

Educational Series for New Members

A short course for candidate members



workers power 5

Contents

1) Karl Marx: from capitalism to communism

What is the difference between socialism and communism? How can we get from a capitalist society with all its problems, divisions and inequalities to a communist society?

Reading:

Socialism: the transition to communism (pg 4-5)

2) Which road: reform or revolution?

Can capitalism be reformed out of existence or does it need to be overthrown in a revolution? What attitude do socialists take to the state? Should socialists participate in elections? How do we break people from reformist ideas?

Reading:

Which road: reform or revolution, by *Karen Petrie* (pg 6-7)

The Russian revolution of 1917, by *Kuldip Sandhu* (pg 8-9)

Communist policy: elections and revolution, by *Richard Bremner* (pg 10)

3) Party and programme

Does socialist consciousness arise spontaneously amongst the masses? How should socialists organise themselves to give leadership to the working class vanguard? What type of party do we need? What type of programme does it need?

Reading:

The revolutionary programme, by *Mark Harrison* (pg 12-13)

Why we need a revolutionary party (pg 14-15)

The Workers' Answer to the Crisis (online at workerspower.com)

4) Key struggle (a): the working class and the unions

What are trade unions? How can we make the trade unions fight in a determined way for our interests? How do we challenge the bureaucracy and transform the unions into militant and fighting organisations?

Reading:

The trouble with the unions, by *Kate Foster* (pg 16-17)

Communist policy: committees of action, by *Joy Macready* (pg 18)

For a rank and file movement in our unions, by *Jeremy Drinkall* (pg 19-21)

5) Key struggle (b): the fight against imperialism and war

What is the relationship between capitalism and war? How attitude should socialists take in wars between imperialist powers that dominate the system and other states? Should socialists take sides?

Reading:

Marxism on war, by *Jenny Scott* (pg 22-23)

Communist policy: anti-imperialism and workers' revolution, by *Luke Cooper* (pg 24)

Communist policy: the resistance and the working class (pg 25)

6) Key struggle (c): opposing racism, fighting fascism

How did modern racism develop? What is the nature of fascism? How can we stop the rise of fascist organisations and defend the working class and black and Asian communities?

Reading:

Communist policy: stopping the BNP, by *John Bowman* (pg 26)

Communist policy: antifascist defence league, by *Luke Cooper* (pg 27)

The struggle against fascism (pg 28)

Published by Workers Power, July 2010 with articles from the archives of *Workers Power* magazine.

This is an educational series to be taken by all new Workers Power members during their three-month candidate membership. Educational discussions around each of the six topics should take place every one or two weeks. The course provides an introduction to the fundamental ideas of revolutionary Marxism and the Workers Power tradition.

KARL MARX: FROM CAPITALISM TO COMMUNISM

Socialism: the transition to communism

What is the difference between socialism and communism? How can we get from a capitalist society with all its problems, divisions and inequalities to a communist society?

Karl Marx was not the first to condemn capitalism for the poverty and inequality that it creates, neither was he the first to fight for a society in which poverty and inequality would be eradicated. But he was the first to realise that capitalism itself would create the forces capable of overthrowing it.

Before Marx, utopian socialists, such as Fourier and Owen, believed that an alternative society could be built within capitalism. They drew up plans for societies in which neither exploitation nor oppression were needed to maintain economic production. Once these model communities were established they would rapidly prove to be superior to what already existed.

That was where the problems started. Fourier hoped to win financial backing from a wealthy patron, and declared that he would be available every day to discuss the details. Alas, as he waited, the years passed. He grew older as capitalism grew stronger.

Totally dedicated to the very end, nonetheless, he built nothing. Owen, himself a very wealthy man, invested his fortune in buying territory in America for his town of New Harmony, but was defrauded by his business partner and had to return home with nothing accomplished.

Marx realised that societies do not develop as a result of clever plans or individual dedication. Adam Smith described capitalism after it had developed out of feudal society. The capitalist system did not develop because Adam

Smith set out a vision of what it might be like.

Socialism, understood as a society in which the economy was socially owned and output was shared equally, would not be created, fully developed, separate from existing capitalist society. Instead, in historic terms, there would be a period during which capitalist society would be transformed into socialist society, a “transitional” period.

The struggle for a more just and genuinely human society, therefore, could not turn its back on the actually existing capitalist society. Just as a worker can only work with the tools and raw materials that are available, humanity in general could only create a new society with the “raw materials” provided by society’s past development.

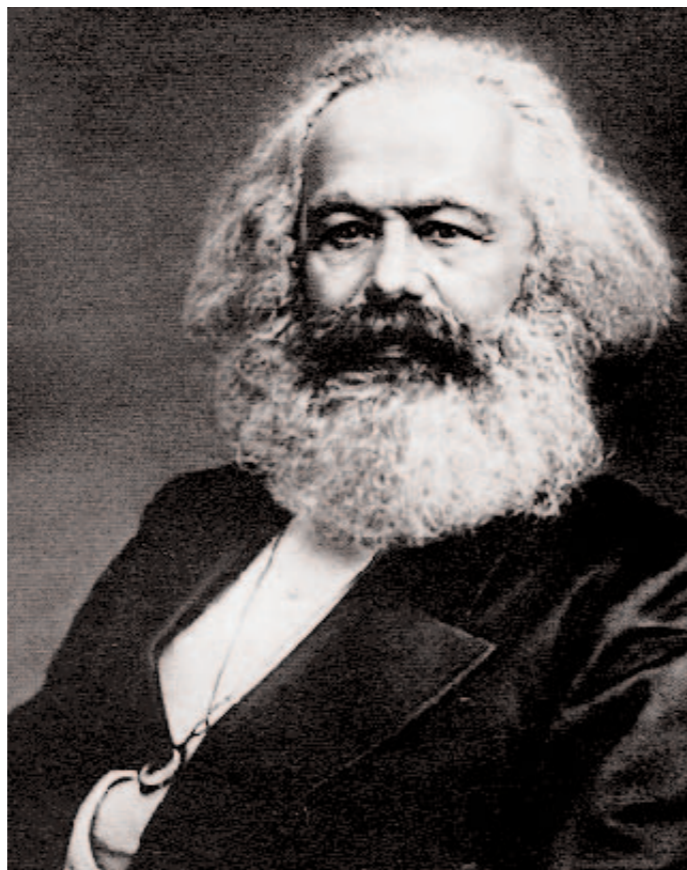
What were these “raw materials”? At first sight there appeared to be two:

- the physical apparatus of production or, “means of production” – machinery, factories, railways etc.
- the people who made up any society.

Whoever was going to change society would themselves be a product of existing society. Tomorrow’s society would be built by today’s people using, initially, today’s technology.

One of Marx’s most brilliant insights was his realisation that there was, in fact, a third factor in society that had to be taken into account. In order to use the technology of production, “people” had become organised in a very definite way.

A small number, the capitalists, owned and controlled the “means of production” while a vastly greater number, the working class, actually operated them. The workers had no real choice in the matter because



their only means of survival was the wage they could earn from the capitalists. Marx called this third element the “relations of production”.

Although not as immediately obvious, it was the third element, the relations of production, that was the most important in terms of changing society. Even in Marx’s day, technical progress had made it possible to produce enough for everybody to have a decent standard of living. Poverty was a result of social relations, the unequal shares in the output, not the limitations of technology.

It was precisely the living conditions of the working class, coupled with its centrality within production, that would create the social force, the revolutionary working class, that could transform society into socialism.

The same social relations also meant that the capitalists had every reason to keep things as they were.

And they had very effective means of preventing change. The whole organisation of society protected them.

They had the best living conditions, the best education, each generation was trained to take over control and, in addition, the law protected their wealth and was backed up by the more physical means of defence: policemen, soldiers, prisons – in a word, the state.

Marx’s political strategy, therefore, had to begin from this understanding of society; the means of production for a better society already existed, the working class needed that better society but the capitalists, protected by the state, were determined to prevent any change. His first attempt to develop a way of overthrowing this minority was presented in the Communist Manifesto of 1848.

In the Manifesto, Marx not only delivered a devastating attack on

Socialism: the transition to communism

capitalism but set out the measures that a working class government, brought to power by a democratic revolution, would need to take to begin the transition to socialism.

These included the abolition of private ownership of land, a progressive tax to drain away the wealth of the capitalists, the centralisation of credit in a national bank, state ownership of transport and communications, planned extension of production to meet need and free state education for all children.

In one sense, Marx’s predictions were brilliantly confirmed within months. Revolutions shook Europe later in 1848. But the course of events revealed a flaw in this first communist programme. Even where democratic rights were won, as in France, they were not enough to overthrow capitalism.

Out on the streets, the working class was confronted by the armed might of the state. Soldiers and policemen, disciplined and controlled by officers from the richer classes, enforced laws backed up by their officers’ relatives in the judiciary. They massacred the workers of Paris and were given medals to commemorate it.

Marx, himself imprisoned during the German revolution, and Engels, who fought in the defeated revolutionary army, later drew a forthright conclusion. Given the human material that made up the state, with its millions of links to the ruling class, there was no possibility that a democratic government could overthrow the bourgeoisie by an “Act of Parliament”. The rest of the state machine would simply refuse to carry out orders and would overthrow the elected government.

At first, that was as far as Marx went. Determined not to make the mistake of the utopians by dreaming up personal recipes for the future, he did not return to the

question until the class struggle gave him new evidence. In 1871, after France had been defeated by Prussia, the French government agreed to dismantle the defences of Paris. However, the majority of Parisians opposed this, mobilised to stop the guns being moved and forced the government itself to flee.

Paris Commune

For three months, Paris had no government, no state apparatus, in the ordinary sense of the word. For the first time, working class men and women took charge of a modern capital city. They created their own system of “government”, a radical democracy, the “Paris Commune” in which delegates were elected by universal suffrage from each city district.

The delegates had responsibility for the defence of the city, distributing what food was available and formulating the laws by which the city would now live. They met in public and their decisions were enforced by the people themselves – when they declared the eight hour day and a minimum wage they did not need a judicial commission to work out how to introduce it.

Well aware of how popular representatives could become corrupted by power, the Commune decreed that no official would receive more than a worker’s wage and that all delegates were immediately recallable by their electors. Real accountability, not the empty democracy which allows an MP, once elected, to ignore the electors for the next five years!

Marx saw in the Paris Commune more than just an episodic adventure in democracy. He realised that it had revealed the key to the problem of how forces created by capitalist society could, through revolutionary struggle, transform themselves into the first stage of the new society.

The existing state had to be smashed, that he already knew, but Paris showed how a new form of social organisation, the commune, could carry out those functions of state power that would still be necessary during the transition, such as defence, reconstruction and economic organisation, without forming a new oppressive apparatus standing above the people.

More than that, because the population as a whole now had responsibility for “government”, individuals were themselves transformed. Attitudes and assumptions that had been formed under capitalist rule were left behind. It was not yet socialism, but the road to socialism – the transition period – had been opened.

Marx developed his conclusions further in the mid-1870s by sketching out what he thought could be said with some certainty about this transitional period. In the aftermath of revolution, the economic system would be whatever had been created by capitalism.

Marx assumed that the first task of the new commune state would be to get the economy working again. All who could would be required to work and, since the commune would have confiscated the wealth of the bourgeoisie, society would make rapid strides towards economic equality.

However, although utilising existing industrial capacity on a rationally planned basis would be a huge step forward, society would still be marked by its origins in capitalism. Inequality would be reduced but the actual scale of production would still be limited. In the longer run, it would be necessary for society to transform that as well. Regional and national inequalities had to be overcome.

Reversing the dramatic underdevelopment of vast areas of the globe would require planned re-

allocation of resources and the creation of a genuinely democratic division of labour within a global economy.

Marx, therefore, further refined the concept of a “transition society” and introduced the idea that the development of communist society would take place in two phases. In the first stage, “socialism” as he called it, the commune state was still necessary both to defeat all attempts at counter-revolution and to reconstruct the international economic system on an egalitarian and planned basis.

Democratic dictatorship

This, Marx called, the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Dictatorship is frequently counterposed to democracy. Yet for Marx the concept of dictatorship was necessary and justified. Indeed, it was a very democratic dictatorship. Democratic, that is, for the vast majority, the working class; dictatorial over the bosses who would try to sabotage progress and crush the new regime through counter-revolution.

How long this transition would take was not predictable but Marx pointed out that the more successful the commune was the less necessary it would become. Once the bourgeoisie had been eliminated as a class, for example, there would be no need for military organisation or defence expenditure.

In the longer term, the transition would be completed when society no longer needed a political force, a state of any sort, in order to organise production and distribution.

Administration would still be necessary but in an egalitarian society this would not involve the subordination of one part of the population by another, it would no longer be “political”. This would be communist society.”

WHICH ROAD: REFORM OR REVOLUTION

Which road: reform or revolution?

By Karen Petrie, Sept 1998

For more than three decades Marx and Engels argued that a revolution was the only way workers could achieve a socialist society. For them revolutionary crises emerged inevitably out of the conflict between classes in capitalist society. Capitalism creates the possibility and necessity for revolution. In the form of the “proletariat”, it also creates its own “grave-diggers”.

Marx and Engels did not reject a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism out of some demonic bloodlust but because they recognised that no ruling class in history had ever ceded its power and wealth without a fight. Modern capitalism itself triumphed over the old feudal order in a series of violent revolutions (notably in England and France).

There is, however, a tradition with deep and powerful roots in the workers' movement which has often claimed the goal of socialism but argued that the path to it was the gradual transformation of society through reforms. Its supporters have maintained that capitalism's worst aspects could be tamed and eventually modified into a new kind of society that favoured workers' interests.

This political ideology has many advocates and several variants, both left and right-wing. It also has a name: reformism.

Capitalism has known periods of expansion and boom when many workers have seen their living standards rise. Probably the longest such period stretched from the end of the Second World War until the early 1970s. But capitalism, despite such periods; is a highly unstable economic system that plunges society into periodic crisis. The profit system creates such fierce competition between capitalist corporations and nation

states that trade wars and, eventually, military conflicts erupt.

Many reformists accept that capitalism is a system prone to crisis. But they argue that it is possible to use a parliamentary majority and government office to pursue reforms that will alleviate such a crisis.

Measures such as regulating competition, nationalising some industries, injecting more public spending into the economy and the partial redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor by taxation used to be at the core of the reformist programme.

In the reformist schema the legitimacy of parliamentary democracy means that, despite opposition from sections of the ruling class, change can still come about peacefully. Enabling acts and ministerial decrees replace the need for violent revolution.

Social Democratic Party

Ironically, this strategy gained its clearest expression at the end of the 19th century in a mass working class organisation Marx and Engels had helped to found; the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). In the 1880s and 1890s capitalism was enjoying a period of expansion and relative stability. Colonial conquests in Asia and Africa and the beginning of the imperialist stage of capitalist development had delivered super profits and improved living standards for many European workers.

German industry grew rapidly during these years.

Trade unions and parties like the SPD organised hundreds of thousands of workers in struggles for better wages, public health provision and democratic rights, resulting in tangible gains for the working class. At the same time they gained parliamentary representation.



Eduard Bernstein

These developments underpinned the emerging view inside the SPD and other workers' parties, that capitalism could be reformed from above. In Britain, this perception shaped the programme and practice of the Labour Party.

In Germany, Eduard Bernstein, a very influential SPD thinker, explicitly abandoned the struggle for revolutionary socialism, claiming that Marx and Engels were fundamentally wrong about capitalism's tendency to crisis and declaring that the revolutionary road was utopian. He promoted the view that Germany would continue to prosper and that workers, under the paternal guidance of the SPD's parliamentary leadership, could move towards a gradual socialist transformation.

A battle of ideas developed within the SPD that would profoundly influence the socialist movement internationally. The Polish-born Marxist, Rosa Luxemburg, launched a defence of basic Marxist principles against Bernstein in her pamphlet, *Reform or revolution*.

World War

Despite Luxemburg's battles within the SPD, Bernstein's reformism gained influence and served to justify many an SPD retreat. When

capitalist stability gave way to the catastrophic First World War, the SPD leadership supported the German state's war effort. The SPD's programme had, in fact, strengthened capitalism by directing workers' anger away from the bosses' system itself into a doomed attempt to make it more humane.

Reformist logic – the commitment to managing capitalism inexorably leads to the defence of that system – led the German SPD leadership to support their bosses when they plunged Germany and Europe into a frenzy of inter-imperialist carnage. Luxemburg had clearly anticipated the danger of this logic. She recognised that whether workers struggle to reform the capitalist state or overthrow it is not a question of different paths on the same road or towards the same goal:

“That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society.”

She was proved right not only by the SPD leadership's becoming

recruiting sergeants for German imperialism in 1914 but by their attitude to the workers' revolution in Russia, led by the Bolsheviks, in 1917. These leaders declared themselves to be the sworn enemy of this revolution, of its soviets, of its militia which was the direct opposite of the hierarchical capitalist army that the SPD now regarded as its own.

After four years of war, and with Germany defeated, the German workers wanted revolutionary change as well. The Spartakists, a party formed by Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, became the vanguard of the revolution of late 1918. The SPD leaders revealed where their real class loyalties lay. They crushed the revolution, and briefly silenced the voice of revolutionary socialism. In January 1919, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were brutally murdered on orders from the SPD leadership, their bodies dumped into a Berlin canal.

Reformism revealed itself as no longer a strand of opinion within the workers' movement but as the agent of the ruling class within that movement dedicated to counter-revolution and willing to contemplate only those reforms that capitalism could afford.

Reformism in Britain

The radical variant of the reformist strategy in a country like Britain, embodied most famously by Tony Benn, argues that the struggle for reforms should be conducted on a wide front, but fundamental social change should be brought about primarily in the House of Commons. Extra-parliamentary struggle is an adjunct, not an alternative, in Benn's version of the peaceful road to socialism.

Benn's case is based on the idea that parliament is the key loca-

tion of power in Britain and other western countries. This is his first and most important mistake. Of course, governments can tinker with the system, increase taxes a little and introduce the odd reforming law. But the capitalists have been very careful over many years to ensure that their real political power is located outside of parliament, in places where it will not fall into untrustworthy hands.

Any reform that seriously challenges the property rights of big business will be met with resistance by the real power of the capitalist state – the unelected civil service, judiciary, the armed forces, secret services and the police. It will be met by the economic sabotage of big business and the banks. They will order flights of capital to cripple a government if they think it is overstepping their boundaries.

The state apparatus defends ruling class power and privilege against the threat of working class revolt. A major strike or workers' demonstration will be met with the full repressive force of this state yet even when they are busy sabotaging government policies, carrying out mass sackings or enforcing pay cuts.

The experience of every attempt to utilise parliamentary means in the struggle for socialism has highlighted the crucial significance of the state apparatus. In Russia after the February 1917 overthrow of the Tsar, the workers looked to the Provisional government to meet their needs. When the peasants demanded land and the workers the factories, the government suddenly proved powerless confronting the landowners, the bosses and the military.

While one wing of the movement – the Mensheviks – put their faith in peaceful reform, the Bolsheviks recognised that only the



Rosa Luxemburg

armed might of workers' and peasants' militias combined with the power of workers' councils (soviets) could secure the basis for a socialist society.

The insurrection in October 1917 was able to take power from the capitalists precisely because the workers had built their own alternative power structures.

Without these alternatives, without a revolutionary party leading a revolution reformism will always fill the gap. And Reformism's strategy can have far more tragic consequences than just a missed opportunity. In 1973 in Chile, after Salvador Allende's left-wing government attempted to implement a programme of radical reforms, the bosses launched a bloody coup against the workers.

The workers were left defenceless and the socialist government

powerless. All their decrees came to nothing. The real power of the bosses' state was revealed in all its brutal horror in a Santiago football stadium where army troops murdered thousands of workers and radical students.

We have to ensure that this lesson is learnt once and for all by the majority of the working class. The century now ending has seen countless opportunities to rid the globe of capitalism squandered by reformist leaders, all too often ending in tragedy.

This is why the necessity for revolutionary force, organised by the mass of workers with the unambiguous aim of smashing the military power of the capitalist state and replacing it with the power of the workers militia, based on the democracy of workers' councils, is the only strategy that can secure a socialist victory.

WHICH ROAD: REFORM OR REVOLUTION

The Russian revolution of 1917

By Kuldip Sandhu, Winter 1999-0

On 25 October 1917 the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets voted to take power and established the world's first soviet republic.

The year 1917 had begun very differently. Russia was a developing capitalist country with an autocratic Tsarist state. Large factories, with a small but highly concentrated working class, co-existed with a huge peasant population and an archaic state regime.

The contradictions within Russia were exacerbated by the war. By February opposition to the war and the economic crisis which ensued led to a massive general strike in the capital, Petrograd.

The spark that ignited the strike came from a strike of women workers on International Women's Day.

On the morning of 23 February women workers took to the streets demanding bread. They marched to neighbouring factories seeking support from male workers. By mid-morning ten factories were shut and 27,000 workers were on strike, by the end of the day 61 per cent of all factory workers in the Vyborg district, some 59,800 workers, were on strike. In the following days the strike grew and the Tsar sent in troops to quell the workers. Women continued to play an important role as the revolution developed, here described by Trotsky:

"They go up to the cordons more boldly than men, take hold of the rifles, beseech, almost command: 'Put down your bayonets - join us!' the soldiers are excited, ashamed, exchange anxious glances, waver; someone makes up his mind first, and the bayonets rise guiltily above the shoulders of the advancing crowd. The barrier is opened, a joyous 'Hurrah' shakes



Demonstration at the Winter Palace

the air."

Soldiers deserted and mutinied. The Tsarist regime crumbled within days. It was replaced by the Provisional Government, made up of bourgeois politicians. But the workers who had made the revolution also built their own organisations: factory committees, workers' militia and the workers and soldiers' soviets.

Dual Power

The fall of Tsar Nicholas only served to deepen the contradictions at the level of state power. A situation of dual power began – that is, power was split between the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the working class on the other. This situation, a feature of revolutionary situations, could not last forever. Either the workers or the bosses would have to become the sole power in the land.

The majority of the delegates to the Petrograd Soviet including its Menshevik (reformist) leaders supported the provisional government. They saw the February uprising as a bourgeois democratic revolution which would logically result in a bourgeois government.

The soviets resolved to form an "observation committee" to watch over the provisional government. They intended to establish strict control on behalf of the working masses who saw them as the voice of their struggles. The bourgeoisie meanwhile looked upon the Provisional Government as their bastion against those very same struggles.

For the working class to triumph they could not merely rely on the maturity of the objective situation, nor could they rely solely on the spontaneous struggle of the masses as had been proved by the failed revolution of 1905. A victorious socialist revolution requires a subjective force; in the subsequent October revolution that force was the Bolshevik party.

The Bolsheviks showed an ability to develop a strategically correct understanding of the February revolution and what followed. This was not automatic, it was forged through democratic debate within the party and through the experience of the living struggle. Initially, many leading Bolsheviks shared a view similar to that of the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet. These included the editorial board of Prav-

da, made up of Stalin, Muranov and Kamenev. They wrote:

"As far as we are concerned what matters now is not the overthrow of capitalism but the overthrow of autocracy and feudalism."

It was Lenin, at the time still in exile, who led the fight. He saw the Russian Revolution as a component part of the international revolution against capitalism itself. In the soviets, militia and factory committees he saw the embryo of a state of an entirely new sort. In his "Letters from Afar" he wrote that the Petrograd Soviet should regard itself as the basis of a new government, counterposed to the provisional government. Anyone arguing that the workers should support the Provisional Government would be "a traitor to the working class", said Lenin.

April Thesis

On his return from exile Lenin codified his position in his "April Theses" arguing that with the formation of the soviets the proletariat had attained a higher form of democracy than could ever be achieved under a parliamentary democracy. The soviets were representative of all the exploited and oppressed groups. They were based on the principle of direct elections, recallability and the abolition of bureaucratic privilege. Lenin described going back to a parliamentary republic from the Soviet of Workers' Deputies as a "retrograde step". The "April Theses" called for the "abolition of the police, the army and the 'bureaucracy'", and for all of these functions to pass to the whole armed people.

Lenin's allies within the party were the largely proletarian left wing. After three weeks of fierce debate and bitter criticism they eventually won out. The importance of this victory cannot be underestimated. Because of it the Bolsheviks

were now armed with a programme with which they could win the masses to the goal of soviet power.

The mass of workers were deeply distrustful of the Provisional Government. Workers' resolutions were sent direct to the soviets. Disenchantment with the war was leading more and more soldiers to join the soviets. By June more than 20 million workers, soldiers and peasants were represented in the first All-Russian Soviet Congress. The leaders of the soviets however, still gave support to the Provisional Government it was in these circumstances that the Bolsheviks raised the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets!"

The aim of this slogan was to force the soviet leaders, who were still mostly Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs), to fight for a workers' and peasants' government based on the soviets, and to end their compromises with the Provisional Government. The slogan was in no way an indication that the Bolsheviks had illusions in the soviet leaders. Rather it was aimed at breaking the mass of people from their continued support for the reformist leaders.

It worked, Bolshevik support continued to grow. In the naval port of Kronstadt they, along with the Left SRs had a majority in the soviet and declared themselves the sole power in the city. Fearful of the growing feeling amongst the masses, the Provisional Government invited leaders of the Petrograd Soviet to join them. In accepting this offer the soviet "compromisers" steadily lost support amongst the workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks exploited the contradiction of the reformists' position with the slogan "Down with the ten capitalist ministers against those who had joined the government.

The Bolsheviks were gaining

support in Petrograd but they were not as strong in the provinces. Lenin realised this but some on the far left of the party didn't. They raised the call for an insurrection. Lenin argued against it, stating, "if we're now able to seize power, it is naive to think that we would be able to hold it". The basis of any form of revolutionary government would have to be the soviets in which the Bolsheviks were still a minority.

Counter-revolution

Despite these warnings the soldiers, workers and sailors could not be restrained. The Bolsheviks were eventually proved right as the ill-timed insurgency led to a serious tactical defeat.

The defeat of the "July Days" ushered in a period of counter-revolutionary repression. Workers and soldiers were beaten up and thrown into the canals. The presses of Pravda were smashed up and the Bolshevik headquarters were ransacked and seized. Many leading Bolsheviks were arrested and others were forced underground.

The victory against the workers led to a growing mood of confidence amongst the bourgeoisie. Brusilov, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, demanded the complete and total restoration of military discipline. Kerensky, the leader of the government, whose own survival depended on his ability to balance the interests of the bourgeoisie with those of the soviets, played for time by dismissing him. The resulting right-wing revolt led to an attempted coup by General Kornilov.

At the same time support for the Bolsheviks amongst the workers began to recover. The Bolsheviks won majorities in elections in the working class districts of Petrograd. Of the delegates to the All Russian Factory Committees

Conference held in August 82 per cent were Bolsheviks.

As Kornilov's forces marched on Petrograd soviets and factory committees across the city vowed to defend the revolution. The workers demanded arms and Kerensky had little option but to hand them over. The Bolsheviks utilised the united front tactic fighting alongside Kerensky against Kornilov, while keeping up a relentless critique of him and his Menshevik supporters.

Workers' government

These tactics proved a huge success. In September the Petrograd Soviet voted overwhelmingly for a Bolshevik resolution calling for a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government. They steadily won control of the majority of soviets across Russia. The party had become the national party of the Russian working class. The slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" could now only mean a Bolshevik-led seizure of power.

Kerensky tried to shore up his failing regime, proposing a totally undemocratic five-person directorate. Meanwhile, he looked for an opportunity to move against the Bolsheviks. At the beginning of October he attempted to move the garrison out of Petrograd, removing soldiers who were increasingly influenced by the Bolsheviks. The move caused an outcry. A meeting of the Egersky Guards Regiment on 12 October called for soviet power and stated: "The pulling out of the revolutionary garrison from Petrograd is needed only by the privileged bourgeoisie as a means of stifling the revolution."

On 21 October the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) established by the Petrograd Soviet to defend the revolution

announced that no order should be considered valid unless countersigned by the MRC.

On 24 October Kerensky ordered the arrest of the MRC and the Bolshevik leaders, and the closure of the Bolshevik press. By the early hours of 25 October the order had been countermanded and the presses were running again. The MRC had done more than just countermand Kerensky. They ordered the insurrection that was to result in the creation of the first workers' state. The MRC's forces took control of the railway stations, junctions, the telegraph, phone exchange and the state bank. The Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky had been overthrown.

Later that day Red Guards and sailors stormed the Winter Palace. Over the coming days and weeks victory was won throughout the towns and cities of Russia.

Insurrection

Such was the mass support of the Bolshevik led revolution in Petrograd that hardly a shot was fired during the insurrection. Although there was a greater level of fighting in some other cities, across Russia as a whole it was precisely this majority support that enabled the Bolsheviks not only to launch a successful insurrection but usher in a workers' state able to withstand the terrible onslaught launched by the Russian bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies in the civil war that followed.

The Bolsheviks had resolved, in practice, the question that had so vexed the Russian Marxist movement in the preceding decades – namely what kind of revolution would overthrow the Tsar. The answer given by the Bolsheviks was clear, a workers' socialist revolution as part of a world revolution.

WHICH ROAD: REFORM OR REVOLUTION

Communist policy: elections and Revolution

By Richard Brenner, March 2010

We only have the right to vote in this country because working class people fought for it.

Every right we have – the right to assemble, the right to free speech, the right to form unions and the right to vote – was not granted freely to the people, but was forced out of the ruling class through campaigns of mass action.

In 1832 the ruling class extended the vote – but only to people with property and money. So in the 1840s the first mass political movement of workers was formed – the Chartists – to fight for the right to vote. It gathered millions of names on a great petition, held giant marches and rallies, launched an armed uprising in Wales in 1839 and called a general strike in 1842: the first in British history.

The heroic struggles of the Suffragettes led to women being given the vote in 1918 – but only at the age of 30! Under the impact of the Russian Revolution the same law in 1918 for the first time allowed all workers to vote. But it was not until 1928 that women were allowed to vote at the same age as men.

Election restrictions

Today elections are still not completely free and fair in Britain. At 16 we are old enough to marry, old enough to work and be exploited, but still not allowed to vote.

Not all our votes count. The undemocratic first-past-the-post system means that all the votes for unsuccessful constituency candidates are discounted. A system of proportional representation would ensure that all parties were represented according to their share of the vote – but the main

parties resist it.

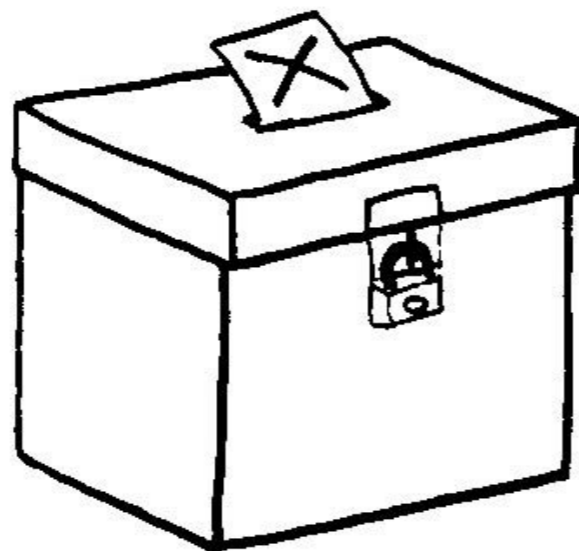
The elected House – the Commons – still doesn't have full power. The unelected House of Lords can obstruct and delay laws. And Britain is still not a republic. The Queen is not just a tourist attraction but has the power to declare war, the power to dissolve a parliament, and the power to appoint and dismiss prime ministers. If there is a hung parliament after this election, the power of this unelected hereditary monarch will come into play.

One government after another strips away the rights of the people. MI5 and MI6 use torture against British citizens to force them into confessions. The High Court ruled it illegal for a group of Muslims to chant slogans accusing Britain's army of occupation in Iraq of 'murder' – despite the fact that there are documented cases of soldiers murdering civilians in this illegal and unpopular war. Perfectly legal demonstrations against the banks in the City of London last year were herded into police pens and one bystander was even killed by police thugs.

The fight for democratic rights goes on, and it is resisted by the rich minority of capitalists who rule Britain. All the more reason to step up the fight to extend our rights, and to use what rights we have to fight for a government of the working class.

In the coming election, communists should stand candidates where we can, on a clear revolutionary programme. That is what Workers Power supporter Jeremy Drinkall is doing in Vauxhall, South London, where he is standing on the ANTICAPITALIST ticket.

When revolutionaries stand in elections, they do so to raise support for workers' struggles outside



parliament, in the workplace and on the streets. They put forward policies that address the immediate needs of working class people, like investment in jobs and housing, and link it to the need to dispossess the rich capitalists – for example by taking over the banks, taxing the rich, and taking the big companies into state hands under workers' control, without compensation. Communist candidates oppose our rulers' wars, call for the withdrawal of troops from overseas, and support strikes and occupations against job losses.

A communist candidate is not like a normal candidate of one of the capitalist parties. Because they are part of a disciplined communist organisation, which holds all its members accountable to its democratic decisions, a communist candidate cannot just pursue their own whims, is obliged to uphold a fighting working class policy, and agrees in advance to take only the average wage of a skilled worker, donating the rest of their large salary to the working class movement. No expenses scandals, duck islands and second homes for us!

Socialist society

Communists believe that even if 600 communist MPs were elected to the House of Commons, the real power in society – the unelected police and army chiefs, the faceless civil servants who rule behind the scenes – would quickly move to overthrow us, rather than sit by peacefully as we took away their wealth and shared it among the people.

That is why, election or no election, communists always say clearly: to get rid of the rule of the capitalists, to remove their control of society's wealth and the riches we create, to establish a fair, socialist system based on a democratic plan of production in place of inequality and market madness – it will be necessary to smash the capitalists' state forces in a revolution. That will take the action of millions of people, organised and led by a revolutionary anti-capitalist party.

It is to build that party – winning new recruits across the country – that communists devote their efforts in the coming election campaign.

The workers' answer to the crisis

An action programme for the working class in Britain

The world is witnessing dramatic and far-reaching changes. The global credit crunch has turned into an historic financial crisis. A series of corporations – some of them major icons of American capitalism – have collapsed into bankruptcy, been forced into takeovers or were nationalised.

And we are still only at the beginning. Major recessions now loom in world's major economic including Britain. Major corporations are already fighting to stay alive in a frenzied bout of takeovers. States will also desperately seek to shift

the worst effects of the crisis onto one another.

There is one thing, however, that capitalists and ruling politicians will agree on: to make the working class pay for the economic crisis. Job losses, unemployment, pay cuts and home repossessions are on the way. But the working class did nothing to cause the crisis – so why should we pay for it? We shouldn't.

We urgently need to draw up a plan of action to resist this onslaught. What sort of organisation do we need? What demands should we fight for? What tactics should we fight around? These

are the crucial questions our class faces today. A Workers' Answer to the Crisis is addressed to these questions and problems.

But it also goes further. In the 21st century, if we are to avoid decades more war, poverty and exploitation, then resistance to the bosses' attacks must – more than ever – be linked to the overthrow of capitalism and a socialist world.

This is why A Workers' Answer to the Crisis proposes a strategy that links our immediate struggles to the socialist goal.

It is not a manifesto of reforms for parliamentary legislation but a

set of proposals for working class action on the streets and in the workplaces.

Every one of the policies we raise addresses the immediate interests of our class. None of the solutions we propose are compatible with the capitalist system. Each and every one of them undermines the ability of the capitalists to exploit us.

A Workers' Answer to the Crisis is the British action programme of the revolutionary socialist organisation, Workers Power. If you agree with it, we urge you to join us and help turn it into a reality.

Get your copy of the The Workers Answer to the Crisis from your local Workers Power branch, or online at <http://tinyurl.com/workers-answer>

For further reading...

From Protest to Power



All history proves that the capitalists will never relinquish their property peacefully – to claim otherwise in the age of 'Shock and Awe' is either hopeless naivety or wilful deception. There is only one way: their apparatus of state repression must be overthrown by force. The capitalists' monopoly of military power – armies, police and security forces, prison systems, civil servants, judiciaries – must be smashed to pieces and replaced with the rule of the working people themselves.

This can be done – the majority of humanity can cast off the tiny minority of parasites. It will take mass organisation, an unambiguous strategy and, when the hour strikes, courageous and ruthless action.

Some may balk at this, but the alternative to revolution is not decades of undisturbed peace. Basing a global civilisation on the empowerment of a few thousand and the impoverishment of six billion is like lodging depth charges in the planetary core. If the logic of capitalism is left to unfold, our world will be torn apart by starvation, disease, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and war.

In the struggle against capitalism, greater energy is equivalent to greater humanity. For with the suppression of our exploiters and an end to the tyranny of profit, human history can truly begin.

Available online at FIFTHINTERNATIONAL.ORG

PARTY AND PROGRAMME

The revolutionary

By Mark Harrison, Nov 1998

The revolutionary Marxist movement has developed many programmes, beginning 150 years ago with the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Sixty years ago Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International on the basis of the Transitional Programme.

For all political parties a programme states what it stands for and its policies once in government. For bourgeois parties it is a statement of what they will do for (or to) us when they gain office.

For revolutionary organisations the programme is more. It is a statement of what we stand for, but it is also outlines what the workers and oppressed should fight for in the here and now. Unlike Labour's election manifesto it is not a series of passive policy statements. It is rather, as Trotsky called it, "a manual of action for millions". It is something we fight for the working class as a whole to take up.

The Marxist movement has produced a number of programmes historically precisely because the revolutionary programme has to be relevant to the current class struggle and to the stage of capitalist development. It is a living thing, tested and corrected in the course of struggle, by the experience both of the revolutionary organisation and of the workers engaged in action.

But while there have been many programmes, some elements have remained the same. The reasons for this are:

- that the fundamental principles of the Marxist programme have changed little in 150 years – our critique of capitalism, our belief in the need for workers' power and socialism, for example;



- that the method of developing a programme that points out the road to the revolution has remained constant – it is what we call a "transitional" method.

The transitional method developed as a response to the first serious undermining of the revolutionary programme of Marx and Engels. While the Communist Manifesto outlined an elementary programme for the "transition" to socialism, the major working class parties formed in the later nineteenth century, especially the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), gradually abandoned this idea of a transition (and later revolution) altogether.

In its place they developed a minimum programme (a set of demands for reforms within capitalism) and a maximum programme (socialism). The concept of a bridge between the two was considered unimportant.

The SPD grew rapidly and won parliamentary representation. But it came under increasing pressure

to adapt to capitalism. Its minimum demands were often important and radical, supportable even today (arming the people, for example). While the transitional programme has replaced the minimum programme for Marxists, the fight around reforms (minimum demands) remains important and can kickstart many struggles.

But the minimum demands did not, taken as a whole, constitute a programme for a revolution. Any mention of socialism as the movement's goal became the stuff of Sunday speeches, separated by a growing chasm from the SPD's actual programme and practice as it became ever more reformist.

It was Engels, writing in 1891, who first spotted the problem with the minimum/maximum approach. When he saw the SPD's draft programme ("the Erfurt Programme") he wrote:

"The political demands of the draft have one great fault. It lacks precisely what should have been said. If all ten demands were granted we should indeed have more

diverse means of achieving our main political aim, but the aim itself would in no wise have been achieved."

Engels saw that the fight for reforms, though important, ran the risk of becoming the fight for the reform of capitalism rather than for its revolutionary overthrow. His doubts were confirmed by the SPD's evolution into a reformist party.

After the Bolsheviks successfully re-elaborated the transitional method in the Russian Revolution of 1917, the international revolutionary movement, the Communist International, looked back to Marx and Engels and their transitional method in order to avoid the pitfalls of the SPD-style minimum/maximum programme.

Tragically, the Russian revolution's internal defeat – at the hands of Stalin and his bureaucrats – cut short the debate in the Communist International and it was left to Trotsky (exiled and eventually murdered by Stalin) to keep the revolutionary flame alight and formulate a transitional programme for

the modern epoch of imperialist capitalism.

programme

the modern epoch of imperialist capitalism.

As well as incorporating the revolutionary movement's historic principles, the programme had to grasp the lessons of recent revolutionary struggles. It was not a lifeless, abstract schema but a guide to action in the existing world. As such, it also had to elaborate the key revolutionary tactics for the class struggle. And it had to be an international programme, capable of spreading the fight against capitalism globally.

The 1938 Transitional Programme codified all these essential aspects. Just as it was a re-elaboration of previous programmes so today it has required re-elaboration. But its method and structure, its key demands and many of its tactics hold good for today. Above all else it spelled out the transitional method – the key to revolutionary strategy today. Trotsky summed the method up as follows:

"The strategic task of the next period . . . consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme of revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

The fight for workers' control, exercised by new forms of workers' power, is central to the system of transitional demands. To the extent that these demands are won the capitalist's power – in both the economic and political spheres – is in Engels' phrase "encroached upon".

he question is, how do such demands work in practice? Let us take one example from today's situation that illustrates Trotsky's point.

Unemployment is beginning to hit hard at what is left of Britain's factories.

Clearly, the issue of job cuts at Rover, for example, is both immediate – 2,500 sackings are threatened – and poses the question of capitalism's general crisis-ridden character. It highlights once more capitalism's callous indifference to working class needs. Workers will want to defend their jobs, but with Labour politicians blaming them and with union leaders willing to negotiate away their remaining rights, the danger is that the fight will be misled and go down to defeat, not because the workers lack the will, but because they lack a coherent political answer, a transitional answer.

Revolutionaries at Rover could turn this situation around through the use of transitional demands. They begin with action. Workers need to occupy the threatened plant (Longbridge). Such action immediately poses the questions of control and ownership since it means the workers seizing the bosses' plant and machinery. Action like this requires new and fresh organisation. The occupied plant must be run by elected workers' committees, and must be guarded by defence teams, both made accountable to regular workforce mass meetings.

This action puts immediate pressure on the bosses and the government, but it needs to have a goal. If BMW cannot guarantee every job

then Rover must be re-nationalised (it used to be British Leyland). The bosses, post-privatisation, have made a mint. Now these bosses are saying the workers are expendable. Our answer is the bosses are expendable. They must not receive a penny in compensation for their mismanagement. We must open up their accounts so that everyone can see the way in which they have run the company.

But on its own seizing the plant back from the bosses – and forcing Labour to nationalise the industry – will not guarantee future jobs unless a regime of workers' control is established. This means control over the speed and intensity of work. It means control over the hours worked so that the grinding working week can be cut (to 35 hours immediately) with no loss of pay or bonuses and so that during lulls work can be shared out among the workforce with nobody having to be sacked.

Bridge to revolution

Demands such as these defend the needs and the interests of the workers against the bosses' ruthless drive for profits. They hit at the bosses' control of the plant. They conflict with capitalist priorities. They organise the workers as an independent class force. And they pose much wider questions of control over government and industry. Is the government to act in the interests of the workers by meeting these demands? If not then let us have a workers' government that will. Is the rest of industry going to sit back faced with such a struggle or will it recognise the danger and go on to attack other sections of workers? If it does then the workers' action and demands must be spread to other sections of workers, generalising the struggle more and more.

In this way transitional demands can both relate to the immediate needs of the workers and pose the question of power. When combined with militant action and overseen by new forms of working class organisation they begin to show the real possibility of workers' power in the here and now. They serve as the "bridge" Trotsky talked about.

Whether or not such demands can be realised under capitalism – i.e. whether in the eyes of the bosses and their reformist supporters in the Labour Party and the unions they are "realistic" – is not the main point. Such gains cannot be maintained indefinitely unless capitalism itself is overthrown.

But these transitional demands have a burning relevance when a capitalist boss tells 2,500 people that they are expendable. Indeed, the realism of such demands can only grow when the likes of Bank of England boss Eddie George can openly tell tens of thousands more that they must lose their jobs for the "good of the whole economy".

To those who say transitional demands are "too advanced" for the workers, we say it is not the job of revolutionaries to put forward demands that we know are inadequate (and we know because of the bitter legacy of previous crises that have caused mass unemployment) to save jobs.

Workers currently dominated by reformist ideas may indeed think what we are saying is too advanced but through the fight for a revolutionary action programme a party can win ever wider popularity for it to challenge and overcome the backward ideas that lead straight to the dole queue and show that the new ideas can lead to socialism's triumph.

That is the importance of the transitional programme today.

PARTY AND PROGRAMME

Why we need a rev

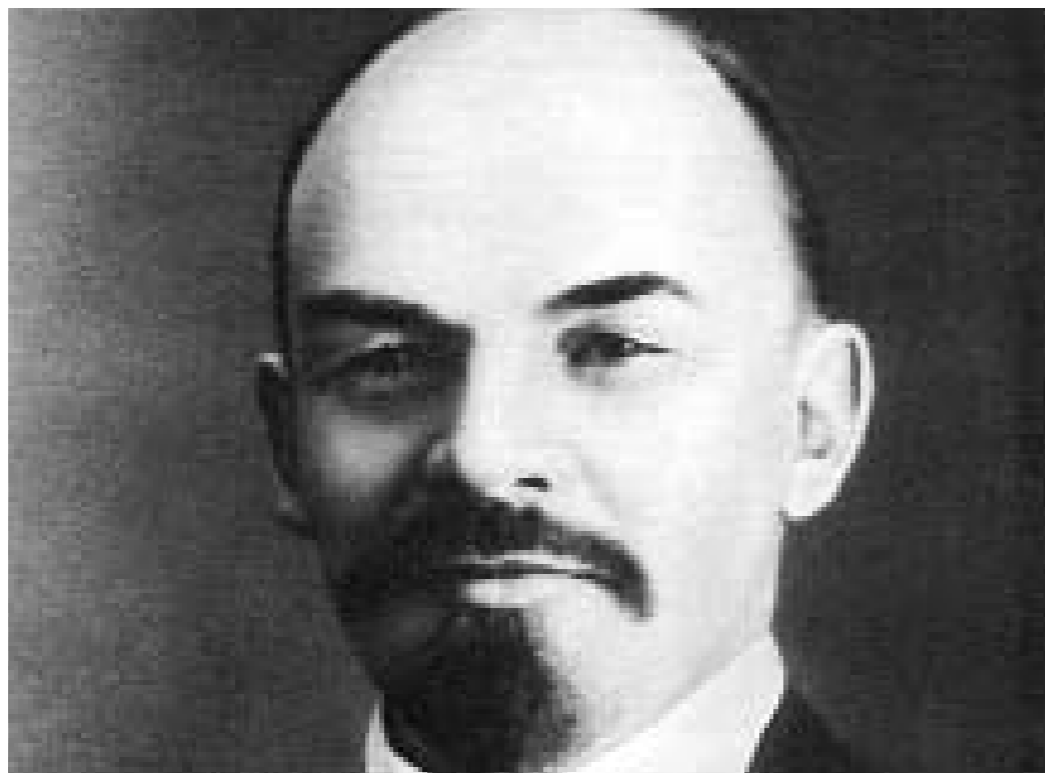
In February 1917 the workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants of Russia revolted against the slaughter of the First World War and the tyrannical regime of Tsar Nicholas II. The workers, soldiers and sailors in the main cities organised themselves, spontaneously, in workers' councils (soviets).

Delegates from the different factories, working class districts and from different regiments in the army constituted an alternative power, based on direct working class democracy. Workers, soldiers and sailors elected delegates from mass meetings to the soviets. Direct representatives, they were accountable and recallable to the workers who elected them. But this did not lead to the workers and their allies taking power immediately.

The representatives of the most popular parties in the soviets, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, believed that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution and instead proceeded to organise a series of short lived governments with the main bourgeois politicians. They resisted the call for "all power to the soviets" in favour of ceding power to the bourgeois Provisional Government.

Within the soviets the Bolshevik Party challenged these parties with clear revolutionary policies. The Bolsheviks fought to win all power for the soviets. Through patient explanation the Bolsheviks defeated the bourgeois parties in the soviets and won the mass of workers and soldiers to insurrection. Soviets led by Bolsheviks were the key to revolutionary victory.

The Bolshevik Party did not appear from nowhere in 1917. It originated within the Russian Social Democratic and Labour



VI Lenin

Party (RSDLP), a party which united all revolutionary Marxists in the Russian empire at the start of the century. In 1903 a row broke out at the RSDLP's founding congress. What appeared to be at first a minor organisational question, over what it meant to be a member of the party, proved to be a key political question in the fight for revolution. Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik faction, argued in line with what had up until then been the common position of the entire leadership of the RSDLP, that the organisation needed to be a militant, professional and centralised organisation. Its members would have to be under the discipline of one of the party organisations and fight for the party programme, what was later to become known as democratic centralism.

The party would be organised democratically, with freedom of discussion among the members lead-

ing to a vote on the party's programme, policies, tactics and action. Once a decision had been made then every member of the party would be obliged to fight for it.

Lenin won a majority at the 1903 congress after a number of his opponents walked out. (Bolshevik is the Russian word for majority). The minority, Mensheviks, (from the Russian word for minority) argued for a looser form of organisation. They refused to accept the right of the congress to elect the editorial board of the party paper, *Iskra*.

This was not just a question of the formal constitution of the party but was directly related to the political tasks of the Social Democrats. In the previous year, Lenin wrote a very important work, *What is to be Done?*, that remains a vital guide for revolutionaries in the struggle today.

Lenin explained that without a conscious political leadership, a

party, the working class' economic struggle inside the workplace will not, spontaneously, generate a revolutionary socialist consciousness. The party is the bearer of that consciousness, fighting within every sphere of class struggle against capitalism and oppression – not just within the workplace over economic issues – to win the working class and oppressed to the revolutionary programme.

Capitalism conceals the exploitation and oppression that is inherent within it. Selling your labour seems to be a fair deal. It appears to be a "free" contract between a boss and a worker. Systematic exploitation is not immediately obvious, even if the effects of it, like low pay are. And it is precisely the fight over the effects – the fight for a better deal, "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work", for reforms within capitalism – that workers spontaneously take up. To go beyond this requires an under-

olutionary party

standing of capitalism, an understanding of its entire system of exploitation and oppression and a programme of action to fight it. Without this the spontaneous struggle is limited to trade union, reformist consciousness.

Lenin called the spontaneous development of trade union consciousness "the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie". Trade union consciousness and political reformism – the natural political expression of trade unionism – are bourgeois political ideologies even though they are based on workers' organisations. And the strength of such ideology is that it is perpetrated on a daily basis by the vast propaganda machine – now infinitely more extensive than in Lenin's day – of the press, the broadcasting media and so on. As Lenin noted:

"... bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology... it is more fully developed, and... it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination."

Of course none of this means that the party stands aside from the day to day struggle of the class, bringing socialist consciousness from without in a passive and sectarian way. Far from it. The party roots itself in the working class. It learns from and generalises the lessons of its struggles, past and present. It serves as the memory of the class as well as its vanguard.

But if it was simply an organisational tool for uniting working class struggles as they unfold it would be little more than a glorified, albeit militant, trade union. In order to both learn from and teach the working class the party must have a programme of action for defeating capitalism and not just ameliorating its worst effects.

Today many activists object to

the idea of a revolutionary party because they are against "leaders". As the revolutionary party unashamedly seeks to lead the working class activists in various protest movements, local campaigns and so on, they declare themselves to be "against parties".

The history of so many parties – from the Stalinist bureaucratic monstrosities, to the clique dominated reformist social democratic parties and the so-called "Trotskyist" or "revolutionary" parties and sects, run like feudal fiefdoms by unaccountable leaders – gives plenty of cause for suspicion. But two things prove that the genuinely revolutionary party is different.

Democratic centralism

The first is the concept of democratic centralism itself. Some argue this is a bureaucratic and undemocratic way of organising. Quite the opposite. Democratic centralism means the maximum level of debate and discussion within the party over the correct tactics and programme to adopt. But when a decision has been reached, then the greatest unity must be presented by the party to the working class. Capital is a highly centralised social force. To overthrow it we must have unity in action.

The working class spontaneously gravitates towards democratic centralist types of organisation during times of struggle. The importance of unity and solidarity are well understood by workers on strike. Decisions are made about tactics and strategy in an open and democratic environment. But anybody who breaks with the decision of the majority once a vote has been taken, becomes a strike breaker, a traitor and a scab. This democracy must be preserved at all costs and only ever temporarily suspended when

repression or illegality make normal democratic functioning practically impossible. It is vital for holding the leaders of the party to account, for allowing dissenters to air their views and to allow mistakes to be corrected. It is the only guarantee against organisational degeneration.

Centralism, the intervention into the external world is the other. For without it, with a free-for-all by party members of different views, nobody would be accountable, no policy could be tested and corrected, no leader held responsible for a success or a mistake. The party that acted without centralism would become a laughing stock and quickly fall apart. Centralism in action is equally a guarantee against degeneration.

Accountability

The second factor that marks out the revolutionary party is that it is open in its quest for leadership of the working class. It "disdains" as Karl Marx said "to conceal its views". And those who say "no leaders" are always, but always, led by cliques or charismatic individuals who direct operations and make the key decisions. The difference between them and revolutionary leaders is that we believe in accountability. Our leaders are chosen and can be replaced.

After all, every struggle requires and finds leadership. Without it, on a picket line for example, the police will have a field day. Our side will have nobody directing our forces to the key points of the struggle while the police commanders direct theirs to the best effect. In reality strike committees and militants selected as picket leaders demonstrate the way in which workers in struggle can find a leadership.

And in every wider struggle leaderships emerge. While reformist

consciousness prevails that leadership will be reformist. And the cost, in strikes, in campaigns, in the struggle for progressive legislation, is that we are sold out or sold short by these leaders.

Revolutionary leadership will break the hold of the reformists and win the support of the masses of the working class. Like the Bolsheviks in 1917, we do not do this by tricks or deceit but by proving ourselves the most consistent fighters for the interests of the working class, we do it by placing ourselves at the forefront of every struggle, by acting, as Lenin said, as "tribunes of the people".

Above all, without revolutionary leadership, the revolution cannot triumph. In Indonesia a powerful uprising overthrew a rotten regime. It mobilised thousands upon thousands demanding change. But suddenly it stalled, not because the masses were satisfied. Poverty and hunger are still rife but the leaders of that revolution favoured a compromise with a wing of the old regime. Their leadership deliberately held back the revolution and will try to kill it off altogether once they have satisfied their own limited demands for democratic reform.

Only a revolutionary leadership can take this movement forward to a victory over the decaying capitalism that spells misery for millions of Indonesians.

The revolutionary party needs to be organised and prepared at all levels. From the intervention into workers' meetings, to leading strikes and participating in revolutionary struggles, the party must be politically and organisationally prepared. A revolutionary party will unite those workers who have learnt the lessons of their struggles in a single organisation that can utilise these lessons to lead the entire working class.

KEY STRUGGLE (A): THE WORKING CLASS AND THE UNIONS

The trouble with the unions

By Kate Foster, April 1999

Many workers will recognise Karl Marx's description of unions as "schools of struggle" when they recall their first picket line: organising yourselves, attempting to cover all the entrances, arguing with other workers, learning who can be trusted, squaring up to the cops. No trade unionist forgets the first victory: seeing a hated manager silenced and cowed, workers going into work confident and looking forward to the next battle.

Yet the experience of organising a union can also be drab, frustrating and disheartening: union bureaucrats telling you your strike is over; endless small meetings, mired in routine and governed by petty rules; seeing the union leaders wolfing their meat and two veg at the poshest hotel in town at union conference.

The experience of trade unions reflects the nature of the unions in the class struggle: they are contradictory.

Unions can take the working class forward and they are an essential weapon in our armoury against the bosses. But they are also used to defuse struggles and restrict the fighting capacity of the class.

Throughout their history the unions have been faced with the dilemma of fighting within the system or fighting to smash it.

In many countries, even to this day, unions begin as illegal organisations. Historically in Europe they arose as workers realised that their strength lay in collective organisation. A single worker could not resist the demands of the bosses, but combining together with other workers gave them strength. In Britain, in the late 18th and early 19th cen-

turies, these combinations were short, sporadic and illegal. Workers organised themselves around immediate demands on the bosses. As capitalism developed, so too did the unions.

By the mid-19th century the unions had become more sophisticated. Unions fought for the legal right to exist and became more permanent formations. Engels wrote: "As schools of war, the unions are unexcelled."

A class for its self

For Marx and Engels unions played an important part in the development of class consciousness. They argued that the working class because of its position in production, that of wage labourer, constituted a distinct social class. It was a class "in itself". However, workers did not automatically see their common interests. As wage labourers, receiving individually from the capitalist their own wage, they appear to be atomised. Yet to resist the bosses they must find collectivity, solidarity and political class consciousness. The working class must become a class "for itself". Organising in a union could be a step towards this, Marx and Engels said.

But the early revolutionary socialists were also aware of the limitations of trade unionism. Unions by their very nature tended to limit themselves to the economic class struggle. Based in the workplace, the spontaneous demands of the unions were around jobs, pay and conditions – economic rather than political demands. Limited to fighting against the individual capitalists and not fighting to get rid of capitalism itself, meant that the unions were constantly having to defend themselves as the capitalist's profits rose or fell.

As Rosa Luxemburg later wrote, limiting the struggle to economic

demands meant the unions were condemned to repeat the Greek myth of "the labour of Sisyphus" – the man condemned for eternity to attempt to push a great boulder up the hill only to see it roll down again every evening. Anyone who has battled with management over cuts or pay will recognise the analogy.

But there was another danger. Marx pointed out that unless the working class could be won to revolutionary politics the unions would become influenced by another kind of politics – the politics of the bourgeoisie. In particular, trade unionism's self proclaimed goal of fighting for "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" accepted the terms of the capitalist wages system. It did not seek to abolish that system.

Marx argued that it was not possible for unions to remain politically neutral. And as capitalism and the unions matured, he was proved correct.

"Pure unionism"

The political ideas of "pure trade unionism", focused around economic demands, inevitably evolved into reformism. The belief that it is possible to reform capitalism, to make it more amenable to the working class, to fight the bosses for concessions but not to overthrow them, flows from limiting the class struggle to purely economic, and frequently merely sectional, demands.

Reformist politics were lodged in pure trade unionism. With the development in the late 19th century of a distinct "labour aristocracy" a material base for a reformist bureaucracy emerged in the unions, as well as reformist political parties linked to this bureaucracy.

As capitalism expanded in the newly industrialised nations of Europe and the United States, mas-

sive profits were made from exploiting the workers and the new markets of the under-developed countries. Imperialist capitalism was born. Colonial super-profits allowed capitalism to pay certain groups of skilled workers higher wages and grant them better conditions. Skilled labour shortages allowed some workers to push for and defend their relatively privileged status. The gap between the highest and the lowest paid workers grew rapidly, between the labour aristocracy and the masses.

In a letter to William Morris, Engels described the condition of certain workers as improving significantly since 1848:

"The best proof of this is the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final."

This development coincided with the creation of legal and more permanent trade unions, able to pay some officials to work specifically for the union. These union leaders and officials were to become the means by which bourgeois ideas and interests were introduced into the labour movement. This bureaucracy's very existence depended upon, and remains dependent upon, the continuation of capitalism. The bureaucrats become arbiters between capital and labour, but always accepting the terms of reference of capitalism itself.

By the time of their deaths Marx and Engels recognised that for the working class to move forward new types of unions would have to be built – class struggle unions:

"Apart from their original pur-

poses, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interests of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves, and acting as, the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the workers at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions."

Before such unions could be built the working class had to learn a bloody lesson. The German workers' movement grew rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century and soon overtook the British unions. Membership of the unions rose from a quarter of a million in the 1890s, to 2.6 million in 1912. But while formally committed to Marxist politics, the German unions became a breeding ground for reformism.

Betrayal

Rosa Luxemburg foresaw the danger but she was not able to avert it. Even Lenin later admitted that the rest of the revolutionary workers' movement had been slow to recognise the danger. The leadership of the unions and the German Social Democratic Party were to betray the whole working class. At the outbreak of the World War in 1914 they sided with the bosses in the war and millions of workers were sent to their deaths in defence of capitalism. The British unions and the Labour Party did the same. The reformist character of pure trade unionism revealed itself as a

bloody defender of capitalist order. The need for the rank and file of the unions to organise themselves to overthrow the bureaucracy also became crystal clear.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, however, showed the alternative. It raised the real possibility of the revolutionary transformation of the unions on condition that a revolutionary workers party – fighting capitalism on every front, not just on economic questions – could be built and could win leadership inside the working class. As early as March 1920 one of the Bolshevik leaders, Zinoviev, was calling for a new international of trade unions to counter the rotten reformism of the old pre-war unions.

In Moscow in 1921 the First Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions took place. They agreed an action programme which still reads like a breath of fresh air to anyone stuck in the claustrophobic bureaucratic structures of a union today.

The action programme calls for workers to come together into industrially based unions to overcome the craft divisions that might exist in one factory or workshop. They call for factory committees and for such committees to be truly representative of all workers. Despite the success of the Bolsheviks in leading the Russian Revolution they oppose attempts by anyone party to monopolise control:

"The factory committee must be elected by the workers engaged in the given enterprise, independently of the political creed they profess. The task of the supporters of the Red International of Trade Unions is to involve all the workers of a given enterprise in the election of the representative organ. The attempt to elect the factory committee exclusively from adherents of the same party, and the casting

aside of the broad, nonparty rank and file workers, should be severely condemned."

The RILU issued a rallying call to the workers of the world for every factory to become "a citadel of revolution". Demands within the action programme were to oppose any job loss, to open the books of any employer claiming that they could not afford to keep people on and to occupy any factory threatened with closure. The RILU warned of the potential of the bosses attacking any sign of militancy amongst workers and called for strike militias and self defence squads. Opposing all attempts to divide workers, the RILU called for full equality for women workers. Aware of the potential danger from the bureaucracy, they were for breaking any cosy collective agreement with the bosses. They called for workers' control, not collaboration. The Bolsheviks in the RILU warned against limiting the trade union struggle and pointed to the importance of political leadership:

"Every economic struggle is also a political one; that is a general class struggle. Such a struggle can only acquire a really revolutionary character, no matter how many workers it may involve, and be carried through for the greatest benefit of the entire working class, when the revolutionary trade unions act in perfect unity with the Communist Party in each respective country. To divide the theory and practice of the struggle of the working class into two distinct parts is extremely detrimental."

Russian revolution

The experience of the Russian Revolution and the formation of the RILU had an electrifying effect upon the unions within Europe. In Britain the 1920s saw political strikes aimed at stopping the British intervention

against the revolution in Russia, massive strikes in the mines and in engineering and the formation of the Communist Party-led Minority Movement, a rank and file movement initially launched to challenge the bureaucracy. The upsurge in the unions culminated with the General Strike of 1926. But by then the revolution had been undermined by the growing cancer of Stalinism and the CP delivered up the British workers to the leaders of the TUC who duly sold them out.

Any examination of the unions of today will reveal that we can still recognise the limitations highlighted by Marx, Engels, Luxemburg and Lenin. We are frequently told that politics should be kept out of the union. Workers remain divided in separate unions in many workplaces. In schools it is a common occurrence for there to be five different unions. And union fat cats think nothing about sabotaging each other in the fight for single union "sweetheart" deals with management.

Reformism and bureaucracy

The bureaucracy still clings to our backs like a bloated leech. They try to sell us credit cards, rather than fight for our future. And our leaders continue to sell us out.

The task of transforming the unions still confronts us today. But we can learn important lessons from the history of our movement. One of the key lessons is that such a transformation cannot take place without a political struggle. And while fighting, rank and file controlled unions would be an enormous step forward for the working class, they are no substitute for a revolutionary workers' party if they are to be able to play their part in the task of overthrowing capitalism.

KEY STRUGGLE (A): THE WORKING CLASS AND THE UNIONS

Committees of action

By Joy Macready, Oct 2009

The mainstream parties' assessment of the extent of the public sector cutbacks needed – an estimated 10-20% cuts in the health sector, £2bn cuts in education, 10 per cent savings across government departments – is staggering. Their representatives and their loyal friends in the media, however, never mention that it is caused by the gaping hole left in the public purse from the £1.3 trillion bailout of the banks.

Meanwhile, private sector bosses are using the recession to relocate production, sack workers, cut their wages and steal from their pensions. Share prices and profit margins may be recovering, but this is not enough for the greedy capitalists; they want to inflict further damage on working class families and communities.

Solidarity

But already we see the signs of a militant fightback. Occupations are leading the way: Visteon, Two Sisters, Prisme, Waterford, and Vestas, to name a few. Parents and teachers in Glasgow and Lewisham occupied their schools to prevent closure. Postal workers are balloting for a national strike against redundancies and reductions in hours and wages. Tower Hamlets College lecturers took all-out indefinite action for four weeks, while Leeds bin workers are still all out.

The list of struggles shows that it is not just the public sector that is under attack, but also the private sector; it is not just workers fighting back against service cuts, but the users of worsening services. Although the public sector is in the direct firing line of the government, all workers will be affected by cuts in housing, health-care or education.

As Marxists, we do not just live in the realm of ideas and theory,

but we put our theory into practice. The challenge is to find a way to link these struggles together, overcoming the division between public and private, between providers and users, and between the various unions. Those struggles listed above are inspiring but all are isolated to a degree.

Within the different struggles, Workers Power has argued for local committees of action to unite activists at a community level. The Vestas solidarity committees, which attracted workers from many different unions, community and green activists, and socialist organisations, were an encouraging step in this direction. But we need a more permanent form of organisation that goes beyond the limited scope of one struggle, one strike or one issue – committees of action that can be mobilised to fight on a number of fronts at the same time.

Such committees can react quickly to events, overcome divisions between workers in different unions, and also bring into struggle the unemployed who have been thrown out of work. They should also include users of public services; as the government and bosses try to lay the blame for deteriorating services at the feet of public sector workers, public opinion must be won to the struggle of these workers for quality services.

Unity from below

Britain has developed organs of class struggle like this in the past. During the 1926 General Strike, councils of action were built by the trades councils in each town and city – all working class political, industrial, co-operative and unemployed organisations were represented, and, importantly, women were also heavily involved. They counteracted the “poisonous and pernicious propaganda” of the government and the employers' organisations and even took control of

food supplies, organised defence corps against scabs and the police and army, and directly controlled the strike locally.

Miners' strike

In 1984, during the Great Miners' Strike, a network of Miners' Support Committees criss-crossed the country, providing vital solidarity like food supplies, Christmas presents for the miners' children, speakers to factories to explain why the miners' needed support, campaigning against police harassment of strikers and mobilising support for the picket lines.

But, say the sceptics, Britain today is not at that level of class struggle – the working class does not have the “confidence” or the fighting spirit to create committees of action. This is a self-defeating argument. In every area where there is struggle, strikers can put out the call for committees of action and rally support from others. The committees will in turn help to boost confidence and raise fighting spirit.

Take the Vestas struggle, for example, where workers occupied a plant that made blades for wind power when bosses announced its closure. It was the solidarity movement – the climate camp and Campaign Against Climate Change – that encouraged the workers to occupy the plant. If solidarity committees could be built for Vestas, then why not for other struggles? By building committees of action in every town and city, more workers will feel able to take militant action and the general level of the class struggle will rise. But to do this, they must do more than simply raise donations, hold meetings and stand on picket lines, crucial though these acts are. They can start to become an alternative centre of power in society.

Alternative power

What do we mean by “an alternative centre of power”? Three things.

First, we know from bitter experience that the trade union leaders often sabotage our struggles, selling them short, calling off action, disuniting strikes. Committees of action can help thwart such treachery by building unity from below.

Second, committees of action can also lay the basis for a political alternative to Labour – a basis from which to build a new anti-capitalist party in Britain, one that will fight for the interests of the working class.

Committing to a new party is not a precondition to joining the local committees of action – many workers who still look to Labour or who are against all parties can be rallied to them. But, because these will be engaged in the local struggles, because they will be coming up against the government's cuts and attacks, many will begin to realise that only a working class political party can secure general, society-wide victories for our class through fighting for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the formation of a workers' government.

Finally, a government of the workers would be based not on an unelected civil service bureaucracy, unelected generals, unelected millionaires in the boardrooms, and 600-odd MPs who are elected every five years but are free to break their promises itself. It could be based on democratic organisations of working class delegates from below, workers' councils with all delegates recallable by the workers who voted for them. The formation of committees for action is a step in that direction – a step towards an alternative centre of power for the whole of society.

For more on committees of action, go to:
www.workerspower.com

KEY STRUGGLE (A): THE WORKING CLASS AND THE UNIONS

For a rank and file movement in our unions

Jeremy Dewar, Feb 2010

This is an ideal time for a rank and file conference. The great financial crash of 2007-08 has been followed by the longest and deepest recession since the Second World War. The bosses, and the Labour Government that serves them, are hell bent on make the working class pay the cost of bailing out their system. Workers in the years ahead face an alternative; resist or see our jobs, pensions, social services wiped out and real wages slashed.

And already there is resistance and a few victories. Just look at the 92 per cent vote of 13,000 British Airways cabin crew against the company's plans to impose as many as 4,900 job losses by 1 April. A 12-day strike over the Christmas holiday period might have cost BA between 20 and 30 million pounds a day. BA was on the ropes, so a reactionary judge took away the workers right to strike by ruling the ballot invalid. Nevertheless they are balloting again and could strike as early as 1 March.

Then there was the first strike in the IT sector. 454 Fujitsu workers took nine days of action by the end of last month and are planning another three this month. They are fighting plans for 1000 job losses, extension of a pay freeze and the closure of the final salary pension scheme. Sodhexo catering workers in North Devon NHS Trust, denied a pay rise for three years, have notched up a victory. Then there is the PCS national strike ballot on 4 February against the abolition of the civil service compensation scheme.

True, resistance has not yet developed into a class-wide counter-attack. This is due in no small



measure to the fact that most union leaders have applied the brakes whenever they could in order to prop up the embattled Labour government.

In the run-up to an election the leaders of the big unions, especially in the public sector, will do all they can to head off strikes embarrassing for Brown. But in private companies, as the economy picks up and profits start to recover, workers will feel more confidence to fight job losses and cuts in wages and pension. In the public service, whoever wins the election, workers will face the biggest onslaught on their jobs and conditions since the early 1980s.

Build from below

It is vital we learn the lessons from recent struggles. The biggest lesson is that we face defeat if we leave the leadership of struggles to the full time officials, who repeatedly

sell us out or sell us short. An example of a monumental sell-out was the action of Unite fulltime conveners and national officials who did nothing to defend the jobs of 850 agency workers at the Cowley BMW mini plant.

An example of the “sell-short” was CWU leader Billy Hayes in the post after militant rank and file action in London and elsewhere had management on the ropes. The November Interim Agreement, settled for by the executive, led to few improvements in some offices, but by calling off the action without a binding permanent agreement they doomed posties to another bitter battle when management returns to the attack, as they surely will.

Another example, the British Airways cabin crew dispute where branch militants won the vote for strike action but Unite leader Derek Simpson, whilst calling the judge's strike ban “a disgraceful day for

democracy” simultaneously leaked to the press his view that a decision to strike at Christmas was “over the top.” Now Simpson has pledged in advance that, whatever the result of the re-ballot, Unite will not call strikes over the Easter holiday period.

How can we stop this kind of sabotage? Firstly by warning that sell-outs by the officials are a real possibility at the beginning of every dispute. The syndicalists and the communists of the 1920s always said, “Watch Your Leaders”. Even better would be Control your Leaders. We can do this by organising strike committees, elected by mass meetings held regularly during a dispute.

We should demand that the officials report regularly to them and that rank and file representatives are present at all negotiation and they should not be bound by secrecy or confidentiality. Lastly we need

KEY STRUGGLE (A): THE WORKING CLASS AND THE UNIONS



to insist that no final agreement is reached without the opportunity for discussion of it and voting on it by mass meetings of the strikers.

Another historic slogan first raised by Clyde-side shop stewards in the First World War is a vital guide to action today. With the union officials where possible, without them where necessary. It means that not only that we need to retain or gain to control over our own disputes but to initiate them whenever the union leaders refuse to act. This not pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking, either.

A number of disputes last year started without official backing. Visteon, Vestas, Prisme... the list is quite a long one. The last two occupations started before the workers even joined a union! While the postal strike would not have gone national at all if it hadn't been for the London offices kick starting the action back in the summer of '09.

Action Committees

By uniting rank and file militants from each and every union into local organisations that can deliver action – strikes, solidarity, demos and rallies we can help every section that takes action.

Such organisations sprang up around the Visteon and Vestas occupations and, most notably, the national post strike. In the case of Vestas, workers commented that they could not have done what they did without the solidarity groups.

Rob Williams, a Unite convenor at Linamar car parts plant, was victimised for his role in persuading Bridgend Ford workers to agree to strike in support of the Visteon workers. But not only did the threatened solidarity action force Ford to cough up the workers' redundancy money, the spirit of solidarity spread and Rob won his own job back.

Workers Power campaign to transform these solidarity groups into committees of action by not dissolving them after each dispute, but keeping them going and broadening them, drawing in delegates from as many workplaces and unions as possible. Of course such committees can only survive in a period of more intense class struggle, but that's precisely what we anticipate. Indeed the 700 or so individuals and delegates coming to the Right To Work conference are testimony to the fact that thousands of activists know we are facing a co-ordinated attack and need a co-ordinated response.

The National Shop Stewards Network, for fear of offending RMT officials and due in no small part to the influence of the Socialist Party, has several times refused Workers Power's proposal to take up the slogan, 'with the union officials where possible, without them where necessary'.

Right To Work to its credit has done so, both at its founding conference last June and again at last month's steering committee. Now we have

to move from words to deeds. We need to support workers once they take unofficial action, but also prepare the way for such action now. The best way to do this is to form rank and file movements democratically uniting the most far-sighted and determined militants inside every union and across the trade union movement.

Tradition

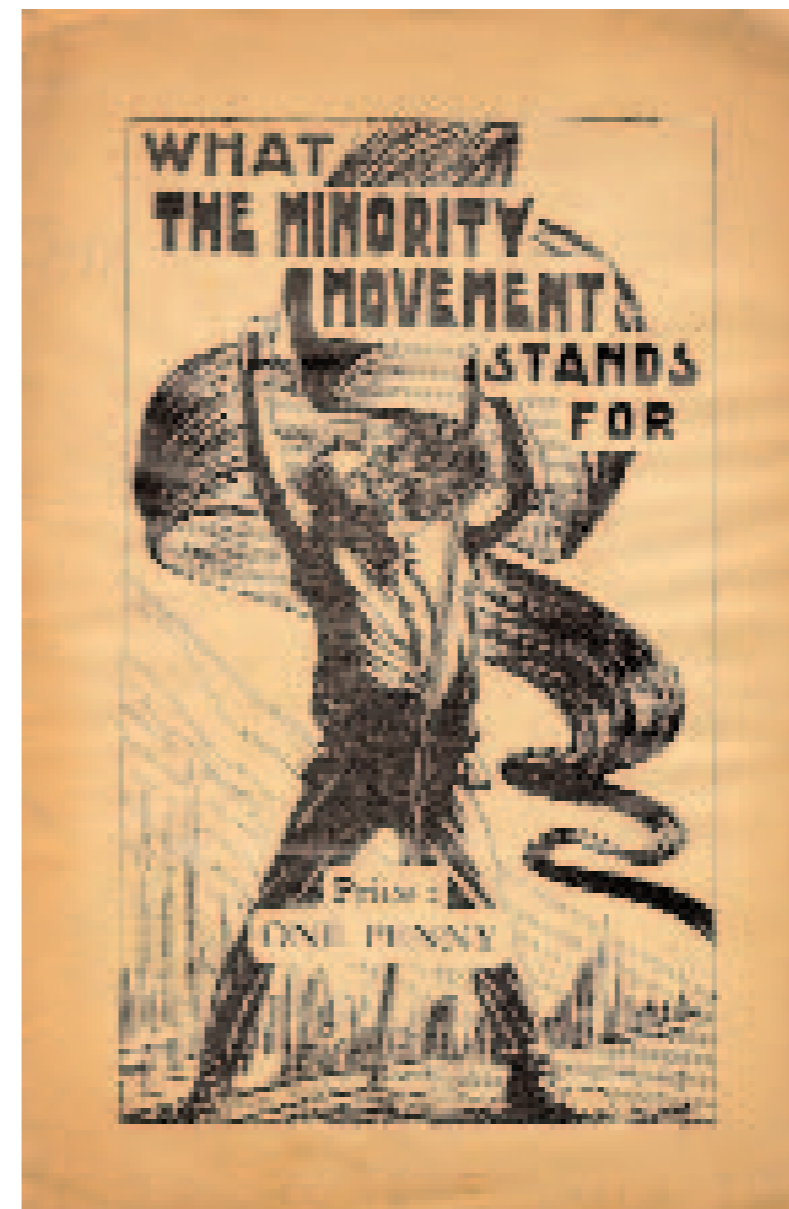
There is an excellent tradition in Britain of building rank and file movements. It goes back over 100 years to the years just before and during the First World War. Union and Labour leaders called for their members to "make sacrifices" and support the mass slaughter in the trenches during the war. A network of shop stewards, directly elected representatives of the rank and file, sprang up across the country to defend the members pay conditions and oppose conscription.

In 1921 the post-war crisis hit. Workers' wages fell – by up to 24 per cent per cent by 1924. Unemployment topped two million. The right wing union leaders again hampered the workers' fightback; union membership fell. It was in 1924, in this difficult climate, that the young communist party launched the National Minority Movement (NMM) in the unions.

The party's paper set out its aims:

"In every union the rank and file forces must be gathered

1. Around a fighting programme.



2. Around concrete demands for union consolidation and reorganisation.

3. Around the necessity for creating a new ideology amongst the union membership.

4. Around the necessity of training and developing a new leadership to replace the old."

The NMM set out to transform the local trades councils into fighting organisations of the whole labour movement, changing their constitutions to incorporate delegates from workplace committees, political organisations, co-operatives and college students, as well as union branches. It fought to have them affiliated to the TUC to make its pressure felt within the official structures.

This is a model for the committees of action we need today.

But the communists did not rest there, communist party member JR Campbell wrote:

"It should be clear to members of minority groups, however, that their task consists of something more than demanding slightly higher wages than the officials are prepared to demand... That 'something more' is the popularisation of the conception of trade unionism, not merely as a reformist force under capitalism, but as a revolutionary instrument for participating in the struggle for power, and after the struggle for power, playing a part in the management of industry."

This was not just for the contemplation of party members or lengthy articles either.

"Every candidate for even the most insignificant post," wrote Campbell, should stand on a revolutionary platform. While the communists supported the left officials against the right and strove to transform the "muddled and incomplete left wing viewpoint of the more progressive

leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint", they warned against reliance on them and never forgot their "main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses".

The NMM fought for concrete slogans, like unemployed benefits set at the minimum wage and a six hour day, as well as society-wide demands, like workers' control of industry and a workers' government, fully utilizing the method of transitional demands. But this did not limit its growth.

By 1925 its conference gathered delegates representing 750,000 members. It played a massive role in revitalizing a defeated, shrinking and demoralized union movement and paved the way for the 1926 General Strike.

Unfortunately, the NMM did not survive the political degeneration of the Communist International into Stalinism and it failed to warn workers of the inevitable betrayal of the TUC in the General Strike. That degeneration was not inevitable for many reasons, but in any case it doesn't erase the positive legacy. It is a model of what can be achieved today, given the political will. Rank and file organisation today has to be political, has to be militantly anticapitalist. It should play a leading role in the building of a new, anticapitalist, working class party in Britain and internationally too.

Right To Work

The Right To Work conference has the opportunity to take the first steps towards building a real rank and file organisation. We want a rank and file movement capable of acting independently of the officials whenever they obstruct the fightback and we want to say this openly and explicitly.

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) leaders have in the past argued that they cannot "substitute themselves for a non-existent movement". But this misses the point. We can in a measured and realistic way take steps to bring such a movement into view – but we have to state our aims clearly and popularise them among the already existing layer of militants looking for big answers to the capitalism's big crisis.

As Leon Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Programme, we must "strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions" and create "independent militant organisations" but do so without "flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions".

We will over the coming months and years have plenty of opportunities to advance the workers' movement in Britain.

Let's seize them.

KEY STRUGGLE (B): AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

Marxism: on war

By Jenny Scott, May 1999

War is a bloody and brutal business. Our rulers deliberately air-brush the images we get of the wars they are involved in. The Gulf war against Iraq in 1991, was presented by the media as a computer choreographed fireworks show in aid of “democracy”. Later, the pictures of hundreds of mangled and charred bodies on the road to Basra came to light. Iraqis had been wantonly slaughtered by the US, British and other forces.

We are now being treated to the same sort of propaganda barrage as our rulers blanket bomb the Balkans. They are having a harder time of it given Nato's “mistake” in bombing a refugee column and its targeting of journalists, television technicians and make-up artists at the Serbian television headquarters. But to soften the impact of the scenes of carnage, this time much emphasis is being placed on the “humanitarian” objectives of the Nato onslaught.

Unlike our rulers Marxists never try to prettify war in order to justify it. We tell the truth. Part of that truth is that war is an inevitable product of a class divided society and a world divided into competing nations. It is also a necessary part of the struggle to overthrow class society.

Pacifism

Unlike pacifists who reject all wars socialists oppose some wars, support others and will be prepared to wage war against the capitalist enemy. Our aim is to create a world free of national divisions and in which classes have been abolished: world socialism. Only such a world can get rid of war altogether and

to achieve what we will have to fight, arms in hand.

Clausewitz, a nineteenth century German soldier and philosopher, provided an important insight into wars when he wrote:

“We see, therefore, that war is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means.”

Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all took Clausewitz's insistence that war was not something separate from politics as their starting point for analysing wars. They went on to analyse the class character of each particular war. Writing during the carnage of the First World War, Lenin noted that the key questions were, “what caused that war, what classes are waging it, and what historico-economic conditions gave rise to it.”

By posing these questions Lenin drew the conclusion that there were both just and unjust wars. In the former category he included wars fought “by nations oppressed by imperialism -Ireland's war for independence for example. In the latter category he pointed to the war then being waged between the major imperialist powers. He recognised that beneath the superficial question of ‘who fired the first shot?’, lay the important fact that those powers were fighting each other in order to divide the world between themselves. He wrote:

“This is a war firstly, to fortify the enslavement of the colonies by means of a ‘fairer’ distribution and subsequent more ‘concerted’ exploitation of them; secondly, to fortify the oppression of other nations within the ‘great’ power's, for both Austria and Russia (Russia

more and much worse than Austria) maintain their rule by such oppression, intensifying it by means of war; and thirdly, to fortify and prolong wage slavery, for the working class is split up and suppressed, while the capitalists gain, making fortunes out of the war, aggravating national prejudices and intensifying reaction, which has raised its head in all countries, even in the freest and most republican.”

Imperialism

The imperialist system described by Lenin – and the wars waged by the “great powers” in that system retain the same reactionary characteristics he noted. The principal difference is that since the second world wars most of the oppressed countries have been transformed from colonies into semi-colonies. That is, colonies that have been given, or have won, formal independence but remain subordinated to the economic power and political pressure of imperialism.

Imperialism goes to war against such countries in the name of “democracy” – against the “military dictator” Galtieri of Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982, against the “tyrant” Saddam Hussein in 1991 (and again in 2003) and against the “new Hitler” Milosevic during the Balkans war.

Socialists recognise that this “democratic” pretext is a lie. In each case imperialism has used and backed the dictators in question when it suited them. Only when they went against imperialism's will and threatened to upset its world order and the profits of its multinationals or the stability of the regions it seeks to control – does imperialism turn against these countries.

Socialists have a clean conscience. We have fought these dictators while they were imperialism's friends and we will continue to fight them despite them becoming its enemies. But, in each case the concrete question in the wars by imperialism is not the fate of the dictators themselves – Thatcher had no wish to overthrow Galtieri, Saddam Hussein was kept in power courtesy of George Bush and Milosevic may yet be used as the guarantor of stability in the Balkans – but the subordination of the oppressed nation to the will of imperialism. If imperialism succeeds, it represents a defeat for workers internationally.

The Gulf war was fought by the imperialist-led coalition to keep Iraq in this subordinate state and to end any threat to their exploitation of the area.

The imperialists' claim that they were fighting for democracy against a cruel dictator was a lie. Kuwait – the country invaded by Iraq and “liberated” by imperialism – was a vile dictatorship in which workers and peasants were denied any democratic rights whatsoever. Its royal family, restored by the “liberation”, set about reinforcing its dictatorship under the protection of the USA and Britain.

The importance of this example is that it demonstrates why Marxists were not simply against the war in the Gulf. We were against imperialism's war on Iraq, a war waged for oil and political control of the Gulf region. We supported Iraq's war against imperialism. This was a just war – even though it was being waged under a leadership which we want to see destroyed by the workers and peasants of Iraq.

In the Balkans today we apply the

same principles, but with one important difference. In Kosova, Milosevic himself is engaged in a reactionary war of ethnic cleansing. We therefore make a distinction between the war in Kosova and the war in Serbia itself. Different class issues are at stake in each war. We are against the policy being continued in Kosova – reactionary, nationalist ethnic cleansing, and therefore do not support Serbia. We are against the policy being continued by Nato – subordination of the Balkans and therefore do not support Nato. In Serbia itself, however, the justified defence of an ex-Stalinist country in transition to becoming a capitalist semi-colony against imperialism means we do support Serbia's struggle against Nato.

Some “Marxists” throw up their hands at this and plead for easy, catch-all solutions. But war provides no easy answers. Wars can rapidly change their character. Only by a class analysis, an understanding of the politics of each war, can we understand why some wars are just and some are unjust and only thus can we determine whose side we are on, if any.

This method has proved vital for revolutionaries in many wars, but none more so than the two world wars of this century. Both, despite the so called “anti-fascist” character of the Allied war effort in the Second World War, were unjust wars as far as Britain, the USA, France, Germany, Japan and the other imperialist states were concerned.

World Wars

Neither world war was fought to preserve democracy. Both were fought in order to re-divide the world for exploitation between

the imperialist powers. They were unjust, imperialist wars.

As Lenin put it with regard to the First World War:

“Picture to yourselves a slave owner who owned 100 slaves warring against a slave owner who owned 200 slaves for a more ‘just’ distribution of slaves. Clearly, the application of the term ‘defensive’ war, or ‘war for the defence of the fatherland’, in such a case would be historically false, and in practice would be sheer deception of the common people ... Precisely in this way are the present day imperialist bourgeoisie deceiving the peoples by means of ‘national’ ideology and the term ‘defence of the fatherland’ in the present war between slave owners for fortifying and strengthening slavery.”

Revolutionary defeatism

Lenin formulated a policy for Marxists that went beyond simply analysing the class character of wars and supporting or opposing them. He developed the policy of revolutionary defeatism – waging the class struggle in your own country against your own bourgeoisie even at the cost of it being defeated in war – as a means of creating the conditions under which imperialist war could be transformed into a civil war, a war by workers on their own ruling class. He argued:

“A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, cannot fail to see that its military reverses facilitate its overthrow. Socialists must explain to the masses that they have no other road of salvation except the revolutionary overthrow of ‘their’ governments, and that advantage must be taken of these governments' embarrassments In



the present war precisely for this purpose.”

The successful application of this policy led directly to the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the world's first workers' state. But even the establishment of such a state, in a single country, will not eradicate war and its attendant horrors.

Socialism

Until the socialist revolution is victorious on a global scale – freeing the world from the economic and national competition that causes war – the capitalists will resist each and every worker's revolution since they stand to lose their fortunes, their privileges and their political rule. Always and everywhere they will fight arms in hand to defeat workers' revolution. Civil war to

defeat them will be necessary. It is a stage towards the creation of a world free from war, and such an objective justifies the use of warlike means to achieve it.

That is another reason why Marxists are not pacifists and are not in favour of general and abstract calls for “disarmament”. We know we cannot defeat a powerful enemy other than by revolution and civil war.

To win such a war we need arms. We are for the disarmament of the bosses' by the armed working class. As Engels put it: “If the working class was to overcome the bourgeoisie it would first have to master the art and strategy of war.” To Say otherwise is a deception, one that will result in wars without end.

KEY STRUGGLE (B): AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

Anti-imperialism and workers revolution

By Luke Cooper, June 2007

The 21st century has been marked by a series of aggressive imperialist wars waged by the United States to achieve “another American century”, that is, to maintain its global predominance. The resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq has delivered heavy blows to the “war on terror” on its first battlegrounds. In doing so, the insurgents are not only fighting for the liberation of their countries but, whatever their conscious goals, form part of a global struggle against imperialism.

But what is imperialism? It is not simply the domination of one state over another; it is the current stage of the capitalist world system. Huge industrial and retailing companies, banks and investment firms - Siemens, Citigroup, HSBC, Halliburton, BP, Toyota, Wal-Mart, etc. - dominate global markets. Their interests are policed by the military, diplomatic and political might of the great powers.

This creates a systematic division of the world between imperialist states and their corporations, who together dominate and exploit colonial and semi-colonial countries, whose independence is more apparent than real. It is precisely because Marxists recognise this that they support without pre-condition all those struggling against imperialist domination.

Accommodation

Many on the left in the imperialist countries baulk at such a position. For example, the Alliance for Workers Liberty in Britain refuses to even call for the troops to be pulled out of Iraq. They argue that the trade unions in Iraq would be destroyed by clerical Islamist forces in the resistance were

this to happen.

Not only does this make the imperialist troops the guardians of the labour movement - when in fact they are the main threat to it - but it assumes working class and socialist forces cannot come to the head and win the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. Ultimately, such politics are a concession to the illusions in capitalism maintained amongst the better-paid and skilled workers in the imperialist countries by the trade union and reformist leaders. They have nothing in common with the positions of Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin or Leon Trotsky.

But it would be an equal and opposite error to believe that each and every force presently obliged to fight US imperialism represents an adequate leadership for that struggle. Indeed such “anti-imperialism” has very real limits and dangers. For example, the Campo Anti-Imperialista held a conference this year where members of the Iraqi resistance - represented by the largely Sunni Iraqi Patriot Alliance - spoke in Europe for the first time. The CAI comrades argued that a global anti-imperialist front was needed, in which the leading force should be the Iraqi resistance, whatever politics it advanced.

The hopelessness of such a project became very clear when IPA delegates revealed their Iraqi patriotism was linked to anti-Iranian chauvinism, angrily rejecting calls for the defence of Iran if it was attacked by the United States. It was precisely their narrow bourgeois nationalism that stopped them taking a principled, internationalist stance. This showed the utopianism, not to mention grave practical dangers, of attempting to form an international front around the leadership of bourgeois nationalists.

Just as it is possible to accommo-

date to reactionary consciousness in the imperialist states, so too is it possible to make equally wrong accommodations to third world nationalism, by calling it “anti-imperialism”. Such nationalists might be fighting this particular imperialist power here and now (and, as such, certainly deserve our unconditional support) but tomorrow they may support the same or another imperialist power, because it is offering them assistance against a rival semi-colonial state.

Proletarian internationalism

In contrast, Marxists advance an independent, working class policy and leadership in the struggle against imperialism in semi-colonial and imperialist countries alike. Imperialism, like the previous stages of capitalist development, is based upon the exploitation of the toiling masses by a small, parasitic class that profits from workers' labour by owning the factories, the land and the banks. The working class is able not only to paralyse the economy by mass strike action but also to take over and run it to build a new society. That is why workers have a decisive and leading role in the struggle against imperialism.

In 1935, Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, argued that the Communist International, under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, had abandoned the fight for working class power and instead formed blocs to support the rule of “progressive” bourgeois forces:

“It is no accident that in the policy of the Comintern, as well as that of the reformists, purely negative formulations predominate, like anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, anti-war struggle, without any class delimitations and without a revolutionary programme of action. Such

formulations are absolutely necessary for the policies of masquerade blocs (the Anti-Imperialist League, the Amsterdam-Pleyel Committee Against War and Fascism and so on). All these blocs and congresses and committees have as their task to screen the passivity, the cowardice and the incapacity to solve those tasks that compose the very essence of the class struggle of the proletariat.” (Centrist Alchemy or Marxism?)

For Trotsky - and the League for the Fifth International - the united front, whether that of workers against their own ruling class or an anti-imperialist united front against foreign invaders, like the USA and Britain today, has to be clearly distinguished from the Stalinist policy of the popular front.

As Trotsky and the early Communist International argued, it is both legitimate and necessary for communists to strike tactical alliances for action with other political forces, even with bourgeois nationalists, in the colonies and semi-colonies. This is quite different from communists accepting an entire stage of subordination to the leadership of bourgeois forces let alone fighting for their rule. For Leninists and Trotskyists, the struggle against imperialist domination must be absolutely continuous with the struggle against workers' exploitation and capital. Because the capitalist class in the semi-colonies can never finally liberate its people from imperialism, that which starts as struggle against imperialism must, to achieve this goal, end in the expropriation of the “national bourgeoisie”.

In this way communists avoid falling into the pitfall of anti-war, anti-fascist and anti-imperialist policies, which ignore both class realities and the only force that can free a country from imperialism for good: the working class.

Resistance and the working class

One of the most contentious issues in the antiwar movement is the resistance of the Iraqi and Afghan people to the US and British occupations. What attitude should those of us, who oppose Bush and Brown's war, take to the people in Basra, Baghdad and Helmand, who are taking up arms against the occupying troops?

Some - especially supporters of CND - will tell us straight away that no support can be given to any form of violence. Communists reject this pacifist argument on moral as well as logical grounds. If this were true, then every national liberation struggle, every slave rebellion, every popular revolution in history should never have happened.

This helpless pacifist attitude only ever disarms the oppressed and never the oppressor. Communists judge our attitude to armed conflicts from an entirely different standpoint. We ask which side in a conflict - if any - is pursuing aims that take forward the struggle for genuine national liberation, for democratic rights and socialism.

How, then, should we view the specific conflict today in Iraq? We have to begin by assessing the big picture. The over-riding aim of the forces resisting the British and the Americans is to drive the occupying armies out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Is this a goal that the working class shares?

It is. The invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan were gross violations of the democratic rights of their peoples, of their self-determination. The fact that their regimes were dictatorial did not give another power the right to “liberate them” or “bring them democ-

rary.” In fact the imperialist occupiers have done neither, but have helped themselves to Iraq's invaluable oil reserves, and forcibly privatised the Iraqi economy, opening it up to exploitation by huge US multinationals.

Communists therefore not only support the right of the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to resist this rape and pillage of their countries, but also aim to help them. This does not mean engaging in stupid terrorist actions in Britain that only help the government whip up hatred for “the enemy” and bring in ever more repressive laws.

It does mean campaigning to mobilise a mass movement of working class people and youth to obstruct the government's war drive, to take direct action to cut off its arms supplies, to call on soldiers to refuse to fight for Bush, Brown and the oil barons.

At this point in the discussion, the reformists in the working class movement, like the Labour MPs and the trade union leaders, will start raising the spectre of radical Islamism. Turncoat ex-leftist journalists like Nick Cohen of The Observer, Christopher Hitchens and David Aaronovitch, in the violent language that they reserve exclusively for the left, will accuse communists of capitulating to right wing or even fascist Islamists, of disregarding the rights of women, of pandering to anti-Semitism, or even, as Aaronovitch wrote of this paper, of being “Taliban Trots”.

Quite apart from the fact that communists fully expect to be denounced by such people, their argument wilfully misrepresents both the whole history of com-

munist policy towards Islamist resistance movements and the tactics that communists propose today for the advance of the struggle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Iraq today the working class movement - the new trade unions and the communist parties - should be organising an independent force of workers and youth to participate in the resistance. That they have failed to do so leaves the initiative entirely in the hands of the Islamist forces.

Iraq and Afghanistan are awash with weapons; the working class organisations could create a militia, if they only had the will. Iraq's secular traditions, and its long history of communist organisation, would mean that the workers could provide a pole of attraction for those, who want to fight the occupation but are committed to democracy and socialism rather than to Islamist policies.

What approach would a working class force take to the other resistance organisations? It would maintain its independence, and it would also appeal for united action against the occupiers, to maximise opportunities for victory. It could frame its appeal for united action in such a way as to mobilise the greatest possible support from the working class and the youth, who currently look to the Islamists because they are the only forces struggling against the invaders.

They would appeal to the other resistance organisations to mobilise the women as well as the men, challenging the sexism and discrimination that Islamists can never challenge and wish to institutionalise

still further. They would fight for trade union action against the imperialist multinationals and the puppet government.

They would fight to bring the working class to the head of the struggle to liberate Iraq, and to win greater support than the Islamist organisations, so that once the occupiers are expelled, the working class itself can establish a government of its own, a socialist government based on direct working class democracy. One thing is indisputable; whoever leads the movement against the Americans and the British today will rule Iraq tomorrow when the occupation is defeated.

This policy was first codified by the revolutionary Communist International in the early 1920s. It is called the anti-imperialist united front, and its necessity today is very clear in the case of Iraq. That is why, all around the world, communists of every country should support the resistance to the American and British occupation, and should work to encourage Iraqi and Afghan workers, poor peasants, revolutionary youth and socialists to form an independent component of the resistance, struggling to come to the head of the movement, to develop the rebellion against national oppression into a revolution against imperialism and the rule of the capitalists.

For the policy of the anti-imperialist united front to become once again a guiding principle of the working class around the world, we need one thing: a new Communist International, a Fifth International.

KEY STRUGGLE (C): OPPOSING RACISM, FIGHTING FASCISM

Stopping the BNP

By John Bowman, June 2009

The BNP's electoral breakthrough at the European elections, gaining them two seats, represents a real and growing danger in these times of economic crisis.

Their two MEPs will give the party a new wave of funding for their political activities, with large salaries and expense allowances. More than this, it gives them further publicity and profile in preparation for the UK general elections, which must be called within a year.

The BNP use elections for publicity, but for the eventual aim of building a violent racist movement on the streets, to break up unions and other working class organisations, deport black and Asian people and prepare Britain for wars of conquest.

Party leader Nick Griffin explained in 1995 that the BNP are an organisation that backs up its slogan 'rights for whites' with 'well aimed boots and fists'. It is this strategy that makes the BNP different from other parties that stand in elections. The BNP is a fascist party – and in these elections they have scored 940,000 votes. That makes them a threat that needs to be dealt with by the working class – black and white.

So why did a fascist party that bans non-whites from membership, that calls for repatriation of non-white people out of the country and that has clear and well-publicised neo-Nazi links gain so many votes?

The answer is simple – mass disillusionment with Labour and the ruling elite in business and government who are letting living standards plummet for millions in the economic crisis while the rich get richer. And the right wing media like the Express and Star

have blamed migrants for unemployment – which is actually caused not by migrants but by bosses – and the trade union and Labour leaders have failed to answer these lies.

So the BNP has had some success making foreigners and black people scapegoats for the anger so many feel. They blame them for everything from the lack of social housing to high unemployment – but they link this to strong anti-establishment rhetoric against the 'elite'. This is not socialism – it is just fakery. But it can work, and some people mistakenly see a vote for the BNP as a point scored against the parties that have caused them so much suffering in the past – Labour and the Tories. The BNP deliberately play on this.

Andrew Brons, one of the BNP's newly elected MEPs, said in his acceptance speech, that he knew his election wasn't 'universally popular' and attacked the 'onslaught' on the BNP by the media and mainstream political parties. Griffin heralded his election as a triumph against the 'ruling elite'. The BNP's racism is only surpassed by their opportunism – their anti-establishment rhetoric was matched by a real toning down of the full reality of their racist policies in their victory speeches.

That hundreds of thousands of people are driven to putting a cross by candidates such as Griffin and Brons in elections is a sign of serious discontent and anger at the establishment. In 1930, Leon Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, wrote that 'if communism is the party of revolutionary hope, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the party of counter-revolutionary despair'. These words ring as true today as they did then with the recession of 2008-09 continuing to deepen with job cuts, pay cuts,

SMASH FASCISM



unemployment and a deteriorating standard of life for millions of people.

The BNP have raised Gordon Brown's slogan 'British jobs for British workers', fighting for 'British workers first' as their goal. The BNP have put this issue to the forefront of the campaigning – with the slogan even listed next to their name on the ballot paper. To stop the BNP we need to show how dividing workers on national lines weakens our resistance to the bosses and doesn't save jobs. The way to protect jobs is a united fight by all workers – and to level up foreign workers' pay to equal other workers, preventing undercutting.

Another important factor is to mobilise the victims of BNP racism into a united fight back, Muslims, Asian and black people. Our rallying slogan must be "black and white unite and fight."

If we are to really undermine the BNP's support and rally former Labour voters to a progressive solution, we need our own party of revolutionary hope here in Britain. We need an anti-establishment party of the Left – a genuine anti-capitalist, internationalist party which doesn't just challenge Labour and the Tories but challenges the whole system of greed and misery which is pushing people into the arms of reaction.

Such a party would be able to put forward radical policies that would

really improve peoples' lives. It would argue to tackle unemployment through massive investment in transport, schools and hospitals to be paid for by heavily taxing the rich. A new party would be able not only to criticise and expose the BNP's racist, anti-working class policies but would be able to put forward real socialist alternatives and drive a wedge between the BNP and their supporters. It would be an activist party that gives a lead to the resistance and hope in the here and now.

At some stage the BNP will move on from its current phase of seeking mass support through respectable electioneering and will start to assert itself on the streets, like the national front tried to do in the 1970s. When this happens, the answer will be Trotsky's policy: a united front of the working class organisations to confront them everywhere, and mass popular defence organisations to drive them off the streets. But right now, the fascists in Britain are at the stage of emerging from a fringe sect into a well-known national political party. They have created a strong pole on the far right wing of the political spectrum – to answer them we need a strong pole on the left. Again in Trotsky's words, in the fight against fascism three things are necessary: "a party, a party and a party."

Antifascist defence League

By Luke Cooper, Sept 2009

A new group calling itself the English Defence League (EDL) is organising a series of marches trying to intimidate Muslim and Asian communities, under the guise of protests against "Islamic extremism".

Twice now, in recent weeks, Asian youth along with white antifascist campaigners have driven them off the streets in angry protests in Birmingham.

The EDL marches mark the far right's return to the streets, on the back of the British National Party's increasing electoral success.

The BNP, presenting themselves as a "respectable party", remains fascist to the core. Their election campaigns are just a cover for winning power through a campaign of street terror, culminating in a fascist dictatorship. Undercover investigations by journalists and infiltrators inside the BNP have consistently exposed this as the basic ambition of the BNP leadership.

The EDL, if it is allowed to grow, could become the streetfighting arm of Britain's resurgent fascist movement. That is why it must be stopped – by any means necessary.

Communists see fascist organisations as instruments of civil war against the working class. Their aim is to smash the workers' movement, both trade union and political, and to divide the working class through murderous campaigns against racial, religious and sexual minorities. In this sense the fascists are not a "normal" capitalist party, and so the methods necessary to defeat them cannot be those we use against the mainstream capitalist parties. Fascism is a weapon of last resort for the capitalists against the working class movement: when capitalism faces a major social crisis, the ruling class can turn to the fascist organisations.



No platform

It is because we recognise the radically different character of fascist parties that we believe they have to be stopped from organising their forces. This is the policy of "no platform". Wherever fascists seek to grow and develop their influence and support, communists seek to organise united action of workers, youth and anti-racists to stop them. Experience shows that when, as with the National Front in the late 1970s, they are prevented from carrying out their inevitably violent street marches, their parties go into crisis, splinter and collapse.

For these reasons we do not accept the liberal argument that the fascists should be free to organise and make propaganda like any other party, because this would be to allow them to conduct a campaign of terror against Black and Asian communities, trade unions and socialist organisations.

The fascist EDL marches pose the question of self-defence quite sharply and immediately. Allowing the EDL to march – even in the small numbers they have been able to rally so far – would encourage their growth and the racist attacks that always follow their appearance. The EDL was formed following white nationalist riots in Luton – where racist thugs went on a rampage.

But it is doesn't have to be like this. The heroic and courageous actions of Black and Asian youth in Birmingham show the way.

Not only did the youth have to face racist abuse and attacks from EDL thugs, but they have also faced

a campaign of repression by the police, including a high profile campaign in the local media with photos of the antifascist youth who broke up the EDL demonstrations.

The police have collaborated closely with the EDL and sought throughout to protect their protests and their right to march. The police can never be relied upon to defend workers' interests or fight the fascists. That is why we oppose calls on the state or the police to ban their marches. State bans will simply rebound on the antifascist forces.

That's why we need independent workers' antifascist organisation.

Antifascist movement

The most high profile antifascist campaign in Britain is Unite Against Fascism (UAF) – an alliance of MPs including Labour, Liberals and Tories, several trade unions, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone and the Socialist Workers Party.

Though UAF sees the need to protest against the BNP, it suffers from having to limit its arguments and tactics to what the capitalist politicians and figures on the right wing of the labour movement will accept.

The return of the fascists to the streets has created tensions in the alliance. In Birmingham the local UAF group, Birmingham United, refused to organise a protest against the second EDL march, fearing violence would break out between antifascist youth and the EDL.

In the run up to the march UAF had lobbied the council and police to ban the EDL march and planned to hold a rally with Asian community leaders, trade unions and councillors in the council chamber at the same time. But then the police allowed the EDL to march while the council banned the anti-racist rally from taking place.

It was a worked example of how the state will back far right groups against challenges from the work-

ers' movement. Shamefully UAF then refused to organise a protest citing the danger of violence, leaving it to local antifascists, including to their credit the Socialist Workers Party, to organise a protest without them.

The split in UAF exposed the contradiction built into the coalition from the outset. In order to keep more right wing, pacifistic forces on board UAF has to present only a liberal opposition to the BNP, and not back physical "no platform".

But the Socialist Workers Party, which is a key component of UAF, does support physical "no platform". If the EDL continue to march while UAF refuse to organise counter-protests for fear of violence, then the contradictions within UAF between these wings can only widen further.

Antifascist defence league

The actions of Black and Asian youth in Birmingham are an example to the whole antifascist movement. But we shouldn't simply rely on spontaneous acts of courage. We need to take steps towards organised defence squads – a national Antifascist Defence League that can rout the EDL wherever they appear. This is particularly important if we are to draw all other sections of the working class, white as well as black and Asian youth, into the struggle, and not just leave it to minority communities to defend themselves.

The Socialist Workers Party, while supporting physical "no platform" where it happens, has not been willing to develop the struggle in Birmingham to a higher level of organisation, an antifascist defence league, as it would force a rupture in UAF.

This is a mistake. We need to learn from the experience in Birmingham and generalise the policy of physically confronting the EDL elsewhere, if we are to make sure no community has to endure their campaign of racist and fascist terror.

KEY STRUGGLE (C): OPPOSING RACISM, FIGHTING FASCISM

The struggle against fascism

As social crisis mounts and social democracy in power proves wanting, the far right is on the rise across Europe. The growth of fascist front parties in Italy, Belgium and France testifies to this. Under conditions of deep crisis, the bourgeoisie can use a fascist movement to maintain their rule against the working class. Fascism, a reactionary mass movement mainly recruited from the ranks of a petit-bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat made desperate by the crisis of capitalism, has as its goal the destruction of the independent workers' movement and the establishment of the rule of finance capital unfettered by any elements of bourgeois democracy whatsoever.

It is a last resort for the bourgeoisie since it involves the suppression of its own parliamentary representatives. As Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy showed, it is a measure that will be taken if the situation demands it. In the semi-colonial countries, fascism can develop as a movement arising out of communalist conflicts or out of reactionary clerical movements. The phraseology of such movements can sometimes be anti-imperialist. But this should not blind us to their anti-communist, anti-working class nature.

This rhetoric is in the same mould as the demagogic "anti-capitalism" of the Nazis. With the triumph of communalism or clerical fascism in the semi-colonies, the

rule of imperialism will remain intact or even be strengthened.

From the moment that fascism emerges, the working class must wage a merciless struggle to smash it. Even when it conceals its more general aims and concentrates on spreading the poisonous fumes of race hatred, the workers' united front must be organised to fight it. We call on all working class organisations to build a mass workers' united front against the fascists.

The workers' movement should not recognise or respect the democratic rights of fascist movements because they are instruments of civil war against the working class movement and the oppressed. But we do not call for them to be banned by the capitalist state. The

bourgeoisie cannot be entrusted with this task since they are the ultimate backers of the fascists. In fact, the state will use bans to disarm and hamper resistance to fascism. Instead, the revolutionaries fight to mobilise the working class around the slogans: no platform for fascists, drive the fascists out of the workers' organisations!

We must physically confront every fascist mobilisation and organise workers' defence units to combat fascist attacks on the racially oppressed and the workers' movement.

The struggle to defend the democratic rights of the workers from military dictatorship and fascism will only be finally won through the overthrow of the system that spawns them: capitalism.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Marxists Internet Archive – a wealth of classic Marxist texts in many languages, readable online
MARXISTS.ORG

League for the Fifth International Website – International news, theory, and key documents
FIFTHINTERNATIONAL.ORG

Workers Power Website – Britain news and analysis
WORKERSPOWER.COM

Revolution Website – Youth news, culture and politics
WORLDREVOLUTION.ORG.UK