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**Middle
East
-workers
hold
the key.**

Iran.



The battle for the 35 hour week.

Trotsky on the press. Spain.

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the material for this issue of the **Militant International Review** was written and in the hands of our printers in December.

However due to technical difficulties its production has been delayed for over a month. And within this month events have moved at great speed—if not breakneck speed—in those areas of the world analysed in this issue.

In Britain we have seen the magnificent movement of the lorry drivers which has been followed by the action of the one-and-a-half million local government manual workers. Involving some of the most exploited sections of the British working class, the mighty demonstration of over 80,000 workers on January 22nd expressed the revolt of these workers at the shameful wages and conditions of millions of British workers.

In the lorry drivers' strike the bourgeoisie, with Mrs Thatcher and the Tories in the lead, foamed at the mouth and denounced so-called 'secondary picketing'. What has terrified the ruling class is the enormous potential power of the working class displayed through this strike. The power of the strike committees has come in for special abuse.

The capitalists, so accustomed to commanding and handing out orders, have had to go cap in hand to the committees for dispensation for the transport of their goods. Those who produced the wealth—the working class—decided what moved and what didn't move through the checking and control exercised by the committees. The lorry drivers gave a glimpse of how society would be organised on the basis of a planned economy. The democratic rights of the working class, together with trade unions, shop stewards committees etc, are the elements of a new society. It would be through committees involving the trade unions, shop stewards, housewives and small businessmen that a socialist plan of production would be drawn up and implemented.

Because of the lorry drivers' strike and the council workers' action the bourgeois press—from the gutter press to the 'quality' papers like the 'Financial Times'—have screamed for action to be taken to limit the rights of the trade unions.

This bears out the analysis which our editorial on Britain makes; a collision between the classes is rooted in the present situation in Britain. The coming to power of a Thatcher-led Tory government would put in the shade even the upheavals of 1970 to 1974. In Iran also the tempo of events has enormously quickened since our article was first written. The Shah has gone into exile—almost certainly a permanent one—under the guise of a 'holiday'.

Notwithstanding this development—which we anticipated in our analysis—the article on Iran outlines the main features of the present situation and the likely course of events over the next period. We hope to carry in the next issue a more lengthy analysis on the crucial developments in Iran which are of vital concern to the whole of the labour movement.

In spite of these factors we trust that the material in this issue of **MIR** will benefit the reader.

EDITOR

EDITORIAL: Decisive turn in Britain

The victory of the Ford workers' strike represents a turning point for Britain. After a two-months strike, the Ford's management were compelled to grant increases of an average of 17%. This broke the 5% limit on wages imposed by the Government, three times over.

Moreover, it has brought to the surface the festering discontent of the working class at the hardships and the cuts in living standards which they have been compelled to bear over this period.

The strike came as a complete surprise to the capitalists, the Labour leadership and the trade union leaders. Even those closest to the workers, the shop stewards and convenors, were taken unawares by the turn of events. As soon as the derisory 5% offer of the employers was communicated to the plants, spontaneous walk-outs took place throughout the Ford factories nationally. What an answer to the sceptics and fainthearts within the labour movement, particularly those who claim to stand on the left, who only a matter of a few months ago, were arguing that the election of Terry Duffy to the presidency of the AUEW marked a new era of right wing domination of the trade union and labour movement!

Yet, as the Marxists had predicted, the actions of the workers themselves compelled the right wing trade union leaders to give support to the strike. Thus the AUEW executive committee was the first union to give official support to the strike.

The strike also completely transformed the Labour Party Conference. The right wing were expecting an easy ride at the conference, and were hoping to



Public service workers' demonstration, 22.1.79

replace some Tribune Lefts from the National Executive Committee by their own nominees. Instead, the conference passed an historic resolution rejecting the 5% limit and all restraints on wages. Moreover the NEC elections witnessed a shift to the left with the election of two Lefts onto the NEC, Dennis Skinner and Neil Kinnock.

However this shift towards the Left would not have been possible, even with the Ford's strike, without the decisive intervention of the Marxists in the conference itself. It was the *Militant* supporters who provided a viable left opposition to the policies and programme of the right wing. It was a *Militant* supporter, young Terry Duffy, who moved the resolution rejecting the 5% limit. The importance of this decision has been emphasised by the Ford workers themselves. They have

pointed out that as soon as the decision of the Labour Party conference was communicated to the management, they immediately decided to restart negotiations, recognising that the 5% limit was no longer "operative".

The Ford strike is an indication of an enormous mood of discontent which has been gathering within the ranks of the working class since 1975. The authors of the Social Contract promised that if wages were restrained prices would go down, unemployment would recede and a revival of British industry would take place. Yet despite the enormous cuts in living standards — the biggest, relatively speaking for a hundred years according to the *Economist* — the collapse of British industry has continued apace. Investment which is the motor of capitalism, is expected to

increase by 10 to 12% in 1978, in comparison to 1977. However, this will not reach the figure of 1970, which in turn is not much higher in real terms than in 1950-51.

Moreover, there is no possibility of British capitalism restoring its past position, or even retooling its industry in order to be able to compete with its capitalist rivals on the world market. Thus the Westminster Bank Review has estimated that it would need an investment in manufacturing industry of at least £100,000 million in order to put British capitalism on the same level as West Germany and Japan. Such investment is completely beyond the capacity of British capitalism. The same journal points out:

"In the United Kingdom in 1976 there were about 7.1 million people working in manufacturing industry inclusive of the British Steel Corporation ... the percentage is less than in any other European country and much less than in Japan ... The total assets supporting the jobs of the 7.1 million employees in the United Kingdom ... amounted to about £53,000 million or £7,500 for each employee. In Japan the total assets supporting each employee in manufacturing industry in 1976 amounted to just over £30,000 at the then existing exchange rates, whilst for German industry the figure was about £23,000 per employee." (May 1978)

COLLAPSE

In other words, the horse power at the elbow of the British worker is about ¼ of the Japanese, and ½ of the German. This is a measure of the catastrophic collapse of British industry under the bankrupt stewardship of the British ruling class. They have fallen behind their rivals in almost every field. This decline is indicated by the following figures:

"Since 1964 Britain's share of the world car market has fallen from 11 per cent to 5 per cent; of the shipbuilding market from 8 per cent to 4 per cent; of steel from 6.2 per cent to 3 per cent; of chemicals from 13.1 per cent to 9.7 per cent; of non-electrical machinery from

16.2 per cent to 10.2 per cent; of electrical machinery from 13.6 per cent to 7.6 per cent; and of transport equipment from 16.3 per cent to 6.1 per cent." (Guardian 27th September 1978)

Even its former semi-satellite, Italian capitalism, has outstripped and is beating British capitalism in its own backyard. Italy now produces more steel than Britain. So does formerly backward China. In 1978 China is expected to produce more than 30 million tons of steel — 6 million tons more than in 1977 — compared to 20 million tons in Britain!



James Callaghan

All the sacrifices of the British working class have been in vain. The holding down of wages and cuts in social services, which meant an enormous bonus to the capitalists, has not resulted in increased investment in industry, or a revival of British industry.

The working class has become conscious of this situation. They are no longer prepared to hold back, as the Ford's strike demonstrates. The Government has insisted on clinging to the fiction of the 5% policy. But the bourgeoisie itself is completely conscious of the fact that the policy is in ruins. The sanctions policy has been dropped after the defeat in Parliament. But in any case the sanctions which have been employed against the Ford monopoly were a mere flea bite. It was about as effective against the employers as a slap on the wrist with a feather! The *Observer*

pointed out that the "sanctions" against Fords resulted in a fourfold increase in tax-free subsidies from the Government for the building of the new Bridgend factory (from the original £36 million promised which has now been increased to £150 million). The Tory councils openly stated that they would refuse to employ the Government's guidelines in relation to the purchase of Ford motor cars and in practise, even the Government agencies themselves would not have been prepared to employ sanctions against Ford.

However, the Government has succeeded in irritating the bourgeoisie and at the same time, is antagonising and is not satisfying the demands of the working class. This is the fate which inevitably befalls reformism in a period of crisis. The Ford's strike has been followed by a whole series of local and national stoppages. The bakers' strike for instance showed a degree of class bitterness which has not been seen in this industry, or indeed in many others, in the post-war period. The temper of the working class is graphically demonstrated by this strike. Formerly, virtually a company union, the strike was only the second national strike in the 128 year history of this union. The employers, accustomed to a docile labour force, reacted violently to the new militancy in this union. We have seen an unprecedented use of the police on the picket line. The employers have resorted to openly seeking black-leg labour. Circulars have gone out to labour exchanges asking for unemployed to come to work in the factories. Undoubtedly, as the Bakers' Union leadership itself has pointed out, the employers attempted to completely break the union through the medium of this strike.

At the other end of the scale we see the "Top People's Paper", the *Times*, similarly attempting to break the power of the print workers' unions. With the full backing of all the Fleet Street barons, and probably supported by the combined funds of all of them, the *Times* management is

attempted to completely break the roughshod over the print unions, by introducing new technology, which on a capitalist basis will mean the complete elimination of whole trades and the destruction of at least one trade union, the National Graphical Association. They are attempting to emulate the American press moguls. Because of the weakness of the US trade unions, the American capitalists succeeded in weakening the print unions after a drawn-out and bitter conflict. Even such a moderate trade union as the National Union of Journalists has declared that the intention of the *Times* management is to "smash the unions".

'DECISION MAKING ELITE'

The intensified bitterness and struggle between the classes in British society has not failed to leave its mark on the relations between the TUC and the Government on the one side and the TUC and the employers on the other. The increased pressure from below was reflected in the decision of the TUC Conference in September to reject the 5%. It has also compelled the TUC to come into semi-opposition to the Government itself. Thus despite a month of protracted negotiations, the General Council rejected even the cosmetic agreement with the Government in relation to wages and prices. This resulted in an outburst by Tom Jackson, leader of the Union of Post Office Workers, and present chairman of the TUC, against the "negative attitude" of the TUC which, he claims, "has lost its way".

This earned him the justified rebuke from Eric Heffer, the Tribune MP, that he was attempting to establish his credentials for the House of Lords!. Yet notwithstanding Jackson's outburst, the very next day, his own union announced that it was putting in a claim for a 24.4% increase in wages.

The sharp change in the situation which these events demonstrate has resulted in a complete change in the mood of the bourgeoisie. Peter Jenkins,



'Times' workers lobby Parliament

political editor of the *Guardian*, summed this up recently in a series of articles in that newspaper:

"But the last few years have left a severe dent in the self-confidence of the people who run the country, the decision-making elite who we can call the ruling class. True, they are less at their wits' end than in the Winter of 73-4 when the country seemed ungovernable or than at the height of the 1976 financial crisis, but they know that they have no answer to the country's economic problems, no means of arresting its industrial decline. They are morally shaken, intellectually still in the hands of the receivers." (28th September 1978)

From 1975 to the end of 1977 the Labour Government appeared to be doing the job which the bourgeoisie required in the present situation. Living standards were held down and profits, at least the mass of profit, increased spectacularly. This resulted in a small access of confidence to the bourgeoisie. But the fragile basis upon which this was founded has now been completely shattered by the Ford strike and the revival in the struggles of the working class.

All the honeyed phrases about co-operation between the classes, class harmony etc, have given way to the same brutal language which the strategists of the bourgeoisie employed in the period of '70 to '74. Once again, the *Times*, led by their new idol Hayek, has suggested the withdrawal of "the

licence" of the trade unions in Britain. At the same time the bourgeoisie has revived the idea of a National Government which was a current of their thinking in the period of 74-75. They calculate that if a Labour Government is incapable of keeping in check the movement of the proletariat, what chance would a right wing Thatcherite government have?

Even such a fervent supporter of Thatcher, as Peregrine Worsthorne of the *Telegraph*, has raised the question of the possibility of a National Government. He has also indicated that Thatcher herself has not discounted the possibility of serving in a National Government in all probability in a minor capacity, if the conditions for a coalition should materialise. Heath is undoubtedly playing for a National Government. At the same time, the collapse of the Liberals has meant that Steel has looked towards some means of saving the Liberals from electoral disaster.

Moreover, it is clear that the basis of a right wing split from the Labour Party — to be more exact from the Parliamentary Labour Party — is probably more evident today than at any other time in the history of the labour movement. The new breed of lawyers, doctors, lecturers and barristers who predominate within the Parliamentary Labour Party are more divorced from the working class than even Ramsay McDonald or Jimmy Thomas. Joe Ashton,



Ramsay MacDonald at time of 1931 National Government

arguing against the idea of reselection of MPs, let the cat out of the bag. He pointed out that there were 40 to 50 Labour MPs who would cross the floor of the House of Commons — in other words go over to the side of the Tory and Liberal enemy — if reselection was adopted by the labour movement!

These creatures and many more within the PLP could go over to a National Government with as little difficulty as a man passing from a smoking to a non-smoking compartment on a train. Such a situation has not yet developed in Britain. But such is the charged situation at the present time, that a National Government could loom up very quickly. It could for instance develop in the wake of a big strike in the public sector. The bourgeoisie is prepared to tolerate increases probably of an average of about 12% in the private sector but is urging the government to batten down the hatches in the public sector. In the face of the claims of the local government workers for instance, the frenzied journals of the right such as the *Daily Express* have even suggested the complete dismantling of the National Health Service.

Over a million workers in local government are preparing for a trial of strength with the employers over their demand for a £60 minimum wage. They have planned for a strike and mass demonstration in London in January. Recognising their power

the government has indicated that it may concede a bigger increase in wages — in excess of 10% — than was on offer before the Ford strike or the recent government defeat in Parliament. Following them are the civil servants, the miners and the engineers. If these and other groups of workers are successful in pressing their claims, the bourgeoisie may decide that there is no other alternative but to play the card of a National Government. They calculate that a Coalition Government, with the split in the PLP which this would involve, would succeed in cowering the working class and the trade union movement for a period of time. This would allow them, they envisage, to cut the living standards of the working class, to dismantle the social services and thereby increase their rate of profit. However, the working class of 1978 or '79 is not the working class of 1931. In numbers, in power, in cohesion, it is immeasurably stronger than at the time of the 1931 coalition government.

It is possible that a National Government may disorientate the working class for a period of months or a year or two. However, a new National Government would not be enabled to remain in power as long as the '31 government, which lasted almost until the outbreak of war. On the contrary, policies of "austerity" today would inevitably provoke a colossal movement of the working

class which could end in a general strike within a matter of months or years. In Denmark, for instance, the coalition of the Social Democrats with the Liberals for the first time in Danish history, provoked spontaneous widespread strikes of the working class — and this is with a working class much weaker than in Britain.

A general strike in modern conditions would not have the same outcome necessarily, as in 1926. As the events in France in May-June 1968 demonstrated, a new general strike could possibly only be called off by the granting of big concessions to the working class. At the same time it could provoke the downfall of a National Government and the coming to power, through new general elections, of a Left Labour Government. It is for this reason that the strategists of capital hesitate before opting for a coalition government. It is a leap into the unknown, which could have catastrophic consequences for them and their class.

ELECTION

It would undoubtedly speed up the process of a shift towards the left which is taking place within the labour and trade union movement at the present time. Moreover, even if they succeeded in rushing through Parliament a bill to change the electoral law to one of proportional representation, which the bourgeoisie have toyed with over the last few years, this would not result in a left Labour Party remaining out of office indefinitely. At the same time the movement of the working class would develop on the industrial plane.

Such is the crisis of British capitalism and such is the tremendous conflict of the classes which this will involve over the next period, even with a rigged electoral law, it could result in the coming to power of a left Labour Government. The Portuguese Revolution has demonstrated that barriers such as this do not prevent the coming to power of the workers' parties in conditions of crisis. Nor can it remain an

insuperable barrier to the British working class.

Indeed, the British bourgeoisie in contemplating such measures, have succumbed to the disease of parliamentary cretinism. They have the delusion that laws alone are capable of transforming the relationship between the classes.

Events will prove them wrong. A National Government is not certain; the bourgeoisie have not yet decided which way to turn. Only the march of events will determine whether or not they will opt for a National Government. However, while not certain, it is back on the agenda as far as developments in Britain in the next period are concerned.

On the other hand, it is possible, that the government, even with big successes for the workers in the form of increases in wages, could drag on till the next General Election is called. The results of that election are still uncertain. The Berwick on Tweed by-election demonstrates the enormous reservoir of support for Labour within the ranks of the proletariat. The vote for the Labour candidate in Berwick was the highest percentage for Labour for 30 years. This was despite the fact that the Labour candidate is a scion of the rich Tory Lord Douglas Home clan. In other words, he is a right wing Tory interloper into the labour movement.

The government claimed that the vote was a vindication of their policies, particularly in relation to the 5% limit on wages. On the contrary, the by-election result reflected the swing back to Labour of former Labour supporters who in protest had voted for the Scottish Nationalists in the past. This was due to a number of factors. Undoubtedly the limited measure of devolution in the form of the Scottish Assembly cut the ground from under the feet of the SNP and resulted in these workers swinging back to Labour. At the same time, the vote demonstrated what the Marxists have always argued; that the working class, in a period of class polarisation, in particular, will always swing back to their traditional party. This is



Margaret Thatcher

so, not because of the policies of the Government, but *despite* them. It is possible that if Thatcher and the Tories fight a virulent anti-working class, anti-trade union campaign, this could result in a polarisation of the classes in the course of the election. In this situation, it is not excluded that Labour could come back to power, as a minority government, or even with a small majority.

However, if Callaghan and the Labour Cabinet continue along the present collision course with the trade union and labour movement and the working class, this could result in a degree of bitterness by the advanced workers which could allow the victory of a Tory Government. Callaghan suffers from the delusion that the 5% limit is a popular policy and a "tough attitude" towards the union will result in electoral dividends. On the contrary, it will only succeed in digging the grave of the Labour Government itself, by undermining the enthusiasm and support of the advanced workers, which is absolutely crucial for the success of Labour in a General Election.

Therefore a Tory Government cannot be ruled out and indeed now seems the most likely outcome of the election. The attitude of the bourgeoisie seems to be that if they are to be saddled with a Tory Government, then it needs to be one with a sizeable majority.

This is the only explanation for the lifting of reporting restrictions and the savaging of the Liberals by the press and the media in relation to the "Thorpe Affair". They are determined to cut down the support for the Liberals and to

ensure the swinging back to the Tories of those who voted Liberal in protest in the last two General Elections.

One thing is certain. The Liberals will be lucky to hold on to a few seats in the next General Election. A Tory Government will have the same consequences as a National Government. By her statements and posture over the past period it is evident that a Thatcher Government, as with the Heath government of '70 to '74, will come into a head on collision with the working class and the trade union and labour movement.

No matter what the outcome of the election will be, we have entered a new stage in the development of British society. In the short term, the lull of the last three years has definitely ended. We are witnessing the upswing of the class struggle in Britain that will continue with minor pauses, and periods of quiescence, even right up to the General Election. In the mighty events which impend in Britain, the ideas of Marxism will gain even greater footing within the labour and trade union movement.

The Labour Party conference has already demonstrated the vital role which the Marxists play in the Labour Party at this stage. This has been paralleled by the role which they have played, also in the industrial field, in the bakers' strikes, in the heroic and epic battle of the workers at Western Ship Repairers, and in many other struggles over the past period. In these events, hundreds and thousands of workers have been looking for a programme, which would be capable of solving their problems. Many of them have embraced the policies and programme of Marxism. But with the big events which loom in Britain, tens of thousands and millions of workers will look for such a programme. The events of the past period, indeed, the events over this decade so far, have demonstrated that only the Marxists have a programme and a policy which can re-arm the labour movement and guarantee victory over capitalism in the coming battles.

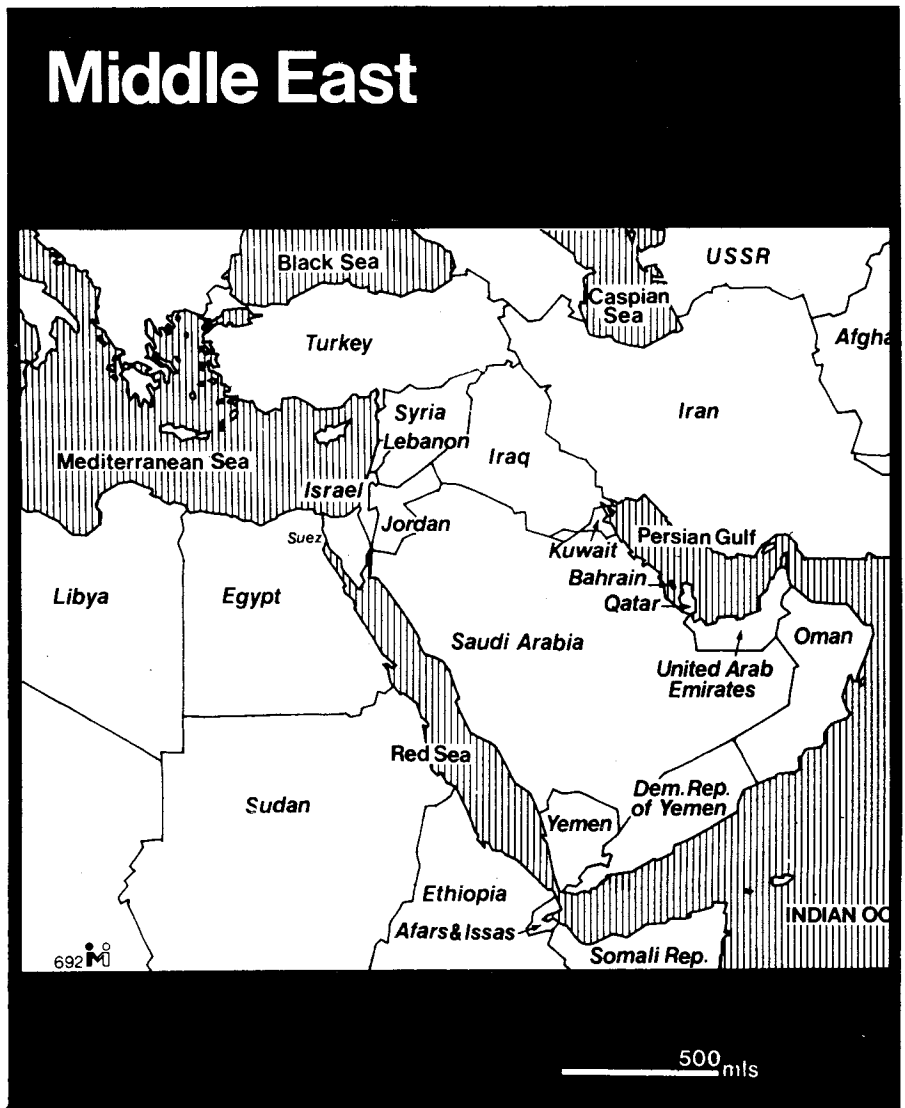
MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

By John Pickard

The diplomatic wheeling and dealing between the imperialist powers and the Middle East states has now reached frantic levels of activity in their search for a peace settlement. The slow "step-by-step" diplomacy of the Kissinger period has been pushed to one side as America, Egypt and Israel bargain and barter desperately to make the most gains while at the same time facing up to the absolute necessity of a "peace agreement." Yet it has been the social and political climate in their own countries that has catapulted both Sadat and Begin into the conference room, and not any supposed "statesmanship" on their part. All the Middle East powers and imperialism look with dread at the possibility of a new war.

WEAKNESS OF IMPERIALISM

In all these negotiations it has been the American government that has played the role of "honest broker", bringing together the rivals and using its own authority and influence to extract concessions, as it has been trying to do since as long ago as 1970 when the "Rogers Plan" was put forward by the USA. But leaving aside all the supposed personal qualities of Begin, Sadat, Carter and the rest, there are very much more important and pressing reasons why the would-be peacemakers have moved so fast in the last two years or so. As we said two years ago: "The diplomatic manoeuvres of the great powers and the apparent turn towards diplomacy in an attempt to achieve a permanent agreement in respect



to the question of Israel and the Palestinians ... has not been brought about by a fundamental change of heart on the part of the governments concerned, but in every case, by a fear of the social upheaval that would be generated by yet another war. In the main countries of the Middle East:

Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Israel, the accumulated class contradictions have reached heightened levels. An additional reason for the feverish diplomatic activity is the ever-shrinking strategic power of Imperialism, particularly the USA." (Militant, 16.1.76)

Above anything else, the powers concerned are anxious to preserve stability in the region. Over the past five years Imperialism has passed several milestones along the road of its own historic decay and weakening, notably the oil crisis of late 1973, the defeat in south east Asia in 1974 and the world-wide recession the year after that. The possibilities of direct military intervention around the colonial and ex-colonial world are far more limited - in many cases non-existent - compared to the 1950s and 1960s. The October 1973 war in the Middle East demonstrated unmistakably the growing dependence of Imperialism on Arab oil. The USA, which relied on the Middle East and North Africa for about 10 per cent of its oil in 1973 will depend on the region for 40 per cent of its needs by 1980; a tenth of its oil is already supplied by Saudi Arabia alone.

As History has shown on many past occasions, wars are the midwives of revolutions and the dislocation of oil supplies in 1973, followed by the social crises in Lebanon and Egypt are nothing to what may happen in the future if there is another full-scale Middle East war. Imperialism has built up mighty military machines at the elbow of both the Shah of Iran and the Saudi Arabian king, the two "policemen" of the region. No doubt the USA is also hoping to draw Egypt, the biggest and most powerful of all the Arab states, into the Iran-Saudi "axis" against social revolution. The revolutionary events in Syria in 1965-66 and more recently in Ethiopia resulted in the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in those countries, albeit on the basis of the bureaucratic Bonapartist military government, and these movements came as a body-blow to Imperialism. The social revolution has already begun to unfold in Iran itself, despite the arsenal of weaponry in the hands of the Shah's regime; but Carter will have no desire to worsen the situation by turning his back on the danger of a further Arab-Israeli war.

It is in this broad context that the American government has been

forced to change its diplomatic position on Middle East questions. Israel could not have come into existence and could not have developed as it has without the enormous financial support of Imperialism. In 1977 the Israeli Finance Minister was quoted as saying: "Since its establishment, Israel has benefitted from a net import of capital amounting to \$31.5 billion. Approximately 43 per cent of this sum had come from Jewish sources in the form of donations, loans, capital investment and capital transfer by immigrants. The remainder was made up of compensation, reparations, and aid in the form of grants from the German government amounting to \$4.7 billion and of grants and allowances from the USA amounting to \$8.2 billion raised on the international money market."



Moshe Dayan

After the war of October 1973, US aid reached the level of \$2 billion a year, roughly half of which is accounted for by military shipments. In proportion to the size of the population there is no parallel anywhere in the world, as regards the military and general aid that has been lavished on Israel. Even Begin was quoted recently as saying, "today we are dependent on overseas aid even for our breakfast." The modern state of Israel owes its existence to Imperialism. But the huge grants and loans were not given for purely altruistic motives. Milton Friedman said in a speech in Israel

that American aid had its value "in that the USA gained a fortress in the Middle East." The military and diplomatic strength of Israel, and even the very presence of the state, became a bulwark against the Arab revolution.

But whatever may have been in its interests in the past, the USA today is no longer prepared to act as the financial and military prop to Israel to the exclusion of all other interests, and being in the best possible position to exert pressure, is trying to force concessions and a peace agreement that would be acceptable to the Arab regimes. The recent sale of jet fighters to Israel was, for the first time, made conditional on the sale of similar aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Egypt and more than anything else, that was meant as a public gesture of the new outlook of the White House. As was starkly evident in the events of the 1973 war, the USA is not prepared to allow the Israeli state to be crushed militarily — that would be the worst possible diplomatic and political catastrophe — but neither is she prepared to allow the continued humiliation of the Arab governments in the military and diplomatic fields.

EGYPT

Not the least of Carter's Middle East worries is the economic and political instability of Egypt. The seething discontent that exists exploded to the surface in January 1977 with the greatest anti-government strikes and riots since the overthrow of King Farouk in 1952. All of Egypt's major towns and cities were paralysed by the movement sparked off by the government removing subsidies on essential foods. Industry and communications were disrupted on a large scale and in the suburbs of some of the cities railway lines were torn up. Commentators in Egypt at the time noted the similarity between the movement in January 1977 and that in January 1952; in fact it was often the same casinos that were burnt and the same police barracks that were attacked on both occasions. Sadat

was so struck with horror at the scale of the opposition that within hours he had restored the food subsidies and sacked the Finance Minister as a scapegoat. Even then, it was a matter of days before the army (rather than the politically-unreliable local police) managed to restore order.

But the problems of the Egyptian economy are intractable. The regime of Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s used the mass support of the working class and peasantry to limit the worst excesses of Egyptian capitalism and landlordism, and it was during this period that major nationalisations took place. But Nasser weakened capitalism without destroying it and now under Anwar Sadat the regime has adopted policies favourable to capitalist interests and follows an international policy based upon American patronage. The so called "Open Door" policy of Sadat was supposed to open Egypt up to foreign investment and now under Anwar Sadat the mic "miracle" on the lines of Brazil or Iran. In fact the 'open door' has created wealth and opulence on a scale not even witnessed in the Farouk era — but concentrated in a small number of hands. Most of the inflow of foreign capital has gone into hotel construction and real estate investment designed to give a quick return.

To Western businessmen Egypt remains a high risk area in the long-term. The trade deficit has increased on each consecutive year of the 'open-door' and now totals about \$2350 million (estimate for 1978). The total international debt is around \$14 billion or \$15 billion, including an arms debt of \$7 billion. The loans that Egypt is receiving internationally are just about enough to cover the repayments for the old loans. This huge economic crisis has fallen on the shoulders of the Egyptian workers and peasants. As a new-style affluence invades the upper layers of society, the poverty and insecurity of the masses only gets worse and as Sadat must be well aware, volcanoes have a habit of erupting, and sometimes exploding outright.

Sadat has been walking the

political tightrope for a long time and he knows he cannot do it forever. The January riots were a warning. The cost of maintaining a large standing army has been the biggest single drain on the Egyptian economy and Sadat has clearly calculated that the social consequences of renewed fighting would be too great. Not only would a new war end in certain military defeat (unlike Israel, Egypt has not recovered its military losses of 1973) but the very existence of the regime itself would be threatened. Just as the debacle of 1948-49 led to the revolution of 1952, so a new Middle East war puts in jeopardy Sadat's rule and the rule of Egyptian capitalism. Even a "gentlemen's coup" among the top brass of the armed forces could set in train a movement of workers, soldiers and peasants that could, as in Ethiopia, force social changes far beyond those envisaged by the original instigators.

The Regime has already been forced to zig-zag this way and that to try to stifle or dissipate the growing political opposition. The new Peoples' Assembly set up in 1976 was intended as a harmless safety valve and a badge of Sadat's "democratic" credentials. Unfortunately for him real opposition soon developed in the liberal political climate and deputies even dared to criticise the government. An opposition paper of the left was published and quickly gained hundreds of thousands of readers. The left National Progressive Party claimed to have 160,000 members. On the right, the old Pashas of the interwar years came together to re-establish the old Wafd Party reflecting the opposition to the government on the part of the openly capitalist strata who demand more profits, more investment incentives, cuts in government spending and so on.

The growth of the opposition became intolerable for the Sadat government and after a steam-rollered referendum new measures were introduced to curtail the political and press freedom that had been granted only months before. The Egyptian government

cannot sit back and watch the opposition growing in front of its very eyes but at the same time it does not have the social reserves of strength to crush the opposition completely — and so Sadat, like a man in a daze, wanders from one expedient to the next, both at home and abroad, looking for a panacea to save himself and his system.

SADAT'S DILEMMA

It has been Sadat's own precarious position and not his personal attributes that have driven him into seeking an accord with Israel. He has at least some inkling of the changed international relationship of forces and he must be hoping to exploit America's dilemma to squeeze concessions from Israel. The problem for Sadat now is that the more he promises and the less he actually achieves, then the more desperate his situation becomes: **"Sadat's visit to Jerusalem has not introduced any new factors into the situation but there cannot be any doubt that it has accelerated social developments in Egypt and in Israel and possibly elsewhere."** (Militant, 7.12.77)

The other twenty one Arab states have all, at least verbally, opposed any separate Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement and the oil-rich states in particular have threatened economic sanctions against Egypt. But what alternatives are open to Sadat? If he were to withdraw from the peace negotiations now it would mean admitting the complete failure of his peace initiative and of his whole policy of US patronage. It would mean almost certainly another war — and one that Egypt would lose badly. Despite facing the odium of the Arab states opposed to him Sadat cannot take a path that will lead to certain military defeat and almost as certainly his own downfall, not to mention the threat against Egyptian capitalism itself. Sadat has already seen American pressure forcing Israel to give back Sinai, and he is now bargaining for Egyptian sovereignty over Gaza — significantly leaving the West Bank

Nobel peace prize Begin -Sadat share £80,000



The leaders are at this moment reported to be deciding how the money should be spent

to future agreements. Sadat must be calculating that the return of these areas to Egypt, alongside American aid and the triumph of the peace agreement itself, will provide a much-needed boost to the sagging economy and the stability of his regime. For Sadat's own interests the most likely outcome is the signing of a separate peace deal, leading perhaps to extensive commercial and diplomatic ties with Israel. Carrying the stigma of the betrayal of the Palestinian workers and peasants is nothing to Sadat when he sees what he would lose by another war, when he looks upon the explosive events in Tehran ... and thinks of Cairo. The same considerations will mellow the opposition of the oil-rich Arab states. King Khaled and the other reactionary Gulf-state leaders have as much or more to lose than Sadat if a new Middle East was were to take place, followed inevitably by fresh social upheaval. The loss of the 'holy city' of Jerusalem is small change indeed to the possible loss of a kingdom.

Without Egyptian support there is little likelihood of a new Arab war against Israel, but a separate peace will not be a permanent peace. The internal problems of the Egyptian regime will not disappear overnight and in fact the Egyptian workers and peasants will be demanding 'their share' of the peace agreement in improved living standards. At the

same time, every new upheaval and explosion anywhere in the Arab world, especially in Palestine, would threaten to spill over into Egypt. A separate peace agreement will not conjure away the social contradictions in the Middle East states and so the threat of war will not be completely or permanently removed.

ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC MESS

The developing class contradictions in Israel are no less significant than those in Egypt. The election of Begin and the Likud coalition in 1977 was a reflection of a new shift in Israeli politics. More than anything else it was domestic issues that dominated the election, especially inflation and Labour corruption. It was a massive switch of Labour votes to the Democratic Movement for Change (a new party at the time, which has now split) that won the election for Likud whose own vote went up only slightly. The DMC and the Labour alignment stood for territorial concessions to the Arab states and taking that issue alone, well over half the votes were nominally in favour of concessions.

Begin and his party represent the most extreme wing of Zionism. Begin himself was a terrorist leader in the years before Israel was established. Yet despite this, it has been Begin who has been the first Israeli Prime Minister to talk of concessions and the abandonment of settlements. But Begin's "concessions" and "statesmanship"

have no more to do with his own personal qualities as Sadat's: like his Egyptian counterpart he can feel the chill wind of economic and social problems and by all indications he has been given forecasts of gales. The enormous pressure of Israeli capitalism and US imperialism are determining Begin's policies for him. Throughout the 1970s the Israeli economy has gone from bad to worse. For five consecutive years now inflation has been over 30 per cent and it will be higher this year. Foreign debts have piled up to the massive figure of \$11 billion and yet the economy crawls along, sinking deeper into the mire. Total growth for 1976 and 1977 was a meagre 2.6 per cent. Investment declined by 14 per cent in 1976 and by a further 5 per cent in 1977. The annual balance of payments deficits is around \$3 billion.

Yet the policies of the Likud coalition, openly representing the interests of Israeli capitalism, will weigh even heavier on the shoulders of the working class. The measures of the government resulted in the most dramatic attack on living standards. In November after the election, the Israeli £ was devalued by 40 per cent and there were cuts in subsidies for many essential items such as food. Government expenditure has been curtailed and there has been an increase in unemployment to over 50,000 where there had traditionally been a labour shortage. The workers were not slow to respond. Despite the bureaucratic nature of the trade union federation, the Histadruth, many sections of workers have gone into battle on the wages front. When the devaluation was announced, the Histadruth, under pressure from the membership, even organised a protest demonstration, something almost unheard of in the past. Industrial peace was established for a few months after the Histadruth leaders signed an agreement with the government to limit wage rises to 15 per cent "in the national interest" but now even that agreement has gone out of the window. The workers would not have been well disposed to an incomes policy that made huge

holes in their wages to begin with, but in July of last year they must have been amazed at the cheek of the government when it gave 39 per cent rises to Cabinet ministers and a rise of 126 per cent to Begin himself! At present, the government claims that inflation is running at 35 per cent; the Treasury is quoting 37 per cent; the Histadruth denies both and claim that the rate is 40 per cent. Perhaps they are all undrestimates. The "Economist Intelligence Unit" points out that if the average consumer price index for 1976 is taken as 100, then the level in July 1978 was 201.4 and is expected to be 245 in December, an average rate of around 50 per cent per annum! But the Israeli workers will not be arguing over one or two percentage points when their living standards are coming under such an attack. The graph for days lost through strikes in the last few years already show an unmistakeable upward curve and it is only a matter of time before the record level of strikes is broken.

In the last two years almost every section of workers has been involved in strikes. The workers are now demanding cost-of-living rises of 100 per cent of the price (rather than the usual 70% of the rise in prices) and have called for wage increases to be brought forward three months from April 1979 to January. I was reported that in September, the Israeli Medical Association agreed to set up its own strike fund! **"The economic changes already under way have galvanised the trade unions into concerted action, organising strikes often without Histadruth support. The Histadruth has become lazy over the years and has become top-**

heavy with its bureaucracy. Now it is being forced to move and its leaders have begun to realise that they could lose their positions unless they assume real leadership." (The Middle East, February 1978)

CONFLICTS IN ISRAEL

Neither is the trade union struggle the only manifestation of the growing conflict within Israel. The Israeli Arab population live as second-class citizens. The laws that govern commerce, land ownership, education, and so on are shot through and through with conditions and regulations that favour Jews as against non-Jews. By whatever social and welfare standards that are used to compare them, the Arab population trail a poor second behind the Jewish population. Not surprisingly, the Arabs have more and more swung their voices and their votes behind Arab national feeling, in the absence of any other real opposition. The Rakah, the Israeli Communist Party (based almost wholly on Arabs) reflects within Israel the same kind of policy put forward by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) outside. From having only 11 per cent of the Israeli Arab vote in 1970 Rakah now commands over 50 per cent and the election of Rakah supporters to be mayors and councillors in the Arab towns are a small symptom of a much more fierce opposition that will develop in the future, especially in conjunction with the opposition of their Arab cousins over the 'border' in the territories occupied after the 1967 war.

In Gaza and the west Bank, the

Israeli government continues to govern through the military so that in the daily lives of the Arabs they often meet the brutality and viciousness of the army of occupation. Since 1967, Jewish settlements have been established all over Gaza and the West Bank, backed by the religious zealots in the government bureaucracy and in the army. Time after time, while their own crops die from lack of fertiliser and capital expenditure or irrigation, while their sons and daughters go off elsewhere to seek work, the Arab villagers have seen their land fenced off for "military purposes" only to be taken over in this way by armed settlers. Arab villagers have lost in many cases perfectly good land and orchards. Little wonder that the accumulated social tensions explode onto the surface from time to time as they did in 1975 and 1976. The Arab opposition in the occupied areas will only grow in the coming months and years. Taking Israel and the occupied areas altogether, the Arab population under the Israeli government already totals 49 per cent of the total and as each year passes the Arab population overhauls the Jewish population. How else can Israeli society develop on present trends except along the path of social and political earthquakes?

Among Jews also, the class divisions have never been greater. The so-called 'oriental' Jews (the Sephardim) from Africa, Asia, Palestine etc., are lower in the social ladder than the European Jews from Europe and North America. In the fields of housing, education, standards of employment etc. the Sephardim find themselves proportionately badly off. Although they constitute about 70 per cent of Israel's Jewish population, less than 10 per cent of university graduates are of Sephardic origin. The political parties are also dominated by the European Jews so that the only MP who can claim to represent Sephardim is one who represents the remainder of the Israeli "Black Panthers" group which was set up by oriental Jews, after the manner of the American

Table: Israeli Strike Figures from Israeli Statistical Abstract 1977.

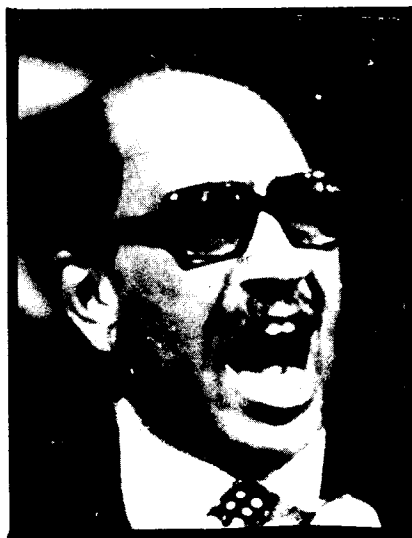
Year	Work Days Lost	No. of Strikers and locked out	No. of strikes and lockouts	% due to wages
1973	375,000	122,348	96	
1974	51,000	27,141	71	
1975	164,000	114,091	117	60
1976	308,214	114,970	123	76

negro organisation of the same name, but which has since shrunk away almost completely. The measures of the Likud government will hit hardest among the already underprivileged oriental Jews, many of whom, ironically, supported Likud in 1977, and, no doubt, new conclusions will have been drawn from the last two years experiences.

Pulling all the various strands together, it is clear that Israeli society has an enormous and growing accumulation of class contradictions. The Arabs, whether in the occupied areas or in Israel proper feel like strangers in their own land, with limited rights and a shrinking livelihood. And what about Jewish workers? What can they look forward to in the next few years? On present trends there is only one answer: after five major wars, after hundreds of minor skirmishes, after months and months of compulsory military service and after great economic sacrifices, the Israeli worker can only bequeath to his children... worse. More and more sacrifice, bloodier and more desperate wars and still no sign of real peace and security. It has been this impasse in Israeli society which has begun to shake up the ossified political structure of Zionism. In the 'promised land' of the Zionists, the milk and honey are turning sour. Now, Israel has become so unattractive that more Jews emigrate from Israel than migrate to Israel, and the exodus would probably be greater except for the currency restrictions and the cost of going away.

ISRAELI CAPITALISTS

The undermining of the traditional ideas and the searching for new policies must not be exaggerated at this stage; it must be put in its correct perspective. Nevertheless, the beginnings of the breakdown are evident. The "Peace Now" movement which started as a petition of about 300 army officers grew in weeks to a force of hundreds of thousands capable of holding mass rallies in Tel Aviv. Despite all the political limitations of that movement, it was a clear



Sadat

symptom of the 'war-weariness' that now grips large sections of society. Through the trade unions and the youth in particular, new leaders will come to the fore in the labour movement; leaders who will win their spurs in the battles in defence of living standards, drawing inevitable political conclusions from the class battles.

It would be a serious mistake to imagine that the mass of the Israeli Jewish population were religious zealots. The whole government bureaucracy including the army, the media and the trade union apparatus is ingrained to one degree or another with Zionism and movements like the Gush Emmunim which uses the ancient prophesies of the Bible to justify twentieth century politics have a grossly disproportionate influence in the political arena. However, there is also a considerable anti-orthodox and secular movement among Jews. The Israeli Press has on many occasions reported clashes between secularists and religious zealots over the observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Last September, for example, one of these fights (the sixth on successive Saturdays) became a full-scale riot involving over 500 people, resulting in many beatings and stabbings. Even the justification of the post-1967 settlements is fading for most Israeli workers. The settlements in any case hold less than 10,000 Israelis as against a total population of over three million and if asked to make a choice

between "peace" or "settlements" the vast majority of Israelis would choose to abandon the settlements. One young Labour MP (described as the "rising star" of the Labour Party) reflected this growing mood in his speech to the Knesset, urging Mr. Begin to stop: **"injecting into our national veins the soothing and intoxicating poison of a national mystique which is outdated and suicidal."** He further called upon the Prime Minister to **"understand that in postponing as long as possible the inevitable need to recognise the right of the Palestinians to self determination, he is only laying up for himself new political disappointments."** This was during the Knesset debate after the Camp David accords were signed.

Despite Begin's own background, the realities of his position as the representative of Israeli capitalism and the pressure of Imperialism have pushed him reluctantly, one might say "kicking and screaming", in the direction of concessions. There is a group of Israeli capitalists who are now quite outspoken in their support for concessions and a deal with the Arabs. These businessmen have reckoned up the equation and have come to the conclusion that they stand to make great gains by trade and commercial agreements with the Arab world, as well as avoiding social unrest at home.

"The new businessmen see the Israel of the future as a highly industrialised country and an exporter of advanced technology. They are particularly anxious for peace, as they are aware of the great potential of the Arab markets which surround them. They would willingly sacrifice territory for normal economic relations with neighbouring states." (The Middle East, Feb. 1978)

But at the same time, Israeli capitalism is fearful of the consequences of conceding too much. Giving back Sinai would be one thing, but opening the door to Arab self-government of Gaza and the west Bank would be tantamount to lighting a revolutionary fuse. An independent Palestinian state in these areas

would be unable to meet the needs of its own population. It would be in a state of revolutionary flux from the very beginning and the instability it would create would threaten Israeli capitalism itself. That explains the many and varied conditions attached to the Camp David agreement on the question of West Bank 'sovereignty' and the many "security considerations" written into the documents from the Israeli's point of view. Despite their public speeches it is also likely that Israel's immediate Arab neighbours are as much afraid of an independent Palestine as is Israel: King Hussein of Jordan would probably prefer the status quo (ie Israeli military rule) to Palestinian independence. Although the demand for an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and in Gaza has gained a certain currency, including in the British labour movement, such a state would be bitterly opposed by Israeli capitalism and the neighbouring Arab states and cannot be realised on a capitalist basis. Nevertheless, despite the deep-seated fear of any movement towards a Palestinian state, the Israeli capitalist class has been forced by international and domestic pressure to move inexorably towards a peace agreement with Egypt, although avoiding as much as possible concessions to "Palestinian autonomy."

PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANISATION

Within Israel the conditions are becoming more and more favourable for winning the mass of Jewish workers away from Zionism. In any case, for the majority of them "Zionism" has no meaning in a religious sense, only in that they see a need for the defence and security of the Israeli state. Even if their own safety and security are wearing a bit thin at the moment, the Jewish workers will always tend to move back towards Zionism, that is to Jewish nationalism, **unless an alternative is offered to them and that alternative must be the perspective and programme of socialism.** Only

class and socialist solutions can hope to fulfil the aspirations of Arabs and Jews without threatening either of them. The maturing objective situation raises the issue of the subjective factor — the need for a socialist movement capable of giving leadership to Jews and Arabs alike, a movement based upon the most consistent internationalism. The movements that are tainted with nationalism in one form or another will never be able to build on the confidence of both sections of workers. Zionism, for example, will quite obviously offer nothing to Arab workers and peasants. Zionism has been responsible over the decades for the establishment of a state based upon their own displacement in favour of immigrants: what is more, the state has succeeded in expanding its borders, spreading further settlements and stamping its military domination over the whole region. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians today live on the charity of the UN and the Arab states in the same 'temporary' camps that were set up in 1948-49, hoping, after a generation has passed, for a return to Palestine, now Israel. The bitterness and the angry frustration of Palestinian youth is easy to understand when the official policy of the Israeli capitalist class alternates between denying even the existence of Palestinians as such, and then conducting the most barbarous and bloody reprisal raids against the camps.

But equally, the various forms of Arab nationalism have no attraction to Jewish workers and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, despite its widespread support among Arabs, will never succeed in gaining the ear of Jewish workers. The nature of the Arab regimes are repugnant to workers, not only in Israel, but around the world. In Egypt workers are shot and imprisoned when they strike; in Saudi Arabia a young couple were publicly executed for the crime of eloping together; in the other Arab states the rights of workers are similarly curtailed to one degree or another.

The Arab regimes in the past were responsible for the most vicious anti-Jewish proclamations, and Jewish workers will not have forgotten that anti-Jewish pogroms in some of these Arab countries led to a wave of Jewish refugees going to Israel after 1948. Yet historically, these Arab regimes have been the mainstays of the PLO in regard to its diplomatic position and in financing. It is quite clear that as **long as the PLO holds a position of support for these regimes, or even adopts a neutral position, then they will never have an attraction to Jewish workers.** But if the diplomatic wheeling and dealing with reactionary Arab leaders would tend to repel Jewish workers, that is nothing to the effect of the individual terrorism with which the PLO is associated through its constituent organisations. In the minds of the Jewish workers the terrorism is only directed at them as Jews — and the reactionary leaders of the Israeli capitalist class are only too happy to equate the PLO by that means to the anti-semitism of the Nazis.

Marxists have always opposed individual terrorism, which signifies an act of desperation and the abandonment of class struggle. The futility of individual terrorism is nowhere more clearly shown than in the Middle East. Israeli workers will not be bombed into opposing Zionism; events such as the murder of Israeli athletes in Munich in 1972, the Lod airport massacre, the hijacking and the blowing-up of planes, and so on, far from serving the interests of the Palestinian workers, have only *strengthened* the hold of Zionism in Israel and have given the Israeli government the excuse for even more murderous raids in reprisal.

The PLO stands for an independent "secular, democratic, unitary, state of Palestine". But despite this formulation — ostensibly posing no threat to the position of Jews — it is only so much *small print* to most Israeli workers who prefer instead to judge the PLO by its concrete actions, and in doing so, reject it utterly. The PLO can not now or in the future be the basis of an

Arab-Jewish workers' movement.

In the modern era the struggles of the colonial peoples for their national rights and national liberation inevitably must become a struggle for *social* emancipation. The struggle against the economic and political control of Imperialism is successful only as a struggle to overthrow the native landlordism and capitalism. In relation to Palestine that is doubly true because of the presence now of the 3 million Jewish population. Any Palestine Liberation movement that bases itself on the patronage of the ilk of Gadaffi, King Khaled, and so on, is thereby guaranteeing the sabotage and the derailment of that movement. National emancipation will be won as social emancipation and that means an implacable struggle for the socialist revolution in Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, etc., and the political revolution in Syria. It has to be understood that the **reactionary Arab regimes stand as no less an obstacle to Palestinian emancipation as does Zionism itself.**

SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP

A socialist policy and programme are the cornerstone to any solution to the Middle East crisis precisely because it is only on a socialist basis that the interests of Arab and Jewish workers can be reconciled. In 1948, Marxists opposed the creation of a separate Israeli state because it was clear from the outset that this artificial state would be a source of conflict and division between the workers of various nationalities. Now, over 30 years later that same position cannot be repeated exactly. The majority of Israeli Jews today were either born in Israel or in Palestine before 1948 and under no circumstances could socialists be in favour of their 'repatriation' ie expulsion. Whatever may have been the case in 1948 the 3 million Israelis today represent a sizeable and distinct nation in the Middle East. That is certainly the feeling of the majority of Israelis. Within certain conditions, namely, that the rights of minority groups and



Begin

returning Palestinians be guaranteed, **the right for an Israeli state to exist within agreed borders must be accepted today.** Indeed, that is virtually the position now of the PLO. But supporting the "Right of Return" for Palestinian Arabs who were expelled in 1948 raises unavoidably the question of the social transformation of society. Capitalism cannot provide enough homes, jobs and living standards for Israelis, never mind for a population swollen by an extra two million Arabs. Without the socialist transformation of Israel, without the democratic ownership and planning of resources, the needs of Arabs could only hope to be met at the expense of Jews and vice-versa. The perspective of social revolution is, of course, not confined to Israel: the overthrow of the reactionary Arab regimes would raise all kinds of new possibilities, including that of a Palestinian state, bearing in mind the common language, culture etc. of the Arabs in the region as a whole.

The faint-hearts within the labour movement who cannot ever imagine that Jewish and Arab workers will ever see anything in common, are always on the lookout for the easy answer. Sliding, as they inevitably do, toward either Zionism or Arab nationalism, they in fact offer no way out for workers in the Middle East. Indeed there may yet be further Arab-Israeli wars and the position of Marxism may be very weak. But nevertheless, mighty class battles will also break out in the coming years. The social upheavals that

are evident in Egypt and Lebanon are not isolated in the Arab world; the class struggle in Israel will grow apace and in the next few years the industrial heartlands of capitalism, that is Europe, Japan and America will also be on the slippery slope to class conflict. A Marxist tendency in the Middle East would base itself on the most consistent internationalism; it would have its foundations in the workers' struggles in the factories and on the docks; it would struggle equally against repressive laws in Israel as in Jordan. Such a tendency would take on flesh as Israeli workers in their hundreds of thousands fight to transform their own Histadruth into a fighting workers' organisation, as the Egyptian workers surge forward again and again in defence of their own standards. The class battles that will take place in the years to come will be like an earthquake in the minds of the workers, or, more correctly, a series of earthquakes. The programme of internationalism, for the Democratic Socialist Federation of the Middle East may not have a wide echo at the moment but there is no other way out for the workers and peasants of the region.

Over the years, hundreds of billions of dollars have been wasted on arms in the Middle East alone. Nearly \$43 billion-worth have been bought just since the war of October 1973. These facts alone testify to the enormous progress that would be possible if the energies and resources of the region were harnessed in a planned mode of production; disease, illiteracy, poverty could be made things of the past. It could be possible, literally, to "make the desert bloom". But these things can only be achieved within the perspective of socialism. The objective conditions may be one thing, but the most vital ingredient of all is the socialist leadership. The establishment and building of a Marxist tendency in the main countries of the Middle East would in a matter of years change the whole picture and they are tasks that belong to the movement internationally as well as in the Middle East.

December 1978

The Battle for the 35-hour week

By Phil Frampton

[Chairman Labour Party Young Socialists]



Post Office workers on the march

On November 21st, 1978, 87% of steelworkers in the German IG Metal Workers Union voted for strike action on their claim for a 5% wage increase and a 35-hour week. Within 8 days, 37,000 were on strike and 28,000 locked out by belligerent employers who were determined to resist IG Metal's demand for 35-hours.

Tired of weeks and months of short-time working and an industry losing 1,000 jobs each month, these workers have shattered the myth of the cosy rapprochement between workers and big business in Germany. 160,000 workers took part in demonstrations on December 12th and bus workers struck in support of the steelmen.

Their action has laid down in no uncertain terms, the path which the workers' organisations must follow if they are to be victorious in the battle against the threat of unemployment. For all that has been written about the backwardness of the German workers, it is in stark contrast to the failure so far of the British union leaders to organise an effective campaign around the demand for the 35-hour week.

Even more, these workers have

demonstrated the possibility of uniting the workers of all countries in concrete action for the basic demand of a limitation to the working week, thus combatting unemployment and taking a major step forward in the struggle to harness the gains of hundreds of years of developing science, technology and education to the aspirations of the working classes for social and intellectual development.

On April 28th, 1978 even a half-hearted campaign by the European TUC resulted in 15 million industrial workers throughout Europe taking industrial action in support of the shorter working week. This mighty illustration of the latent power of the workers' movement (which significantly was largely ignored by the British media) spelt out what an irrepressible force rests in the hands of the workers' organisations once the leadership is prepared to use it.

If the bosses are so absolutely adamant that Britain cannot afford a 35-hour week without cuts in wages, then why bother fighting for it?—is the response of a few leaders of the labour movement. The answer has come from Jack Jones,

former leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union who once calculated that the present output of the British economy could be maintained on the basis of a 19-hour week, if unemployment was abolished and if all the spare resources were used. Likewise during the 1974 Tory government's 3-day week industry managed 80% of production, which would suggest that in 4 days, production would have been higher than today! Bob Smillie (President of the Miners Federation in 1918) once said "we can produce enough in less than a six hour day if we were not producing to make millionaires."

It is not a case of Britain being unable to afford it, it is merely that the employers wish to protect their interests. What the employers' screams make clear is the bankrupt nature of their miserly rule over Britain and the crying need for a planned system of production.

The very same screams went up when Tom Mann and Eleanor Marx led the struggle for the 8-hour day in the 1880's and previously when the 10-hours Bill was introduced in 1847 to offset the revolutionary mood of the time.

The capitalists would have men work a 25-hour day if they could get away with it. As late as the 1840s they were standing by as young children dropped dead after 24-hour stints in the textile mills.

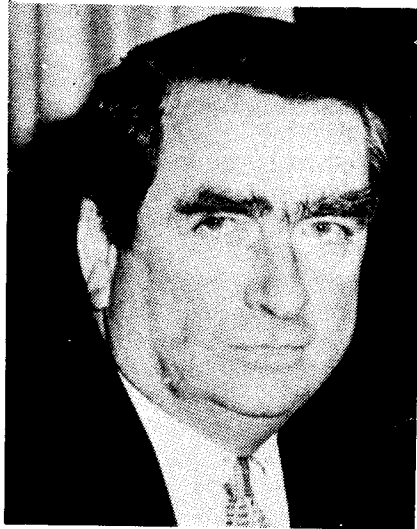
As Marx pointed out, the logic of capitalism is to secure the longest possible working day to achieve the maximum profit in the quickest time. Additionally, in the cut-throat profit system individual capitalists are forced to continually seek after new techniques and more productive machinery in order to gain advantages over their competitors. Machinery becomes both physically and technically obsolescent. Rapid technological development in the computer industry means an employer has to try and use his machines 24-hours a day because they will soon be outmoded.

It is only the intervention of the working class, organised and ready to do battle that has secured a reduction in the working week. Today, a labour movement far stronger, especially if it is united internationally, has the power to win the 7-hour day worldwide. But to date the battle has been one of isolated struggles, of the German metalworkers and the British Post Office Engineers, of the Belgian carworkers and the British Firemen. If the TUC were to carry out its own decision and mobilise the 12 million workers at its disposal, would the bosses still be able to afford it?

While still in the midst of a recession, the French workers mobilised in 1936 to win the programme they had elected the Blum Popular Front Government to carry out. Faced with a wave of occupations and strikes by 2½ million workers, the employers were impotent (at that stage) as the Popular Front legislated for a 40-hour week. Such is the power of the masses to change the accounts of the employers! Of course, this concession was given to head off a revolution where the employers might have lost everything. Since that time they have pushed the average French worker back to a 42-hour week.

Under capitalism, the battle for shorter hours is a ceaseless

struggle. While the trade unions can win an agreement limiting the basic hours to be worked in the week, workers are forced to work longer hours as overtime, if real wages are cut. Thus between 1975 and 1977 the number of hours worked by the average male manual worker in Britain rose from 43.6 hours to 45.7 hours. Indeed in the eighteenth century when capitalism was less developed, the employers, complained that the workers would only do four days work 'unless provisions were short' and resolved to pay the workers less money to force them to work an extra day!



Denis Healey

Here again it is the strength of the labour movement in demanding decent wages which will determine whether the workers need to work longer hours.

The international demands for the introduction of a shorter working week—in Europe, America and Australasia—herald a new era for the labour movement and a sharpening of the struggle over unemployment. It directly raises the need for class action to banish the threat of mass unemployment.

The faint-hearts within the working class organisations have already queried the raising of the demand for a 35-hour week at a time when the international capitalist class is attempting to bring in counter reforms rather than reforms. The capitalist's forecasters have all accepted that world trade will only grow very slightly in the foreseeable future, at a rate of 4-6% a year as opposed to the growth rate

of 12-14% during the post-war boom. They readily concede that such a low level of growth will not suffice to bring unemployment down.

This is very much evident to the British ruling class. "We are convinced that we are now not so much in recession as in a new 'normal' period where industrial growth will be much slower than it was," said Charles Villiers, British Steel boss, apologising for his industry's measly investment plans ('The Times' 24/11/78).

The enormous problems created by this world slowdown, especially magnified in Britain's case, have forced a change in attitude of the financiers and industrialists. They bay and howl at any concessions made by the Labour government to the workers. In these conditions, the demand for a 35-hour week with no loss of pay does not escape their category of 'preposterous suggestion' and unthinkable reforms.

In May, 'The Times' set out its objections.

"The principal methods of work-sharing...are likely to push up labour costs...if labour costs rise, this will reduce the competitiveness of British exports...If trade union leaders are really serious about cutting dole queues, they must begin to view a move to reduced working time as a substitute for a pay increase."

Their philanthropic demand to the workers amounts to; 'workers either accept low wages or high unemployment.' But in recent times the British workers have had both! Between January 1974 and January 1977, unemployment rose by 812,000. Between 1975 and 1977 £8,000 million was cut from public spending and, according to the Treasury, real wages fell by 11%.

Nor has the mini-boom between 1976 and 1978 altered the determination of big business to erode workers' wages.

Despite North Sea oil and the wage cuts of the last few years, British industry is still in a terrible state. In November, Denis Healey said that 10% of British industry was comparable in performance with its foreign competitors and 70% was worse! Consequently their

is continuing pressure to cut wages and public spending and to increase productivity.

Thus at a time of general slowdown in the world economy, with employers trying to squeeze the workers, we have the prospect of the working class taking up demands for a major reform, as the 35-hour week is. The last year has seen a resurgence in the confidence of the working class internationally following the crisis of 1975 when world production fell for the first time since world War 2.

This is due largely to the fact that there has been a small economic upswing. Japan in 1978 will probably turn out to have had a growth rate of 5%, West Germany, 3½%, the USA a growth rate of 4% and Britain attained a lowly 2½%. Almost all the major capitalist countries have seen an increase in the combativity of the workers (as reflected in strike figures).

But the key factor in the emergence of the 35-hour week demand is that despite renewed growth there has been only a small fall off in the levels of unemployment since the last recession. Unemployment remains at a chronic level even in those countries which have fared much better than Britain. In the USA, 5% are out of work. In West Germany in June '78 930,000 were on the registers, in France, 1,047,000 and in Japan, 1,240,000. Belgium had 8% unemployed and Britain 6%.

It is a similar situation to that of Britain 1918-21 when a boom coupled with high unemployment laid the preconditions for the renewed battle for the 8-hour day. Railway workers and cotton workers were among those who were victorious, while the miners went a step further, threatening to strike for a six-hour day.

The British TUC's first response to the problems of the 1970s was indeed to demand a 35-hour week (1972 Conference). Some of the sections of the engineering workers in the Newcastle area fought on this demand and won a one hour cut in the working week. But the central aim of the organised workers in the early 1970s was first defence against the attacks of the Tory government, then on to the political offensive, to



LPYS lead the fight against unemployment

overthrow the reactionary Tory government and replace it with a Labour government which they hoped would satisfy their aspirations. After battles unprecedented since the days of 1926, the Tories were removed. With Labour in power the working class held back its industrial activity hoping and trusting that Labour would solve the crisis and reduce unemployment.

Since that time unemployment has continued to rise. The past four years demonstrated that unemployment is not the 'typhoon' which Michael Foot spoke of but a living horror-story which is here to stay so long as capitalism continues. On March 13th, 1978, Jim Callaghan spelt out the Labour leadership's impotence. **"Despite the fact that we have done more than any other country in Europe and can keep introducing palliatives as we like, I can see no basic solution to the problem"**.

In one sentence, import tariffs, the job creation schemes, the £25 million a day subsidies to private companies, wage restraint and the Employment Protection Act, were dismissed as totally ineffective in withstanding the capitalist onslaught on workers' jobs.

This only confirmed the experience of 1976-77, a period of slow growth, but a period of rationalisation when the capitalists, in order to restore their rate of profit, were forced to try and cut away at the unprofitable sectors of the economy. Indeed the Bank of

England Quarterly Review illustrates that despite the climb back out of the recession, the amount of spare capacity in British industry actually increased. For the workers this meant 1,275,000 redundancies. (March '76-April '78, Dept. of Employment Gazette)

Niether has the picture changed since 1977. Merseyside alone lost 19,000 jobs in the first months of 1978. A Guardian reporter estimated unemployment in the Kirkby area of 50%! Factory after factory was closing down, government aid or not.

Or to take Wales, seasonally adjusted unemployment rose from 5% to 8% between 1975 and 1978. An estimated 10,000 jobs will have been lost by 1979 in the steel industry alone.

Whether in steel, printing, motor vehicles, telecommunications, aircraft, shipbuilding, on the railways or behind an office desk, every worker has been warned that his job may be next to go. **So too, his very power to fight for increases is threatened by the increasing army of unemployed.** Despite the autumn wage battles, many workers, eg., in Vauxhall and the aircraft industry settled for low wage rises, with their eyes fixed on the lengthening dole queues.

A simple cry has come up from the workers. "If you employers, financiers and capitalist politicians cannot create new jobs to reduce unemployment let us workers share out the jobs we have without loss in pay."

Faced with an intransigent ruling class, the question of industrial action will be posed.

In the past the 35-hour week was sometimes used in negotiations with management as a bargaining counter perhaps to be dropped at the first objection from management. But today it has been hoisted to become the main demand alongside that for wage increases. The TUC has called on all its member organisations to campaign for the 35-hour week.

It was the dispute in the Post Office during the middle of 1978 which highlighted both the threats and the possibilities inherent in new technology. The meteoric technological advances made in the telecommunications industry, such as the introduction of 'System X' in the telephone exchanges, poses a threat to tens of thousands of jobs. The Post Office has refused to give any guarantee of jobs past the next five years! Thus a union with members who previously lagged behind in industrial militancy, the Post Office Engineering Union, was drawn into action around the demand for a 35-hour week to protect jobs.

Area after area took to overtime bans and strikes in order to force the hand of management. When the men were on the verge of victory the union leadership signed an agreement with the Post Office, which, though it agreed a 37½ hour week, was on the basis of a disastrous productivity deal.

The rise in unemployment is explained mainly by the slower provision of new jobs rather than the faster destruction of old jobs. Andrew Glyn explained the issue in 'Militant' no. 409:

"...the fundamental point is that investment in new equipment does not itself cause loss of jobs. Certainly in the context of a stagnant market, investment will tend to have that effect, as new capacity, which can produce more cheaply and which employs fewer workers, drives out older plant...In Japan for example, in the 1950s and 1960s, the industrial capital stock grew at 12.5% a year, three times as fast as the British...But far from meaning that employment grew slower, it grew at 3.7% a

year in Japan and not at all in Britain."

In the high technology telecommunications industry itself, Britain's share of the world market has fallen from 25% in 1963 to 6% today. Likewise with the micro-electronics industry.

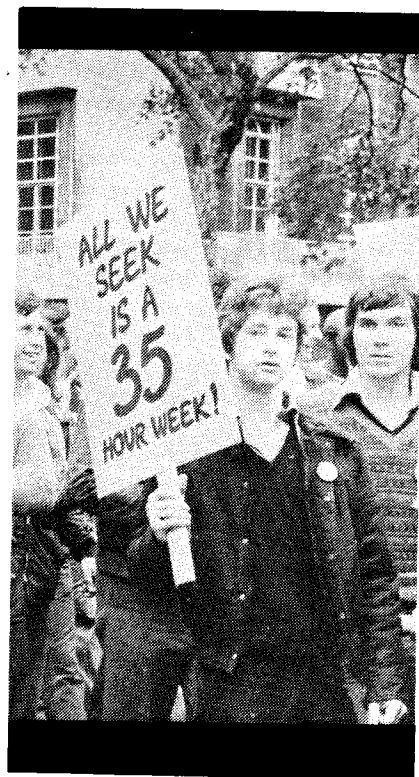
It is precisely for this reason that the government recently announced at the end of 1978 that £100 million would be put into developing the microcircuit industry. However this is a meagre sum to spend in developing this industry.

Referring to the introduction of new computing techniques, the Department of Industry in a confidential report, according to the Financial Times (14/11/78) said: **"there is a grave risk that more vigorous and better integrated policies for the sectors in other countries...will lead to the UK being overtaken. This could result in a loss of jobs even worse than that to be expected in any case from increased computer-based automation."** In other words, it is 'progress or death' for British industry, as it is for its competitors. The task is clear, to make new technology act in the interests of the working class.

Notably, in the print industry, the press barons have preferred to withhold new machinery rather than contemplate work-sharing. In the fierce confrontation at 'The Times', the owners demanded an enormous sacrifice for the introduction of new machines and forced the unions into a corner. Similarly in New York, Rupert Murdoch led the Newspaper Publishers Association into a dispute lasting three months in an attempt to secure trade union agreement over a halving of the labour force.

With the rapid growth conditions of the post-war boom at an end and technology still in the hands of the capitalists, trade unionists have been left in no doubt as to the prospects that technological progress holds out for their jobs.

The same Department of Industry report (see above) predicts 2.5 million to 3.5 million (ie. 10% to 15%) unemployment with the introduction of new computer techniques. One Professor Stonier has estimated that the micro-pro-



cessor will lead to only 5% to 15% of Britain's present workforce being necessary "to supply all our material needs"! Robot welders in the car factories, fully automated warehouses and coal mines are all an indication of the way in which labour can be replaced. New technology opens up both a vista of the potential transformation of men's life or monstrous levels of unemployment and poverty such as history has never seen before.

The stage is set for enormous confrontations. Aware of the likelihood of the organised resistance to further redundancies the ruling class are preparing.

In preparation for future battles they have pushed the Criminal Trespass Law and Prevention of Terrorism Act through Parliament giving them powers to deal with factory occupations and union activists. An indication of their changed attitude was shown in the period prior to 'The Times' lock-out and by the lock-out itself. They went even to the extent of changing the locks on the doors in their attempt to stop any possibility of a mass sit-in!

So too the working class have been limbering up with the POEU dispute, the Firemen's struggle for a 42-hour week and the overtime

ban which was called for January 1st by the Boilermakers Union whose members will be severely hit by a proposed 15% cut in jobs.

The Ford's dispute also provided a glimpse of the strategy of the employers who categorically turned down the unions' claim for 35-hours. However, an indication of the pressure for shorter hours appeared even as late in the strike as the 7th week, Ron Todd, T&GWU National Organiser still came out of the negotiations declaring a failure to agree not only on wages but also on hours. And though at the end of the long strike the majority of men were ready to go back with the 17% wage increase, the stewards at the Halwood plant recommended rejection of the deal mainly on the basis of the failure to win the 35-hours.

Notably in those countries where living standards are higher and have not been eroded to such a degree as in Britain over the last few years, the issue of hours has come more to the fore. The struggle of the German steel workers has led to the ruling Social Democratic Party giving a commitment to support the 35-hour week.

Struggle

The Belgian workers have already battled and won a shorter working week in the engineering plants, in large stores, in the petroleum industry, in Volvo, ITT and Phillips.

For the British workers, 1978 witnessed just the beginning of a movement which will grow and intensify in the coming years. The prospect of another recession by the end of 1979 or 1980 makes the need for action even more acute. Already the Labour Party National Executive and the TUC have been pressured to take up the leadership of this campaign. If this pressure is successful and the Labour Party were to pledge in its manifesto a commitment to the 35-hour week, it would lay the basis for drawing workers and unemployed together for a resounding election victory.

Such a struggle would point the way to the workers of Britain taking control of society, of industry and commerce in order to ensure that

all society's resources are used for the benefit of the working people in a rational way. More so, it would bring home to every worker the common link between himself, the workers of Britain and the workers of the world.

It was around the simple demand for the 8-hour day that Marx sought to construct an international bond of the working class, a preliminary condition for the ending of class rule.

"Even under the most favourable conditions all serious success of the proletariat depends upon an organisation that unites and concentrates its forces; and even its national organisation is still exposed to split on the disorganisation of the working classes in other countries, which one and all compete in the market of the world, acting and reacting the one upon the other. Nothing but an international bond of the working classes can ever

ensure their definitive triumph."

(Report of the 1868 Brussels Congress of the First International)

Capitalism's development of production and new technology has created enormous possibilities for mankind. A Britain under workers control and management could immediately cut the working week to give workers the time for education, for leisure and for running the affairs of the state. In 1919 when the Bavarian workers took power in Bavaria, Lenin's first advice to the Soviet was to introduce a 6-hour day to give the workers time to run the other aspects of society. With today's technology, a 20-hour week or 4-hour day would be an immediate possibility freeing the workers for the planning and construction of a socialist society in which all his social and material needs could be met.



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INTERNATIONAL NOTES

IRAN

The sudden and rapid undermining of the Shah's regime in Iran by the year-long tremendous wave of struggles which have swept the country have terrified the bourgeois internationally with the prospect of revolution. For years it seemed that the Shah's regime, propped up by immense oil wealth, which bolstered a well equipped army and the dreaded SAVAK secret police, was capable of resisting any opposition which developed. But despite this appearance of power, beneath the surface enormous contradictions were building up inside Iran which were eroding the foundations of the regime.

The growth of the oil revenue led to a tremendous development of Iranian industry, which accelerated after the 1973 jump in oil prices. Iran's Gross National Product grew by 33.9% in 1973/4 and in 1974/5 by 41.6%! Industry also grew rapidly and with it the size and strength of the working class. In developing the productive forces the regime prepared its own grave diggers in the form of the mighty proletariat. Since 1962 the number of people living in towns doubled to reach 50% of the population; Teheran the capital, increased its size from 3 million in 1968 to 5 million in 1977. Between 1956 and 1978 the number of workers employed in industry increased from 1,290,000 to 3,700,000, compared to 3,400,000 in agriculture out of a total employed population of 10,340,000! Not only has the working class enormously expanded, it is also very young; in

many factories the average age of unskilled workers is 20.

But while there was a tremendous growth in industry, so also did all the social contradictions. Inflation rocketed and provided the background to the development of colossal unrest in 1977. In 1977 the general inflation rate was 30% while in the year up to May 1977 the cost of food was up by 36%, and housing shot up by 55%. Even foreign businessmen were complaining that an 'ordinary' two bedroom flat in Teheran cost between £300 to £500 a month, while for workers the situation was naturally even worse. The cost of a room with shared kitchen and bath could be £100 a month, as much as 60% to 70% of a worker's wage! Despite plans to build 200,000 homes a year, the actual number built was 100,000 in five years.

On top of these appalling conditions the Government announced in 1976 a programme of retrenchment. The Shah, interviewed in 'Kayhan' in October 1976 said: "We have not demanded self sacrifice from people. Rather we have covered them in soft cotton wool. Things will now change. Everyone shall work harder and should be prepared for sacrifices in the service of the nation's progress". An example of this approach, according to the Shah, was that workers could no longer expect their traditional year-end bonus if their company was not making a profit.

This policy met with resistance from the working class in a series

of strikes as they became conscious of their growing strength. At first the regime was able to contain this movement by use of its repressive apparatus, but this was only at the expense of making it plain that in Iran any struggle, for even a small reform, became a political fight with the dictatorial regime. In this way the dictatorship's own measures, along with the appalling poverty, prepared the ground for the current mass upsurge. Thus the most widespread demands of the Iranian workers have been 'Down with the Shah', as the Shah has come to symbolise both the existing order and the repression.

In the face of a growing mass opposition to the Shah the leaders of both the Stalinist powers and imperialism have sought to prop him up (shown for example in the birthday greetings the Shah received from Carter, Brezhnev and Chairman Hua). Only now, as the opposition has grown even bigger and the Shah's position looks untenable, has imperialism begun to toy with the idea of sacrificing the Shah as a token concession aimed at preserving its interests in Iran.

The support for the Shah has not been purely because of a philanthropic wish to preserve one more monarch before the entire species becomes extinct but out of the fear that the overthrow of the Shah would open the doors to the development of a movement directed against capitalism.

Already at the time of writing schemes are being laid for the formation of a civilian government

including leaders of the liberal capitalist National Front. The National Union of National Front Forces is a coalition of "moderate opposition forces" (Le Monde) such as the Iran Party, led by Shapur Bakhtiar the ex-general manager of the big French-Iranian company Aalam, and the Mellat Iran (Iran Nationalist Party). The National Front's leader Karim Sanjabi has continually stressed that he is prepared to come to terms with the Shah. But at the same time when under pressure from the masses he has also had to say that there can be "no compromise" with the Shah (*Financial Times* 11/11/78). Yet only five days after this statement it was widely rumoured that he was in discussions with the Shah — under the cover of being apparently arrested — on how to set up a 'constitutional' monarchy.

The *Times* has already commented on the moderate leaders' suitability for taking over the role of the protector of capitalism if the Shah falls. Its editorial on 8/9/78 praised how the **'religious leaders in the Iranian Liberation Movement and the heirs of Mossadegh grouped in the National Front, have consistently refused to collaborate with Marxists'**. Yet in spite of this attempt to reassure imperialism about the future in Iran the *Observer* had earlier quite accurately spelt out the bosses' difficulties because the **"Shah's dilemma is that if he further unscrews the lid of the pressure vessel and agrees to genuinely free elections, he may release forces he cannot control. If he does not, his elections will be seen as a sham, and the already troublesome opposition will take to the streets again, to provide another sort of ungovernability."** (13/8/78)

The mere fact that the opposition movement appears at this stage under the religious leadership of the Moslem priests (Ayatullahs) does not mean that it is either reactionary or that the movement cannot develop into a wider struggle to eliminate capitalism. The 1905 Revolution in Russia began with the mass presentation of a petition to the

Tsar in the St. Petersburg Winter Palace. The petition had been organised by a priest, Father Gapon, who moreover was most probably a police agent! Yet in spite of this the shooting down of that march by the Tsar's troops was the spark which ignited the revolution. In the same way the religious demonstrations and shootings in Qom at the beginning of 1978, coming after a period of mounting struggles and protests by workers, students and intellectuals, were only the catalyst which brought to the surface the tensions which had been building up below for some time.

But the central difference between Iran and Russia, even in 1905, is that no independent workers' party, as yet, has developed, capable of putting forward an independent policy for the working class around which it could unite and lead the rest of the Iranian masses in the struggle against capitalism. The fight against the Shah and for democratic rights is a struggle for clearing away the repressive obstacles to the fight for the winning of decent living standards and conditions, which will inevitably develop into a struggle against the capitalist system itself.

This is the reason for the ruling class's fear and why the preparations are being made for some token concessions which they hope will defuse the situation and remove the threat over capitalism's future in Iran. They hope for a so-called 'Spanish Solution' to the Iranian Crisis. Yet it is plain to see that the granting of a few democratic rights in Spain has only

served to strengthen the workers' organisations and not remove the workers' willingness to struggle.

The Iranian workers have shown time and time again their power to extract concessions out of the regime — such as the over 25% wage increase, and their bravery in the face of Army and police bullets. At the same time they are becoming more and more conscious of their strength. The rapid spread of the stay-in strikes throughout all sectors of the economy after the massacre of September 8th demonstrated the power of the working class and their growing understanding of where their power lay. The success of the strikes in both winning some concessions and paralysing the economy increased the workers' confidence to once again take to the streets against the Shah and his supporters at the end of September. This resulted in the burning down of the British Embassy, as the Iranian masses answer to Owen's support for the regime.

At the same time the strength of the mass movement has increasingly had an impact on the Army conscripts, with some soldiers standing by as demonstrators attacked symbols of the Shah and the capitalists. Others refused to fire at the crowds and consequently been summarily shot by their officers. This has shown that the Shah cannot rely on most of the 220,000 strong armed forces and is using the 70,000 strong gendarmerie outside Tehran and in the capital the regular soliders of the Imperial Guard and a special forces brigade which are

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considered "politically reliable", unlike the mass of conscripts.

Yet in December reports have appeared in the British press that some crack Imperial Guard troops have mutinied and shot their officers.

In the face of the opposition of virtually the whole population to him and his regime it is extremely doubtful that the Shah can survive the present crisis.

Indeed the bourgeois press in Britain has openly reported that the main pre-occupation of the Shah is how best to depart from the scene while retaining intact the basis of his regime. Various proposals have been floated including the suggestion that his son should replace him.

But such is the mood of all layers of the population that this "solution" seems highly unlikely. Indeed even the army tops are reported to be divided as to what to do. One section still supports the Shah while another wants him to abdicate for fear that the army will soon break in their hands with the ordinary soldiers ready to go over to the side of the demonstrators.

All the conditions for revolution exist in Iran. The bourgeoisie is divided and doesn't know which way to turn. One section of the ruling class has shown that it believes that the game is up by fleeing the country with an estimated 2,000 million dollars.

The middle classes in the towns and in the countryside have turned against the regime.

Above all the Iranian working class has shown unsurpassed heroic qualities in the past few months. No amount of bloodshed, tanks and the paraphernalia of repression has been able to prevent them from organising one general strike after another.

If a mass Marxist Party existed in Iran the socialist revolution would be a reality and the Shah would be in exile or standing trial for his crimes against the Iranian people.

This may still happen in the period opening up. Some sections of the bourgeois press have attempted to picture the movement in Iran as merely a "holy war"



inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini and Islam merely provides a rallying point against the regime. (The Muslim religion was the only legally permitted opposition to the Shah.) Khomeini has denounced "Communism" and "Marxism". However, if a regime led, or inspired by him came to power in Iran this would be only a short interlude.

As the *Times* and other serious journals of capitalism have warned an "Islamic Republic" could be very quickly followed by a regime which would move sharply to the left. The departure of the Shah would open the floodgates even wider and allow the rapid organisation of a mass Marxist movement which could lead the masses in completely overthrowing Iranian landlordism and capitalism.

A bourgeois democratic regime would merely represent a problems of Iranian society. It would merely represent a "democratic interlude" which would give way to either a viciously reactionary regime which would attempt to crush the Iranian workers and peasants or a radical government which would

nationalise industry and the land and begin the planning of the resources of Iranian society.

The struggle to win the masses' economic and social demands will inevitably develop against capitalism, which has already demanded 'retrenchment' in Iran and even in the richer advanced capitalist countries of the West is attempting to force through austerity programmes against a background of mass unemployment. While concessions can and will be won through the strength of the workers struggles, the bosses will continually attempt to take back with the right hand what they are forced to give with the left. This is why in Iran, as in Russia in 1917, the fight for the masses' immediate demands is indissolubly linked with the need to overthrow the capitalist order.

The Iranian workers have already proved their ability to struggle. What is needed now is for this tremendous movement to be given a clear programme and direction by a leadership drawing socialist conclusions from the experiences of these struggles and of the working class internationally.

It is plain that the Shah's days are numbered and it is only a matter of time before the present regime collapses. The working class has already seen the power that it has both in the factories, the oil refineries, in the offices and on the streets. However as the immediate situation unfolds, more and more workers will be drawing the conclusions from their struggles of the need for an independent workers' party with a Marxist programme, which will be able to lead the struggle for a Socialist Iran.

Already the events in Iran have shaken the whole area, which the *Financial Times* has described as a "tinder box". The overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in Iran would be an example which would set the whole of the Middle East and Indian sub-continent alight with the flame of revolution.

Bob Labi

SPAIN

The carefully orchestrated applause which has greeted the acceptance of the new Spanish Constitution (Spain's seventh since 1812) cannot disguise the reality of the continuing crisis in Spain.

The referendum to approve the Constitution exposed the tensions existing in Spain with a national average abstention of 32%, which rose to 56% in the two key Basque provinces of Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya. This was a mark of the opposition to the Government and particularly to the Constitution's failure to guarantee the national rights of the Basque people.

The new Constitution, while granting certain democratic rights, at the same time gives the king a "central role as arbiter, mediator, a fount of loyalty" and will "in practice permit him an important area of behind-the-scenes manoeuvre" (Financial Times 6/12/78). The King's functions include approval of laws, convening and dissolving Parliament, calling referendums and naming the Prime Minister. If after two months a Prime Minister nominated by the King has not won a vote of confidence in the Congress, then Parliament is dissolved and new elections held. The new Constitution puts the King in a position above Parliament where he can become a figurehead of reaction in a time of crisis. Thus it represents a shift towards a more 'democratic' form of Bonapartism by the Spanish ruling class.

The Constitution declares that "free enterprise in the context of a market economy" (ie. capitalism) is the basis of the Spanish society. In addition it gives the employers, for the first time, the legal right to lock out workers. While the Constitution permits strikes, in the section on collective bargaining it does not even mention the words 'trade union'.



Police in the wings

The Constitution is in fact an attempt to preserve a Bonapartist state in Spain, giving the Government and the King powers to act without Parliamentary approval. Under it the Government retains the right to promulgate legislation by means of administrative decrees. But this attempt by the Spanish ruling class to preserve for itself repressive powers to use later against the working class will not help it to weather the approaching storms in Spain.

The sharpening clash of interests between the Spanish bourgeoisie and the working class, despite the workers' leaders clear wish to arrive at some accommodation, was revealed in the failure to reach agreement on a new Moncloa Pact. The Government and the CEOE (the Spanish CBI) want wage increases this year held to 12½%, but the trade unions demanded 16½%, while inflation in 1978 was 17%. At the end of 1978 the Government imposed an 11-14% wage ceiling, which the unions rejected demanding a minimum 16% wage increase and shorter working hours.

In spite of the lowering of inflation from 30% to 17% and a

surprise balance of payments surplus last year, the general appraisal of even capitalist economists is that this was the "result of a fortunate combination of events and something of a once-and-for-all phenomenon" (Financial Times 13/12/78). Even this was only achieved by a momentary squeeze resulting in the rocketing of unemployment to over a million (according to the official government figures) out of a 13.3 million strong workforce, a sharp rise in company bankruptcies and a fall in investment.

The main strategy of the Government is to reduce the working class's share of the wealth it produces thereby increasing profits and, hopefully, stimulating investment. Investment inside Spain has been falling since 1974 while the export of capital from Spain has jumped; in the first nine months of 1978 it totalled \$550 million. The ruling class, fearful of the workers' strength, has sought to use the workers' leaders to 'control' their members through the 'Moncloa Pact'. In the words of the state economic agency CEDIN this involves "holding down the cost of labour—through wages as well as

National Assistance—and a policy of monetary austerity."

But in spite of the workers' leaders acceptance of the Moncloa Pact in November 1977 Spain has been swept by a wave of struggles. Workers have sought to use their newly-won democratic rights to make up for what they missed during the years of dictatorship and against the impact of the current economic crisis. 1978 once again demonstrated the power and combativity of the Spanish proletariat, not just on economic issues, but in social and political struggles as well. When for instance, the Barcelona bosses attempted to organise resistance to the new labour law, which granted certain concessions to the unions, over 800,000 workers in the area came out on strike in protest.

In the first six months of 1978, 3,170,000 workers, a quarter of the working class, were involved in strike action. This was 40,000 more than went on strike in the same period in 1976, which was a record year for strikes in Spain, involving in total over 5,500,000 workers.

Unemployment has been one of the major issues confronting the Spanish Labour Movement. The Government claims that unemployment is a million, while the Socialsit Party (PSOE) economists working in the National Statistics Office estimated that it really is 1,700,000, around 11% of the working population! In addition these PSOE economists have said that the Spanish economy would have to grow by at least 5% this year and next just to stop unemployment rising. Yet the Government thinks that the economy will grow at most by 4.8%.

This unemployment is not evenly spread across the country; the depressed regions like Andalucia and Extremadura have much higher levels. Parts of Andalucia, like Cadiz, Malaga and Seville, have official unemployment rates ranging from 14% to almost 16%. A recent survey by the Bank of Bilbao concluded that while the rich provinces were getting richer the poor provinces were getting poorer. In the face of this situation enormous movements have developed in Andalucia. Thus a day of

protest action involved three million out of the five million people who live in the region.

But it is not only the grinding poverty of some regions which is fuelling the growth of the regionalist and nationalist movements in Spain. The two important Basque provinces of Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa have per capita income double the national average and three times greater than Andalucia. In fact the economic growth in the Basque country has strengthened the working class and made it more determined to struggle against the long-standing national oppression which the Basques have suffered from the central government.

The tremendous development of the national movements inside Spain has resulted both from the national oppression of the Franco regime and the dead end which Spanish capitalism finds itself in. The leaders of the workers parties, the PSOE and the Communist Party (PCE), have co-operated with the capitalist Suarez Government and refused to support the right of self-determination for these regions. But super-imposed on the class oppression is the denial of the national rights—including the right of self determination—of the people of the Basque country. This has only increased the national feelings throughout the area.

The new Constitution gives the regions only limited powers subject to the ultimate control of the central government and quite categorically rules out the formation of a Federal state, let alone granting the right of self-determination. The Constitution lists 22 powers that may be transferred to the regions, ranging from promotion of culture to supervising hospitals. But at the same time it leaves open the question of where the money for these services will come from, particularly now at a time of economic crisis.

It has been the development of all these tensions, along with the unrest among the right-wing military and police officers, that has steadily undermined the position of the capitalist government of Suarez, the ex-general secretary of Franco's fascist 'party', the Movimiento. This weakening of support was the

reason why the municipal elections were not held in 1978. In this situation it was only the policies of the PSOE and PCE leaders which enabled the Suarez Government to continue in office despite its massive drop in support and build up its 'democratic' credentials.

Events in recent months however have shown that the workers leaders have not been able to restrain the working class any longer. It has become increasingly clear that enormous tensions are building up inside the labour movement. Opposition to the leaders' policies has shown itself openly with section after section of the PSOE, the PCE and the PSOE-led General Workers Union (UGT) and the PCE-led Workers Commissions (CC.OO) rejecting their leaders' policies. Expulsions, especially in the PSOE and the UGT, of dissidents have taken place. A fall in membership of these organisations as workers drop out disappointed at the lack of radical change brought about by their leaders is also evident. Between January and November last year the PSOE's membership alone fell from 230,000 to 62,000 (Financial Times 30/11/78).

Yet despite this falling off in membership of the PSOE, the general swing in Spanish society is towards the left. A mid-December opinion poll gave the PSOE 38.7% and Suarez's ruling Centre Democratic Union (UCD) 27.3%. When the PCE's support of around 15% is added it is clear that the workers' parties have at present the majority of support. This compares with the 34.3% the UCD and the 28.5% the PSOE won in the June 1977 General Election. This indicates the mass radicalisation which is occurring, while at the same time the more active layers of the working class are becoming more watchful and critical of the policies of the workers' leaders.

It is this overwhelming move towards the left that would have doomed the right-wing coup planned by the officers involved in the so-called 'Galaxy plot' last November. A military rebellion, at this stage when workers are confident of their developing strength, would only have provoked a mighty

working class movement in resistance. The majority of the officers and bourgeoisie saw the danger that such a resistance movement would develop into an attack on the foundations of their regime, in the same way as Spinola's attempted coup in March 1975 led to the nationalisation of 67% of the Portuguese economy. It was for this reason that the coup was stopped, although the widespread sympathy for the aims of the plotters can be seen in the facts that only two of the five main conspirators have been arrested and that at least 200 officers, while refusing to join the coup, did not report the plotters to the authorities.

The UCD Government is resting upon sand and could quite quickly collapse in the face of a big movement. It is clear that preparations are already being tentatively made for the possible formation of a coalition government embracing a section of the UCD, the PSOE and probably the PCE. Certainly the PSOE leaders have been pushing for a UCD-PSOE coalition, with themselves in a supporting role, and Felipe Gonzalez, the PSOE leader, has recently said that as "a last resort" in an emergency he would be prepared to join such a coalition.

Even with the new wage controls the workers leaders are not prepared to give a fighting lead against the Government. The 'Guardian' reported that a TV debate between the Economics Minister, Fernando Abril, and the CC.OO and UGT leaders, Marcelion Camacho and Nicholas Redondo, held just after the Government announced the new wage limits was a "flop. Each man expressed ably...his already well known views, but there was no clash of opinion. Doubtless there had been some polite agreement made between them before the show". (30/12/78).

The March 1st General Election is an attempt by Suarez to maintain his support before it has been undermined by the clashes over the Government's wages policy, and to 'cash in' on the credibility which the support he has had from the PSOE AND PCE leaders have given him. Suarez hopes to win a

majority in the General Election which would put him in a good position to win the Municipal Elections which are finally being held on April 3rd. Suarez has known "full well that the municipalities—staffed with appointees of the former regime, some of which have changed to UCD colours—would swing towards the Left" (Financial Times 13/12/78), which is why they have been delayed so long.

But in spite of these tactics, it is highly likely that Suarez's UCD will lose support and that the Socialist and Communist Parties will emerge with increased support—if not an absolute majority. This in turn could lead to the entry of the CP and SP leaders into a coalition government.

There could be no doubt whatsoever that a coalition would be totally incapable of solving the problems facing the Spanish working class. The only reason that the ex-fascist Suarez would be prepared to form a coalition is that the UCD Government was incapable of continuing in office with its present policies without bringing in the workers leaders in an attempt to hold the situation.

But at the same time enormous hopes would be raised among the broad masses by the entry of the workers' leaders into the Government. There would be the expectation that this Government would be able to achieve some significant improvements in working people's situation. But such a coalition would be incapable of delivering the goods. An alliance with a

capitalist party naturally means that the workers' leaders have to accept the implementation of capitalist measures—measures which are directed against the working class. Thus a coalition would serve to strengthen the opposition inside the labour movement to the leadership's policies, which was the reason Gonzalez gave to the Madrid paper 'El Pais' last October for his being at that time lukewarm towards the idea of a coalition.

The Spanish working class is steadily digesting the lessons of the past period and the more advanced layers are moving towards the ideas of Marxism, a progress which the leadership is trying to stop with expulsions. But administrative measures will not stop this growth of support for Marxism. The Spanish workers are testing out their leaders and organisations to see whether they are capable of meeting their needs. It is the depth of the crisis in Spain which is giving this process its explosive character. Despite the disappointment with the existing leadership there is no large scale turning away to alternative organisations. Thus in spite of the massive fall in PSOE's actual membership its broad support is still growing. When the struggle turns back again from the industrial plane to the political one there will be a renewed upsurge in support for the traditional workers' parties, the PSOE and PCE, and inside of them a sharpening struggle for the Socialist policies necessary to lead the Spanish working class to victory.

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION 1931-37 By Ted Grant

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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND THE WORKING CLASS

We publish below an article by Trotsky which has only recently appeared in English for the first time. We believe that this article will be of particular interest to our readers in view of the recent rabid campaign of the capitalist press against the lorry drivers, the council workers and others who have been involved in strike action. Trotsky nails the lie that Marxists are opposed to the 'freedom of the press'.

To take away the capitalists' virtual monopoly of the press is not to strike a blow against the 'freedom of the press'. On the contrary, to put these resources "in the hands of society as a whole" would be the first real step towards the 'freedom of the press.' Even the capitalist parties would be given access to publishing facilities—something which they deny to the working class today—in proportion to their support in the population. On the basis of a planned economy capitalist propaganda would have no attraction to the working class or middle class.

The article is also important in explaining why it is wrong for the labour movement to demand that the state should introduce repressive legislation which is invariably used against the labour movement.

Editor

A campaign against the reactionary press is underway in Mexico. The attack is being directed by the CTM leaders, or, more precisely, by Mr Lombardo Toledano* personally. The objective is to 'curb' the reactionary press, either by placing it under a democratic censorship or by banning it altogether. The trade unions have been mobilised for war. The incurable democrats, headed by 'friends' of the GPU, have hailed this campaign, which cannot be regarded as anything but suicidal. In fact, it is not difficult to foresee that even if this campaign triumphs and leads to practical results that will suit the taste of Lombardo Toledano, the ultimate consequences will be borne primarily by the working class.

Both theory and historical ex-

perience testify that any restriction of democracy in bourgeois society is, in the final analysis, invariably directed against the proletariat, just as any taxes that are imposed also fall on the shoulders of the working class. Bourgeois democracy is of use to the proletariat only insofar as it opens up the way for the development of the class struggle. Consequently, any working class 'leader' who arms the bourgeois state with special means for controlling public opinion in general and the press in particular is, precisely, a traitor. In the last analysis, the sharpening of the class struggle will impel the bourgeoisie of every stripe to reach an agreement among themselves; they will then pass special laws, all sorts of restrictive measures, and all kinds of 'democratic' censorship against the working class. Anyone who has not yet understood this should get out of the ranks of the working class.

'But at times', some 'friends' of the USSR will object, 'the dictator-

ship of the proletariat is forced to resort to special measures, particularly against the reactionary press.'

'This objection', we reply, 'comes down primarily to trying to identify a workers' state with a bourgeois state. Even though Mexico is a semicolonial country, it is also a bourgeois state, and in no way a workers' state. However, even from the standpoint of the interests of the dictatorship of the proletariat, banning bourgeois newspapers or censoring them does not in the least constitute a 'programme', or a 'principle' or an ideal set-up. Measures of this kind can only be a temporary, unavoidable evil.'

Once at the helm, the proletariat may find itself forced, for a certain time, to take special measures against the bourgeoisie, if the bourgeoisie assumes an attitude of open rebellion against the workers' state. In that case, restricting freedom of the press goes hand in hand with all the other measures employed in waging a civil war.

*Vincente Lombardo Toledano, a Stalinist was the head of the Mexican Confederation of workers [CTM], the major trade union federation in Mexico.

Naturally, if you are forced to use artillery and planes against the enemy, you cannot permit this same enemy to maintain his own centres of news and propaganda within the armed camp of the proletariat. Nonetheless, in this instance, too, if the special measures are extended until they become an enduring pattern, they in themselves carry the danger of getting out of hand and of the workers' bureaucracy gaining a political monopoly that would be one of the sources of its degeneration.

We have a living example of such a dynamic before us in the detestable suppression of freedom of speech and the press that is now the rule in the Soviet Union. This has nothing to do with the interests of the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the contrary, it is designed to protect the interests of the new governing caste from the worker and peasant opposition. That very Bonapartist bureaucracy in Moscow is now being aped by Mr Lombardo Toledano and Company, who equate their personal careers with the interests of socialism.

The real tasks of the workers' state lie not in clamping a police gag on public opinion but rather in freeing it from the yoke of capital. This can be done only by placing the means of production, including the production of public information, in the hands of society as a whole. Once this fundamental socialist step has been taken, all currents of public opinion that have not taken up arms against the dictatorship of the proletariat must be given the opportunity to express themselves freely. It is the duty of the workers' state to make available to them, in proportion to their numbers, all the technical means they may require, such as presses, paper, and transport. One of the main causes of the degeneration of the state apparatus is the Stalinist bureaucracy's monopolisation of the press, which threatens to reduce all the gains of the October Revolution to utter ruin.

If we were to go looking for examples of the Comintern's fatal influence on the workers' movements in various countries, the present campaign led by Lombardo

Toledano would provide one of the oddest. Toledano and his fellow doctrinaires are trying essentially to introduce into a bourgeois democratic system means and methods that might in certain temporary conditions prove unavoidable under a dictatorship of the proletariat. What is more, they are not really borrowing these methods from the dictatorship of the proletariat but rather from its Bonapartist usurpers. In other words, they are infecting an already ailing bourgeois democracy with the virus of decaying Stalinist bureaucracy.

Mexico's anaemic democracy faces a constant and deadly threat from two directions—first, from foreign imperialism, and second, from the agents of reaction within the country, who control the publications with the widest circulation. But only the blind or feeble-minded could think that, as the result of a ban on the reactionary press, the workers and peasants can free themselves from the influence of reactionary ideas. In reality, only the greatest freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly can create favourable conditions for the advance of the revolutionary movement of the working class.

It is essential to wage a relentless struggle against the reactionary press. But workers cannot let the repressive fist of the bourgeois state substitute for the struggle that they must wage through their own organisations and their own press. Today the state may appear to be 'kindly' disposed to the workers' organisations; tomorrow the government may fall, into the hands of the most reactionary elements of the bourgeoisie. In that case, whatever restrictive legislation that exists will be thrown at the workers. Only adventurers with no thought

other than for the needs of the moment would fail to heed such a danger.

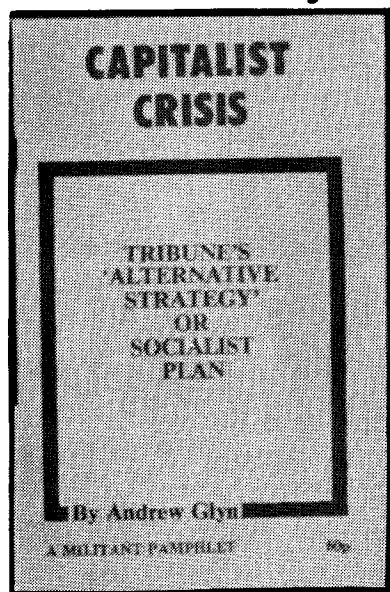
The most effective way to combat the bourgeois press is to expand the working class press. Of course, yellow journals of "El Popular's" ilk are incapable of taking up such a task. Such sheets have no place among the workers' press, the revolutionary press, or even the reputable democratic press. 'El Popular' serves the personal ambitions of Mr Lombardo Toledano, who in turn serves the Stalinist bureaucracy. Its methods—lies, slander, witch-hunting campaigns, and falsification—are also Toledano's methods. His newspaper has neither programme nor ideas. Obviously such a sheet can never strike a responsive chord into the working class or win the proletariat away from the bourgeois press.

So, we come to the unavoidable conclusion that the fight against the bourgeois press starts with throwing out the degenerate 'leaders' of the working class organisations, in particular with freeing the workers' press from the tutelage of Lombardo Toledano and the other bourgeois place seekers. The Mexican proletariat has to have an honest newspaper to express its needs, defend its interests, broaden its horizon, and prepare the way for the socialist revolution in Mexico. This is what 'Clave' proposes to do. So, we are starting out by declaring unrelenting war against Toledano's wretched Bonapartist pretensions. And in this effort we are looking forward to the support of all advanced workers, Marxists, and genuine democrats.

Leon Trotsky, August 21 1938.

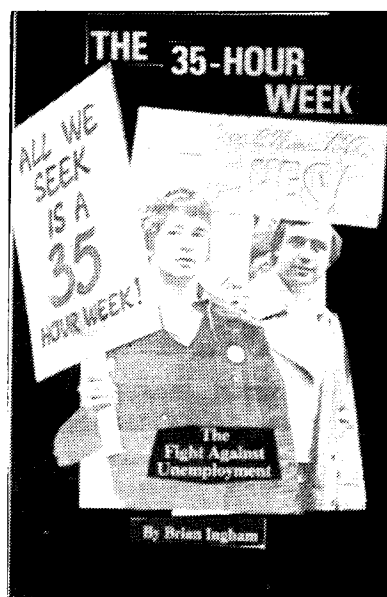
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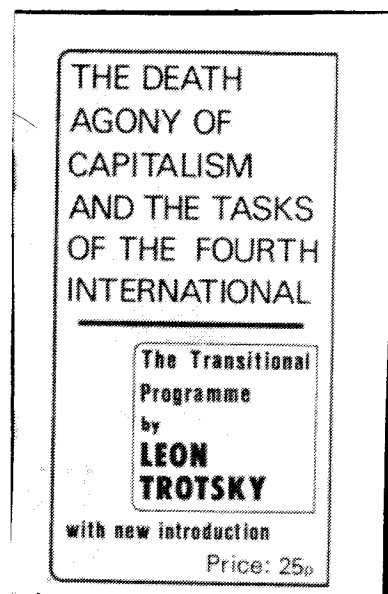
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