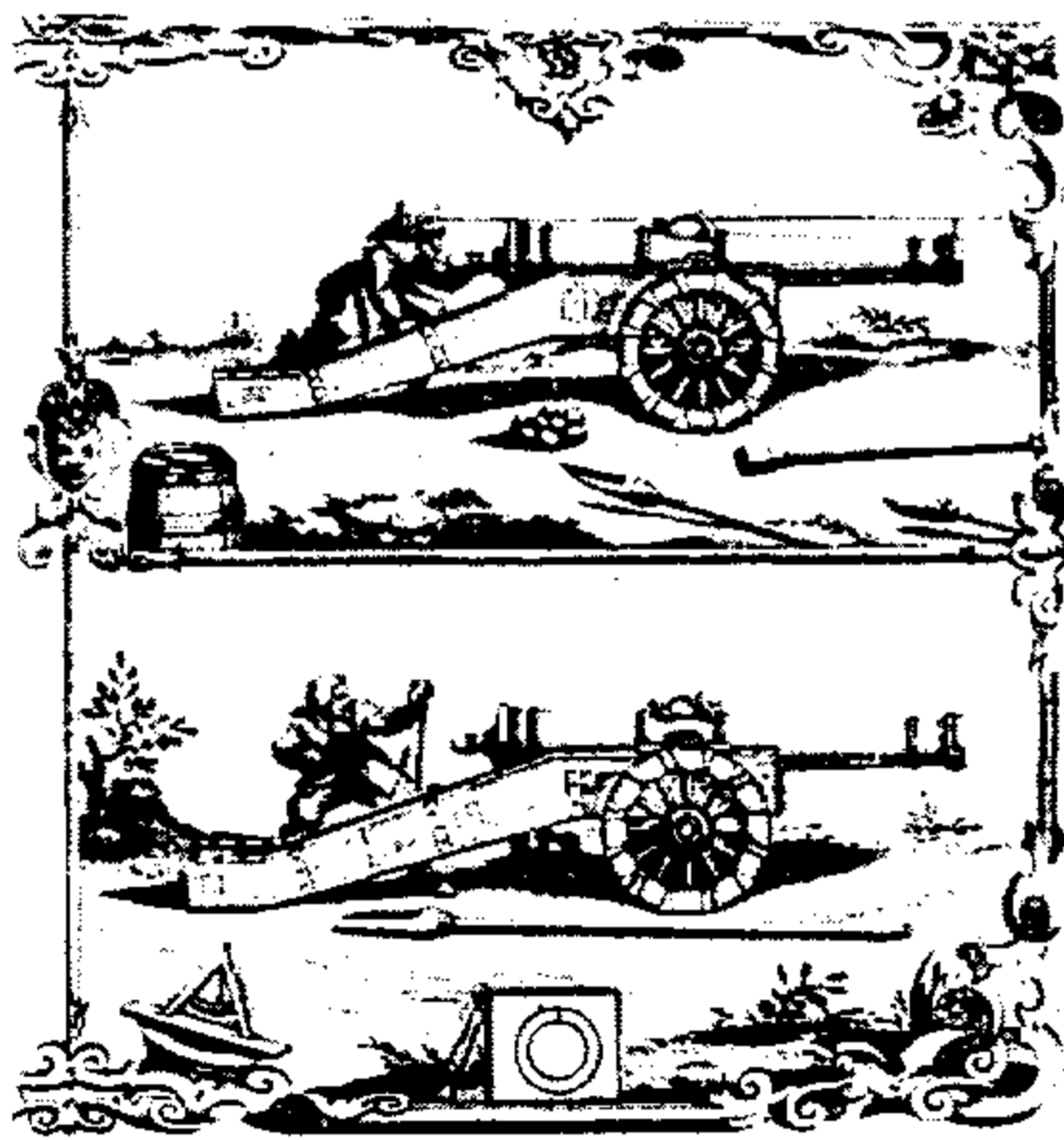
MONARCHY ABOLISHED

The Independents swiftly replaced the old order. Monarchy was declared "unnecessary, burdensome and dangerous to the liberty, safety and public interest of the people" and was abolished. The House of Lords was declared "useless and dangerous" and was abolished. A republic was declared.

But the ordinary people wanted more. The Army Council had adopted the "Leveller constitution" which was called "The Agreement of the People". It demanded free trade for small producers, disestablishment of the Church and universal suffrage. This was not, however, on Cromwell's agenda. As his brother-in-law Ireton put it: "Liberty cannot be provided for in a general sense if property be preserved."

In other words, the Independents differed from Presbyterians in recognising the need to destroy the old form of government and replace

it with a new. But this was in order to firmly establish the kind of state they wanted, to liberate the big bourgeois, the new capitalist class, from the old feudalism.



Cromwell's New Model Army was well-armed and well-trained

They used the Army to carry this out, but had no intention of then sharing their power with small producers, artisans and landless labourers. A Leveller attempt to take total control of the army was defeated in November 1647, and the Army Council was disbanded.

And there is often some confusion here when historians use this experience to say that, in the end, the working class always loses. Of course, the point is that there was no working class as a class. What the Revolution did was to create the conditions for the emergence of the working class, and its definition over time as a separate class with antagonistic interests to the capitalist class.

The Levellers represented the utopian ideals of a group of petit bourgeois artisans, though contained within the movement were the germs of ideas which would later develop as socialist. There was also the primitive communism of The Diggers, the other main sect inside this revolution of the lower orders.

The Diggers said that everyone had the right to land, to hold and farm it in common and share the fruits of their labours. All over the South of England Digger groups began to squat land and try to farm it.

But their movement was crushed. Some of the Diggers statements still have meaning today: "This is the bondage the poor complain of, that they are kept poor by their brethren in a land where there is so much plenty for everyone," said their leader, Winstanley.

The Levellers were provoked into an attempted uprising in 1649 which was ruthlessly put down by the "Grandees" now controlling the army, and the leaders were shot.

The rule of the bourgeoisie was now firmly established, but their experiences of the Civil War were not lost on them. After the death of Cromwell, the Parliament purged all traces of radicalism and brought back the king.

Charles II became exactly the kind of king they wanted, assisting in keeping the lower orders in their place but clear about the limits of his power - an establishment tailor-made for bourgeois rule.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Not until the 19th Century was the organised working class able to fight for and win the right to vote, though not for women until after World War I.

The goals of the Diggers are for us to complete, not on the basis of village-based primitive communism, but on the basis of international scientific socialism. And that is going to take another social revolution, as the power of capital decays and collapses into terminal crisis, just as feudal monarchy had in 1642.

Note: This article is based on reading of the pamphlet "The English Revolution 1640", and the books "God's Englishman", a life of Oliver Cromwell, and "The Century of Revolution 1603 - 1714" all by Christopher Hill. These are available to buy or borrow from libraries, and are highly recommended.

UNEMPLOYMENT RISES WORLDWIDE

Unemployment in Britain has increased every month for two years and will continue to rise throughout the rest of 1992. Estimates from the Confederation of British Industry, the employers' organisation, predict that the level will reach 3 million on official figures during 1993. This level, which excludes school-leavers, is expected even if some recovery in the economy takes place, which the CBI believes to be far from assured.

Commentators and economists scour the indicators for some sign of the end to the slump, but it is now the longest since the 1930s, affecting every country. Japanese vehicle sales have fallen every month since April 1991 and individual bankruptcies doubled in Japan during 1991, to 23,491.

Unemployment too is a world phenomenon and its consequences hit the lives of millions. Many lose not just their jobs but also suffer from the burden of huge debts incurred in the consumer credit boom of the 1980s. Over 80,000 homes will be repossessed in Britain in 1992, with a further 40,000 postponed by Major's election pleas to building societies. In the USA one and a half million jobs were lost in California alone in the eighteen

months preceding the social revolt against poverty in Los Angeles.

As Russia's IMF-sponsored, pro-capitalist government adopts free market measures, unemployment is a non-optional part of the package. In an attempt to stave off revolt, Igor Khalevinsky, a deputy Labour Minister, says that richer countries such as Australia, Canada, the US and Germany have been approached to allow in "guest workers" from Russia. Yeltsin can expect no significant relief, however. Only 13,000 workers are expected to be accepted by the German government in the next eighteen months. This is less than a drop in the ocean of unemployment coming in the Russia as out-dated factories and whole industries are shut down.

The extent to the threat to workers around the world is measured in full in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Unemployment and under-employment have reached alarming proportions, according to the International Labour Organisation. From 3.6 per cent at the end of 1990 unemployment has risen to more than 10 per cent at the end of 1991. Estimates suggest 25 to 40 per cent of the workforce is unemployed. A

third of the workforce commutes daily to construction jobs in Israel, to work as day labourers with no job security or social benefits.

In South Africa, where currently more than 5 million workers are unemployed - that is two in five of the workforce - the ILO suggests an increase to 7.3 million, or 57 per cent, by 2005. Whilst the majority black population bears the brunt of both joblessness and one of the highest rates of child labour in the world, both unemployment and poverty have begun to surface amongst whites for the first time since the 1930s.

During the 1980 only an average of 31,000 jobs were created each year. In the slump hit 1990s this figure has dropped. With up to 500,000 new workers entering the South African labour market each year, Africa is due for a social explosion - indeed it has already begun.

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