



Militant

international review

BRITAIN
-into the
eighties

HUNGARY
-1919 soviet
republic

SPAIN

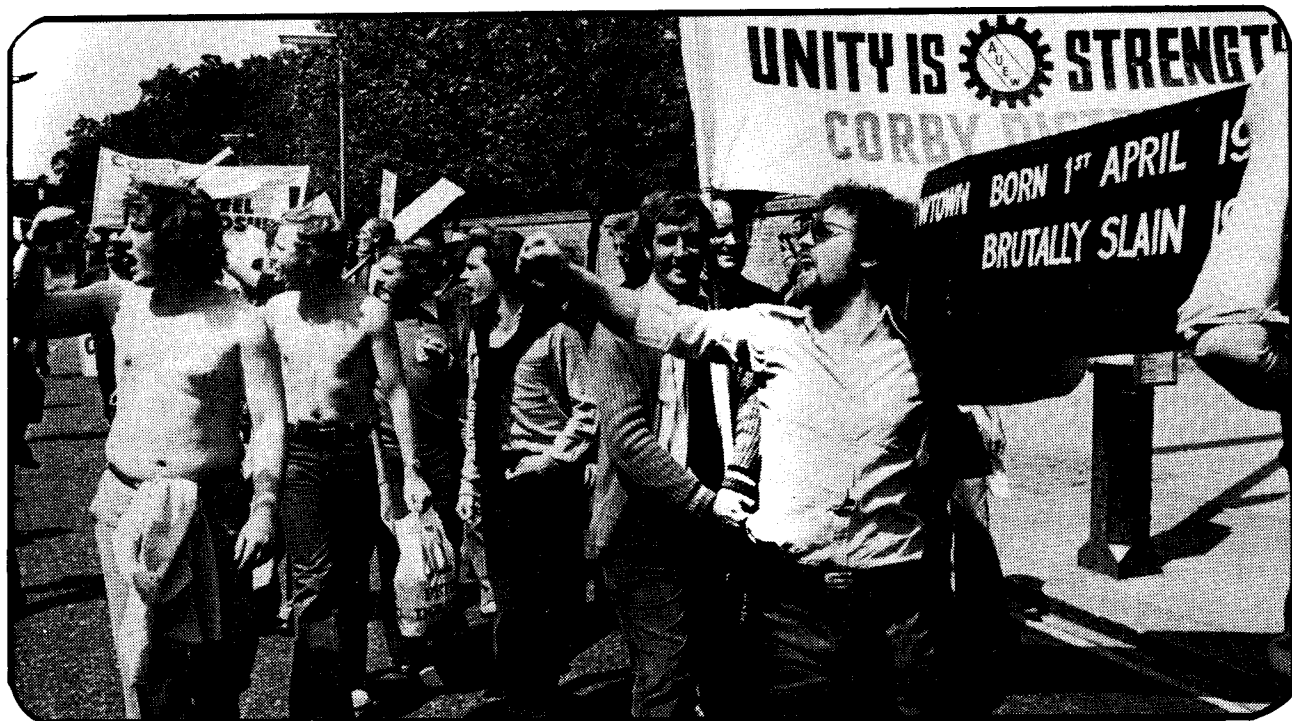
WINTER 1980 40p

CONTENTS

"Forward into the 'Eighties" 3

**The Forgotten Revolution:
The Hungarian Soviet Republic 1919..... 12**

Letter from Madrid 28



"Forward into the 'Eighties"

Peter Taaffe, editor of 'Militant', looks at the current situation in Britain and points the way forward for Labour.

All photos in this section by Julian McKittrick [Militant]

The 1970s was a disastrous decade for the British ruling class. In the last ten years they have seen a further decline in their position. From a second rate power British capitalism has become a third or even fourth rate power. Yet in the '80s the British bourgeoisie may look back wistfully to the last decade as a period of economic and social "stability".

Certainly as we go into a new decade their spokesmen have little hope that they can recapture their past glory. On the contrary in the writings and prognostications of the bourgeois economists and political commentators is to be found not a spark of optimism.

At the beginning of the '70s the coming to power of the Heath

government gave a little confidence and strength to the bourgeoisie. They looked towards Heath being able to reverse the relationship between the classes in their favour. But this government was wrecked by the resistance of the working class.

Now as fate would have it a new decade sees a Tory government in power. Even more than Heath the new Tory prime minister, Thatcher, promises in evangelical terms a rebirth of British capitalism. And the capitalists, despite their misgivings in relation to the Tory leader herself, responded enthusiastically to the promise of a "new dawn". They poured over £11 million into the Tory party coffers during the last year; over £3 million used directly in the general election.

But within a matter of months of the Tory Party coming to power the expectations of the ruling class, if not yet completely evaporated, have been somewhat dimmed. Thatcher has not succeeded in restoring the lost fortunes of the capitalists. But she has stirred up, in a far shorter time than the Heath government, a greater wave of protest and indignation on the part of the working class.

An unbridgeable chasm has been opened up between the classes by the measures of the government in its first six months of office.

Thatcher promised that through the policy of savage deflation—cuts in the living standards of the working class—she would restore the profitability of big business. Yet the reality

today is entirely different from the picture painted by Thatcher and her acolytes.

Even the agencies of the government itself, such as the Treasury, are forced to predict a further decline in the next few years. Investment in manufacturing industry is expected to drop by 3% this year in comparison to last year, and a 7% drop is anticipated in the course of 1980. An optimistic estimate by the government itself is that the economy will decline by 2% in the next year but independent economists such as the Independent Treasury Estimates Movement estimate it could be upwards of 4%.

Moreover, this will go together with a big rise in inflation. In the long term the position of British capitalism is catastrophic. According to a confidential Treasury economic projection leaked to the press last month, "Motor vehicles production will fall by 21% in 1983, mechanical engineering by 23% and other metal goods by nearly 25%" (29 October, 'Financial Times').

CAPITALIST CONTRADICTIONS

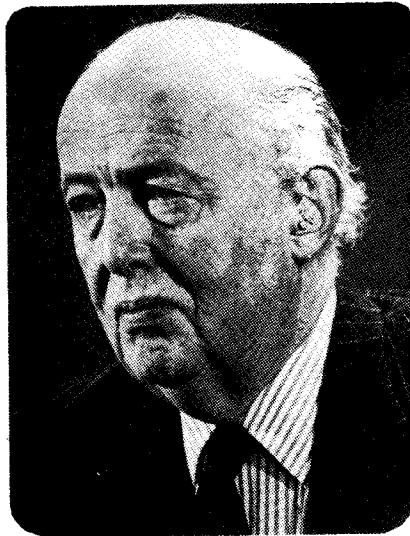
One sign of the decay of British capitalism and its representatives was shown in a recent article in the 'Financial Times' where a writer attempted to draw consolation from the fact that German exports of machine tools were "only" five times as large as those of the UK! He wrote: "By the standards of medium sized industrialised countries the UK can hardly be written off as a total flop."

How the mighty have fallen! But as the 'Economist' pointed out recently: "As late as the mid-1950s Britain was among the top ten richest nations in the world with an income per head about 25% higher than West Germany's and five times as high as Japan. Now its place in the world league is somewhere in the mid 20s. Japan's income per head is more than 50% higher." Not one of the serious representatives of capitalism expects the situation to be more favourable in the future.



"Thatcher has demonstrated her complete incapacity to understand class relations in Britain"

Tory chairman Thornycroft commented that the events of the Labour Party Conference were a "sad day for Britain."



The Tory government must be sadly ruminating on the fact that despite the lavish concessions and bribes given to big business, as the 'Financial Times' pointed out, it has been rewarded with "the most precipitous industrial decline" since the end of the second world war. The strategy of Thatcher and Co. was founded on the idea that by slashing the living standards of the working class this would give the necessary resources to the capitalists to re-invest back into industry.

It is a reversion to the traditional methods of the bourgeoisie of the 1930s and the 19th century, of savage deflation in order to provide a boost to profitability.

Yet as the Marxists have pointed out many times this is bound to fail even if Thatcher is successful in slashing the living standards of the working class. Throughout the whole of the capitalist world and particularly in Britain, there is the phenomenon of what the capitalists call 'excess capacity': industry is working at no more than 80% of capacity.

Moreover, with the onset of a world recession there is no incentive for capitalists to re-invest in industry at this stage. At the same time by cutting the living standards of the working class, the market is cut, which is a further disincentive to the capitalists to re-invest.

These contradictions of capitalism have completely shattered the whole strategy upon which this government is based. Added to this is the raising of the minimum lending rate to the unprecedentedly high figure of 17%. This is a further enormous disincentive to the industrialists to re-invest. At the Lord Mayor's banquet in the presence of Tory Chancellor Howe, the Lord Mayor of London himself declared: "If foreign industrialists can borrow capital for their industry at 7% we cannot fully compete if we have to borrow money to put in new equipment at 15% or 16%."

In other words why should the capitalists invest when the rate of profit has sunk to 3% and threatens to go lower in the next period, and out of this the banks take a massive rake-off for borrowing and the landlords take a cut. In this climate the industrial capitalists more and more switch to investment overseas, in land—not just in the urban areas but agricultural land as well—to investment in property etc. This has further undermined the already weakened industrial base of British capitalism.

In the next decade it spells doom for the capitalists in Britain. It is not just in the older more traditional industries that British capitalism is falling behind, but in the modern

industries as well. Thus the introduction of industrial robots has proceeded at a very speedy rate in America and Japan.

Of the 6 to 7 thousand industrial robots in use around the world today half are in Japan and a quarter in the United States and the rest are in Europe. But Britain has a mere 60 or 70 robots in use at the present time in comparison to West Germany's 500! The traditional industries such as steel, still retain their importance in the economy. Yet the ruthless closure of Corby, Shotton and of other steel plants has meant a colossal contraction of the industrial capacity of British capitalism.

This will leave British capitalism in the 1980s dependent on the imports of steel from its rivals. Even at this stage in certain special steels British capitalism is compelled to import enormous amounts. Thus the whole justification for the Tory strategy is already in ruins. As the 'Economist' points out: "Resources are not going to move from inefficient to highly profit making activities because practically no business activity in the next two years is going to be highly profitable" (October 20th).

This vicious spokesman of British capitalism has urged the Tory government to go even further in its attacks on the living standards of the working class. In the same issue of this journal it demands that: "Public sector employers should give nil wage rises to public servants in areas where it is desirable to persuade people to leave in droves, or ask for a transfer. ["The government should abolish the central bargaining function."].

Its comments on the Employment Protection Act, Health and Safety legislation etc. shows the desperate straits of British capitalism: "It is no answer for apologists for British legislation to point to similar demands elsewhere in Europe. They can be afforded." It further adds: "The indexation of so many social security payments is a lunacy. Most private sector rents should be abolished." Such are the desperate straits of British capitalism that some of the spokesmen of the bourgeois have begun to think the

unthinkable, by suggesting the introduction by this government of a form of import controls.

In October exports recorded were £3,577 million but imports were £3,916 million. Despite the existence of North Sea oil, a balance of payments deficit of £3,000 million is likely to be recorded in 1979, and upwards of £2,000 million deficit this year.

BRITAIN FALLS BEHIND

In this situation voices were raised at the recent CBI conference calling for a measure of import controls. Now Ronald Butt writing in 'The Times' (22 November) suggests in a very tentative fashion that this government should introduce import controls.

Indicating the thinking of a section of the strategists of capital, he writes: "Everyone except a few Tory backbenchers who do not like to say it too loudly has chosen to forget the old Tory association with protection from Disraeli onwards." In other words historically protectionism has always been a feature of Tory policy.

He goes on to complain, "At present ours is about the easiest market in the world to penetrate. Japan on the other hand makes its market as hard as possible by sacrificing commercial criteria to penetrate the markets of others. At present a large part of the world exports its unemployment to us."

The latter part of this statement could have been lifted from the writings of many of the 'Tribune' economists. Butt calls for the introduction of a form of the "temporary imports surcharge imposed by the Labour government in 1964." As an alternative he suggests an Import Deposit Scheme similar to that which was introduced in 1968. Moreover he is not alone in calling for these measures. Tapsell, Tory MP and one of the foremost proponents of monetarism, has also called for similar measures. On the one side they have seen the precipitous decline of British capit-

alism and the flooding of its home market with manufactured goods from abroad. On the other hand disguised protectionism is being introduced in practically all of the advanced capitalist countries at the present time.

Disguised import controls are in operation—in the form of job subsidies, quotas, etc.—in most advanced capitalist countries. It is not excluded, in fact it is probable, that the Tory government will be compelled to travel down this road as a means of attempting to stop the haemorrhage of cheap manufactured goods flooding the British home market.

The strategists of capital on the whole are hesitant to take such measures because of the fear of retaliation, and the international repercussions. Such measures would have a baleful effect on world trade. The lowering of tariff barriers during the post war period was a decisive factor which led to the world economic upswing. The capitalists are therefore hesitant to reverse this process.

But individual capitalist powers such as Britain are in such a difficult position that they will be compelled to take urgent measures. In so doing they will demonstrate in the clearest possible fashion that import controls should not be a feature of the demands and the programme of the labour movement as the 'Tribune' tendency has consistently argued over the past five years.

The ruling class as a whole were undoubtedly enthused by the coming to power of the Thatcher government. To a much greater extent than any since the war perhaps, this government was its tool. Nevertheless even before the elections its enthusiasm was tempered by the fear of the consequences of Tory policies being implemented in a crude Thatcherite fashion.

And all their fears and doubts have been completely confirmed. As we have pointed out in the 'Militant' and the 'Militant International Review', Thatcher has demonstrated her complete incapacity to understand class relations in Britain. The measures of the government are partly determined by the terrible

crisis of British capitalism, but also by the stupidity and lack of touch in her dealings with the labour movement of Thatcher and her disciples. The cuts in housing, in education and the social services generally have been pushed home by her lieutenant Heseltine with a viciousness and heartlessness which has shocked even traditional Tory voters.

Many of them on modest incomes will be compelled to pay £30, £40 and even £50 a month more. This one measure alone will totally wipe out the tax concessions given by Howe in his budget in June. Last year, moreover, 2,500 families were evicted from their homes, many of them for failing to meet mortgage repayments. The Tories' 'property-owning democracy' is turning a little sour for working class and middle class families.

At the same time the avalanche of price increases and cuts will mean drastic reductions in living standards. Labour MP Michael Meacher estimated that since the Tories have come to power the average family is over £4 a week worse off. The cumulative effects of the cuts already announced will mean a reduction in living standards for the average working class family of £9 a week.

The widespread feelings of anger were reflected in the massive protest strikes and demonstration on November 28th. It is also shown by the demand for big wage increases to compensate for the spiralling price rises. The Ford workers with a 21% increase in wages have set the 'going rate' for other sections of the working class. Faced with demands for big increases in wages this Tory government will in all probability impose a wage freeze, despite its loud protestations to the contrary.

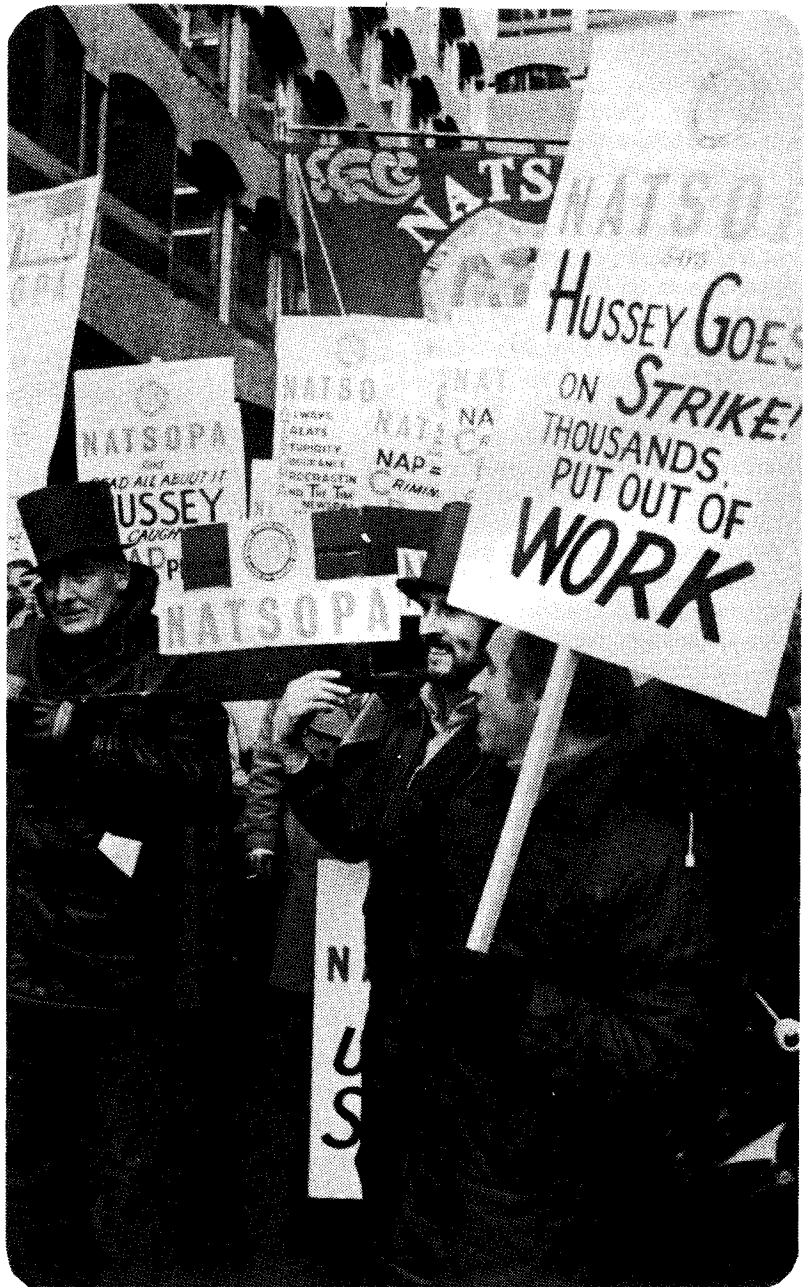
In the course of the last six months we have seen that on the industrial front the bourgeois have been given more than one bloody nose. After a twelve month epic battle 'The Times' employers were forced to concede a defeat and give their workers a 45% increase in wages with 5% more to come after.

This took 'The Times' workers from the lowest to the highest paid in Fleet Street. The ITV lockout also

ended with an increase of 40% wages for the workers in that industry. The engineering employers, like this government vowing never to retreat, in the face of unprecedented solidarity displayed by the engineering workers, were compelled to concede part of the demands for wage increases and a one-hour reduction in the working week by

1981.

Many workers were undoubtedly disappointed by the outcome of the engineering strike. With a more determined leadership introduction of a shorter working week would have been conceded earlier. But the idea that a 35-hour working week will be delayed until the end of the next decade is absolutely ludicrous.



Print workers support workers at 'The Times', at the beginning of the dispute.

The strike was a partial victory. Other workers such as those at Fords have gone through the breach opened up by the engineers and secured a one-hour reduction in the working week without a strike.

Nonetheless the Duffy leadership of the AUEW were compelled to support this strike by the pressure of the rank and file in the union itself. The dispute demonstrated that despite the fact that the majority of the workers who came out in the one- and two-day strikes stood to gain very little for themselves, nevertheless when the call was made by the traditional organisations of the proletariat they responded magnificently. Some of the most determined sections for the engineering workers were the women. At the same time factories which were not unionised before became organised during the course of the strikes. If the engineering employers expect that the one-hour reduction in the working week and the 35-hour week will be delayed until the end of the decade they are in for a surprise. On the contrary, given the rise in unemployment approaching two million by next year or the year after, which the bourgeois economists themselves expect, increased pressure for an earlier introduction of the one-hour reduction and the 35-hour week will grow in the engineering and other industries.

It is only at Leyland where the capitalists have scored a major success. And even then it was only because the AUEW leadership backed away from a confrontation with Edwardes over the suspension and probable sacking of Derek Robinson. The initial response of the Leyland workers was to strike in support of the principle of shop floor organisation and the stewards' organisation. The Transport workers made the strike official. If the AUEW had declared the strike official, Edwardes, Lowrie and Cox would have been brought to their knees.

But the AUEW leadership capitulated in the face of Edwardes' blackmail. His threat to sack all strikers and risk the complete closure of the company was empty. Not even this Tory government

would be prepared to accept the closure of a company which with ancillary workers would affect two million people. However, if Edwardes and the Tories had contemplated such a lunatic step this would undoubtedly have opened up the possibility of a mass occupation of the company and a serious clash between the trade union and labour movement on the one side and the capitalists and their government on the other.

However, it is extremely doubtful that this situation would have arisen. Once the unions had declared their determination to fight the sacking of Robinson, then Edwardes would have been forced to beat a retreat. Indeed on the very day when Duffy announced his 'compromise' with Edwardes the latter was denying that he had ever said that either Robinson was sacked or he would resign. The battle was moving in favour of the workers when Duffy and the right wing threw the towel in.

ANTI-UNION LEGISLATION

It is true that Duffy has promised to call an official strike if the AUEW finds in favour of Robinson. But it is likely that the workforce and the stewards' movement will remain at a low ebb for a period. Edwardes is determined to cripple the stewards' movement and enforce savage attacks on the workers. But even if he succeeds in the short term—and this is not entirely certain—in the long run this will stoke up tremendous resentment that will result in an explosion at Leyland. The sword of Damocles held by Edwardes over the heads of Leyland workers will not cower these workers in accepting his dictates for ever.

The measures of the government have enormously inflamed class relations. Despite the boast of Howe and of Junior Minister Rees in November last that no 'U'-turn is contemplated by the government the movement of class forces in Britain will compel them to carry through a 'U'-turn. Indeed, on the question of maternity leave and on other issues

the government has been forced to do an 'S'-turn. Once the effects of the cuts bite home the reaction will be so intense that the government may be forced to back away. Even sections of the Tory Party itself at local level—local councillors in particular—have urged the government to modify its position.

Rumblings of discontent about the "dogmatism" of the government have also surfaced in the capitalist press. If the government, and Thatcher in particular, remains intransigent then it is not ruled out that the possibility of a general strike could loom in Britain. It is rooted in the chronic crisis of British capitalism and the relationship of class forces which exist. The bourgeois are determined—to use the terminology of the CBI—to alter "the balance of power in industry" in favour of their class.

The British proletariat is equally determined not to take on its shoulders the responsibility for the crisis. Such is the charged atmosphere that has developed that an explosion is possible at any time, and on any one of a number of issues. Thus, if the government pursues its anti-union legislation the TUC could be compelled to launch a campaign similar to the one against Heath's Industrial Relations Act. Any attempt to implement such legislation, particularly on so-called secondary picketing, could precipitate an explosion. The Tory government in Australia, and particularly the state government in Queensland, have used such legislation against miners and other workers which resulted in national general strikes. Similar developments have taken place in New Zealand.

But the right-wing trade union leadership is as much concerned, if not more, than the Tory government with the possibility of such a collision. They are frantically trying to arrive at a compromise with this government as was the case with the Heath government.

But it is unlikely, if not completely ruled out that such an agreement is possible at this stage. The situation of British capitalism is such that they are compelled through the medium of Thatcher to attack the living

standards and rights of the working class.

On the one side the policies of the Tory government are not determined by choice but by the objective situation in which British capitalism finds itself. On the other, the union leadership, however hesitantly and inadequately is compelled to reflect the opposition of the working class to the measures of the government.

It was only after the defeat of Heath in the miners' strikes of 1972 that he was compelled to open up negotiations and discussions with the TUC. But these inevitably broke down with the further movement and worsening in the position of British capitalism.

The resistance of the working class to the government's policies resulted in the 1974 miners' strike and the three-day week. But the situation of British capitalism today is even worse than four years ago. The Thatcher government and its measures could compel the TUC, after a period of struggle on a local and regional level involving one-day general strikes, into calling a national general strike for 24 hours. It is not excluded that this in turn could prepare the way for an all-out general strike, notwithstanding the fear of the trade union leadership of such a development.

The only way in which the government could attempt to arrive at an agreement with the TUC is by replacing Thatcher as Prime Minister.

Such a development is probable as the speculation in the capitalist press has indicated. Already Carrington and Pym have been spoken of as potential replacements for Thatcher in the event of this government foundering on the resistance of the working class. In the event of a general strike it would not necessarily develop on the lines of 1926. The working class in Britain today is immeasurably stronger than in 1926.

The social reserves of capitalism in the middle class, the white collar workers and students have been enormously undermined. But in modern conditions a general strike could be called off only by the granting of big concessions in the form of wage increases, reduction in



Frank Chapple speaking at the 79 Labour Party Conference.

hours etc., along the lines of the general strike in France in 1968.

What the bourgeois are forced to concede with the left hand in the form of wage increases will be taken back with the right hand through price increases over a period of time. One thing is certain, the bourgeois in Britain is preparing for a confrontation with the proletariat.

This is indicated by the series of articles which have recently appeared in 'The Times'. Like a general staff of an army preparing for war the strategists of capital in these articles carefully examine the terrain on which these battles could take place, the resources and deployment of the "enemy" forces (the working class) and the most effective means to deal with these forces. One indication of the lengths to which they contemplate going is shown in the last article in this series which appeared in 'The Times': "The faeces in the street" option ought to be mentioned for the sake of completeness.

In other words the capitalists calmly discuss the breakdown of the sewerage system, with sewage coming up out of toilets, as a means of breaking strikes. The conclusion which they draw from this is that the generals commanding the opposing army are their strongest card. "If you face most of the present trade union leaders with faeces in the

street, in other words with a revolution they would 'wet themselves'." But the articles come to the conclusion that the bourgeois neither has the social reserves, the technical capability nor the military manpower to defeat the working class in an open confrontation.

The 1979 Ulster workers' strike, although conducted on a reactionary basis, underlined the powerlessness of the army in modern conditions to run the power stations. They also don't have the capacity to run the water system. The force on which the bourgeois in the final analysis is forced to rest is the leadership of the labour and trade union movement itself. In a very striking comment, 'The Times' mentions the words of Lloyd George to the trade union leaders when faced in 1919 by a strike of the Triple Alliance, the miners, the railwaymen, and transport workers: "If you carry out your threat and strike you will defeat us, but if you do so have you weighed the consequences?"

"The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country, and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance, for if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state or withdraw, and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen, have you considered? If you have, are you ready?" It then approvingly quotes the words of the miners' leader Robert Smillie: "From that moment on we were beaten and we knew we were."

In other words the trade unions are the strongest force in society. Included in the ranks of the trade unions in Britain today is more than 50% of the labour force who with their families constitute an overwhelming majority. But the strength of the capitalists resides in the fact that this force is not conscious of its power. Faced with the prospect of mobilising the working class to carry through the socialist transformation of society the reformist leadership of the trade union and labour movement will retreat.

One representative of the bourgeois boasted in this series: "The



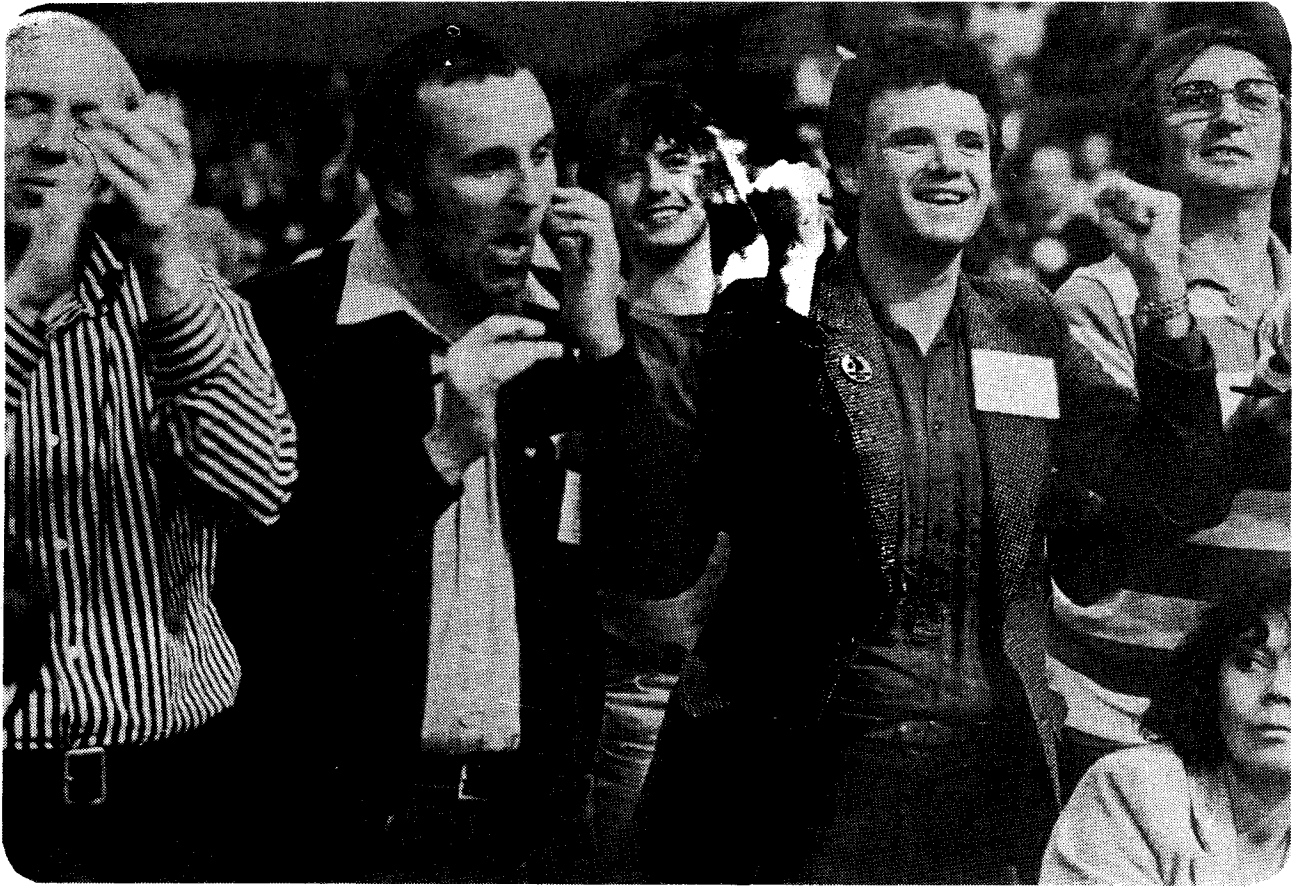
only game they [trade union leaders] are interested in is getting wage increases by a few 'percentage points' " (23.11.79). Yet in the conditions which now exist in Britain it will not be a question of getting increases by a few "percentage points". On the contrary the ruling class are looking for drastic decreases in the share of the wealth produced by the labour of the working class going back to that class.

Thus Tory Minister Howell recently declared: "Success in the next few years for the western economies including our own, will be measured not by bigger growth rates and high living standards. The test will be whether societies like ours can retain present levels of well-being and security or fall back. That will be the yardstick." ('Times', 14.11.79).

The defence of present standards, never mind increases, is bound up with the need to carry through the socialist transformation of society. This is the only conclusion which should be drawn from the speeches of Tory Ministers and an analysis of the situation of British capitalism. Unfortunately the leaders of the labour and trade union movement have the illusion that it's possible to extract further and lasting reforms within the confines of the capitalist system.

But as the last Labour government demonstrated, in the changed situation of British capitalism, the reformists are incapable of going through with these reforms. It is the consciousness and understanding of this situation on the part of the rank and file of the labour and trade union movement which has led to the enormous transformation in the Labour Party in the past period which was reflected in the decisions of the last Labour Party Conference.

Dumbfounded, the more hysterical sections of the right wing blame the decisions on re-selection and the election manifesto at the Brighton conference on the so-called "bed-sit infiltrators" by which they mean the supporters of the 'Militant'. Shirley Williams has described us as "the termites, gnawing away at the foundations of the Labour



Jubilant delegates at the 79 Labour Party conference after announcement of the re-selection votes.

Party."

We do not apologise for one moment for 'Militant's' role in furthering the shift to the left that has taken place in the Labour Party in the past period. But it is not just the work of 'Militant' within the labour movement but the change in the outlook of the mass of the workers in the Labour Parties and the unions at the present time. For the Right to suggest that a few people can parachute into a constituency to gain control demonstrates the contempt in which they hold the rank and file of the movement.

The workers in local Labour Parties are, it seems, putty to be moulded by a few individuals of short standing in the labour movement. Anyone familiar with the workings of the labour and trade union movement knows that this is impossible. Only by consistently arguing for a point of view and convincing the workers over a period

of time is it possible to gain support within the labour and trade union movement.

But it was arch right winger Neville Sandelson who perhaps unwittingly gave the right's game away. He denounced those who supported re-selection as attempting to play the role of "career assassins". In other words what is at stake are not principles or policies so far as some sections of the right are concerned, but the position, the power and the privileges—the "career"—of Labour MPs. Many of these people wandered into the Labour Party during the boom when it was easier to become a Labour MP than to get a similar position in the Tory or Liberal Party.

In outlook, in policy and in lifestyle they hardly differ at all from their opposite numbers on the Tory and Liberal benches in the House of Commons. The ranks of the movement are no longer prepared to

tolerate the passing of radical and socialist resolutions only to fight right-wing governments doing the opposite. They are demanding that the next Labour government carries through radical and socialist policies. This is the explanation for the changes at Brighton.

The right wing are frantically mounting a counter-attack. They are looking to the next Labour Party conference to reverse the decisions carried at the last conference. In particular, they are attempting to use the Labour Party enquiry on organisation in order to carry through changes in the composition of the National Executive Committee. Together with right-wing trade union leaders such as Frank Chapple and Roy Grantham of APEX they hope that the major change coming out of the enquiry will be the alteration of the structure of the NEC to guarantee them a permanent majority on the NEC.

It is extremely unlikely that they will be successful in their schemes. History is working against the right wing. The social and economic conditions which allowed them to dominate the Labour Party in the past are rapidly disappearing.

Therefore sections of the right wing have already floated the idea of forming some kind of "Centre Party". Roy Jenkins, as a preparation for re-entry into British politics next year has already raised this standard in his recent lecture on BBC TV.

Other right wingers such as Owen have urged caution until after next year's Labour Party conference. But Jenkins is undoubtedly correct when he points out that no matter what the short-term outcome for the right in the next period from the long term point of view their historic role in the Labour Party is now exhausted. Therefore it is possible if they are defeated at next year's Labour Party conference the right wing could break away and form some kind of Centre Party.

The bourgeois are already preparing for the downfall of the Tory government. 'The Times' has welcomed the proposals of Jenkins for the formation of a Centre Party and has also urged the building up of the Liberal Party. They want to create a safety net for discontented Tory voters who are in "danger" of swinging over to support an "extremist" Labour Party.

The ruling class viewed with horror the developments at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. From the so-called left of the

Tory Party represented by Walker to the right, with Tory chairman Thornycroft in the vanguard all of them commented that the events of the Labour Party Conference were "a sad day for Britain" (that is for the ruling class). The swing towards the left in the Labour Party has been taken into account by the bourgeois in their calculations.

They view with dread the prospect of the Tory government being prematurely brought down, because this could lead to the election of a left Labour government. It is for this reason amongst others that they are more likely to jettison Thatcher and replace her with a more acceptable figure, rather than face a general election. The trade union leadership also fear the prospect of a Tory government being brought down through the mass mobilisation of the working class and the labour movement.

The aroused expectations which will be brought to bear on a future Labour government would entail great difficulties for them. It is for this reason that they prevaricate, seek agreements and compromises with the employers on one side and the Tory government on the other. But the realities of the class struggle will make this impossible at this stage. The shift towards the left in the Labour Party is not at all accidental.

The growth in the support for Marxist ideas represented in the support for 'Militant' is also not at all accidental. The Marxists have played a vital role in making conscious the experience of the

advanced workers over the past four years in particular. It is for this reason that the bourgeois and their shadows in the Labour Party wish to drive the Marxists out of the labour movement.

It appears that they are preparing another witch-hunt against the Marxists. But it is impossible to separate Marxist ideas from the labour movement in Britain no matter what organisational measures are tried.

The 1970s were a disturbed period in comparison to the '50s and the '60s. It was the decade when the ideas of "uninterrupted growth" and "social harmony", which predominated in the labour movement, first began to founder.

It was a decade, in other words, when the labour movement began to shed the blinkers which had been placed on its eyes by the right-wing leadership of the labour and trade union movement. It was also a period when socialist and Marxist ideas began to gain ground amongst the advanced workers. But the 1980s in comparison will be a far stormier decade, a period when the tensions between the classes will be intensified.

The capitalists look with trepidation and fear towards this next decade. The Marxists on the other hand go into the next ten years with confidence and hope that their programme will become that of the labour movement as a whole.

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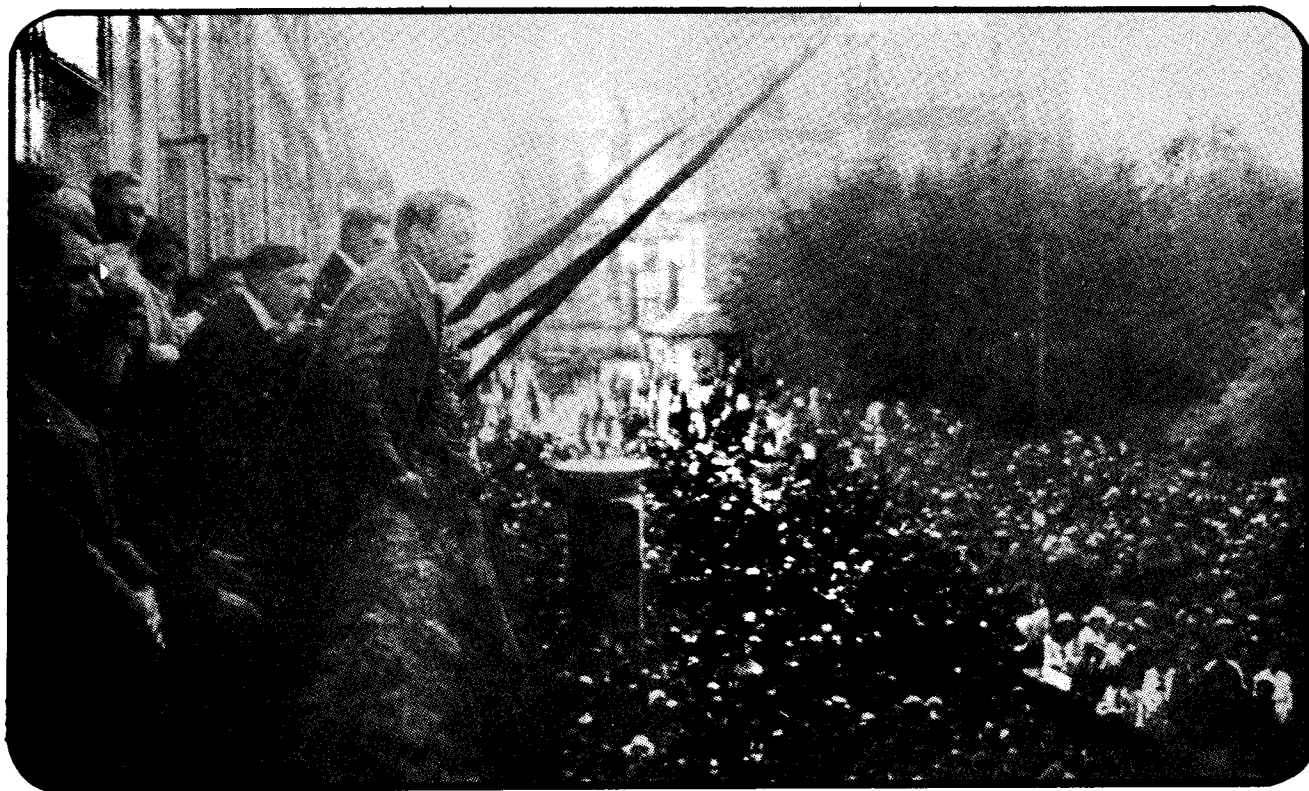
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[The Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1919] **The forgotten revolution**

by Alan Woods

On March 21st 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed. On the 1st of August, 133 days later, this heroic chapter in the history of the Hungarian working class was brought to a close with the entry of the White Rumanian army into Budapest. Had the Hungarian proletariat succeeded, the isolation of the Russian Workers' Republic would have been brought to an end.

The brief experience of the Bavarian Soviet Republic which lasted from April 7th until May 1st 1919 was an indication that the flood-tide of revolution was spreading from East to West with what seemed at the time an irresistible urge. Had the Hungarian workers' state managed to consolidate itself for just a few months longer, the

flames of revolution would have engulfed Vienna and Berlin, where the working class was already in a state of revolutionary ferment.

The triumph of the German revolution would have changed the whole course of human history. Yet this did not take place, and the Hungarian Revolution of 1919 entered the annals of history as yet another heroic episode like the Paris Commune of 1871.

Nevertheless, from a study of the causes of its failure, the Hungarian Soviet Republic half a century later can help us to enrich our knowledge of the processes whereby the socialist transformation of society is brought about, in order better to equip ourselves for the struggle for socialism today.

In 1919, Hungarian society bore all the hallmarks of an archaic structure which had been maintained more or less intact throughout the centuries. From the bloody reaction which followed the defeat of the Peasant Revolt of 1514 issued the Hungarian law enshrined in Werböczi's Tripartite Code which divided the Hungarian people into fixed castes of great and small nobility, with the clergy on the one side and the "plebs" on the other.

For 150 years, Hungary languished under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. Then, in 1687, the Crown of St Stephen was declared to be hereditary to the male line of the Austrian Habsburgs.

For generations, the Hungarians struggled to assert their right to exist



Count Karólyi, the Hungarian 'Kerensky'



Béla Kún—his mistakes played a fateful role in the eventual fall of the revolution

as a nation. The most serious attempt to throw off the Austrian yoke came at the time of the revolutionary wave which swept Europe in 1848. But the weak Hungarian bourgeoisie and the spineless nobility proved incapable of freeing Hungary from the foreign oppressor. After the defeat of 1848, the national oppression of Hungary reached its apogee—10,000 Hungarians were executed.

Hungarian newspapers were suppressed and schools taken over by Austrians. Estates confiscated from rebel Hungarians were given to aristocrats from the Viennese court. Thousands of police-spies and agents flooded the country. The Hungarian nation was subjected to the humiliation of Habsburg censorship and Germanification.

Then came the rise of Prussia and the humiliating defeat of Austria at the hands of Bismark in 1866. Smarting under the blow, the Emperor Franz Josef moved towards an understanding with the Hungarian aristocracy. Thus was born the famous "Ausgleich" or compromise of 1867.

This deal meant that the Habsburg Empire would henceforth consist of two "ruling people"—the Austrians and the Magyars (Hungarians), two "second-class peoples", the Croats and the Poles, and six peoples without rights: the Czechs, Slovaks, Rumanians, Ruthenians, Slovenes and Serbs. The Magyar ruling class supported the Habsburgs and, in return, were given leave to exploit and oppress the other nationalities living in their half of the empire.

Hungarian society was characterised by its extreme backwardness, by semi-feudal relationships and the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of wealthy nobles. Some 5% of the population owned 85% of the land. Theoretically, serfdom had been abolished, but in practice, the 20 million acres represented by the great estates were worked by "estate workers" whose social conditions differed very little from that of serfs.

These big estates could neither be sold nor divided. An example of the feudal character of Hungarian law



Winning the support of the peasantry would have been the key to revolutionary success

was that the Esterhazy family was to always possess 100,000 acres of land which would belong to the eldest son in perpetuity.

As an indication of the belatedness of Hungarian social development, the majority of these "entailed estates" were actually created from 1869 onwards—that is, in a period when in most European countries the last traces of feudal land relations were disappearing.

Three quarters of the peasantry consisted of poor peasants and farm labourers—a total of 2½ to 4 million, living in conditions of grinding poverty. It was usual for a peasant to get up at two or three o'clock in the morning at harvest time, and work until nine or ten at night, living on crusts of bread and rancid bacon and sleeping in a hole dug in the field with a hoe. There were no holidays.

The average peasant family lived

in a one-room hut, often shared by two families or more, sometimes with 20-25 people in one room. Six out of ten babies died before reaching one year. Tuberculosis, brought on by starvation, was so common that it was known as "the Hungarian disease".

The one time in his life that the average peasant wore boots was in the army, where he was subjected to racist abuse and physical violence from the Austrian drill-sergeant. Beating and flogging was also the rule on the estates. According to a "liberal" law, estate servants between the age of 12 and 18 might be beaten by the owner, but only in such a way "as not to cause a wound which does not heal within eight days."

A minority of peasants held small plots of land of an acre or so. But these "dwarf-holders" could not maintain their families on the

produce of their land and had to hire themselves out also. At the bottom of the scale were the "csiras" or cow-keepers: "The work of the csiras...is the hardest. Generally, after four years, hard work and the heavy manure-atmosphere of the stables destroy the lungs of the csiras. If a csiras is lucky, he gets away before he starts to spit blood. But many stay, become wrecks, and go to the village to live by begging."

Land-hunger, along with the national question, was always the motor-force of revolution in Hungary, with a history of bloody peasant revolts put down with the most barbaric cruelty. In the revolution of 1848 there were attempts to distribute the common pastures among the peasants and confiscate the big estates. But the victory of the Habsburgs meant the victory of the big landlords who subsequently formed a solid bulwark of reaction in

Hungary, becoming the local agents of Austrian imperialism on Hungarian soil.

PROBLEM OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

The explosive situation in the Hungarian countryside towards the end of the 19th century is adequately conveyed in an official report of the powerful landowners' association, the OMGE, written in 1894:

"The population of the great plain consists of civil servants, rich peasants and the agrarian proletariat, who all live isolated from each other, hating each other.

"The civil service regards the Hungarian agricultural districts as colonies, and their own jobs as colonial service.

"The rich peasants are somehow lodged in an unassailable and stable conservatism, while the land-workers remember the big historical revolutions and regard the future without hope. Nevertheless, their revolutionary ambitions are still alive."

The government bureaucrats who compiled this report were not mistaken. The wave of farm labourers' strikes which swept the country in the earlier years of this century, and which often led to pitched battles with the police, culminated in the strike of 10,000 estate workers in 1905 and the general strike of 100,000 "free labourers" in 1906, which was only broken by calling up the strikers into military service. The only possible escape from this appalling misery was emigration. Between 1891 and 1914 nearly two million Hungarians—80% of them poor peasants—left the country, crowded like cattle on ships bound for the USA.

The social problem in Hungary was exacerbated and complicated by the existence of the national minorities. In 1910, out of 21 million people living in Hungary, there were 10 million Hungarians, 2.5 million Croats and Slovenes, 3 million Rumanians, 2 million Germans, and the rest were made up of Slovaks, Serbs, Ukrainians and other smaller peoples.

Thus, for Hungary, the national problem was not confined to the issue of her semi-colonial dependence on Austria, but also included the problem of the national oppression of the non-Magyar elements living within the frontiers of Hungary. The systematic discrimination against the minorities is most clearly demonstrated in the field of education.

In 1900, 39% of the total population was illiterate. But the figure for the Slovaks was 49.9%, for the Serbs, 58.5%, Rumanians, 79.6% and Ukrainians, 85.1%. Wages in Hungary were 33% lower than in Austria and 50% lower than in Germany. But in 1913 the wages of non-Magyar workers were 30% lower than those of the Hungarian workers.

The weak and belated Hungarian bourgeoisie had proved incapable, throughout its entire history, of tackling a single one of these fundamental problems. The reason is not difficult to see. Although undoubtedly the more backward half of the Empire, Hungary had already decisively entered into the process of capitalist development by the turn of the century. Alongside the big feudal estates, modern capitalist industry sprang up, sustained by investments from foreign capitalists.

The banks dominated the Hungarian economy and through them was exercised the stranglehold of Austrian, German, French, British and American finance capital. The development of capitalism bound Hungary still closer to the rule of Austro-German imperialism. On the other hand, the feudal aristocracy was also tightly enmeshed with big business and the banks.

In 1905 there were 88 counts and 64 barons on the administrative boards of industrial, transport and banking concerns. One of them, Count Istvan Tisza, was chairman of the biggest merchant bank in the country.

For all of these reasons, any attempt to destroy the age-old, humiliating dependence on Austria and uproot feudal relationships in the village necessarily presupposed an open fight against capitalism which could only be led by the work-

ing class in alliance with the mass of poor peasants and farm labourers.

On the eve of the Revolution, Hungary constituted the most backward half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but for that very reason, it was that part where social tensions most quickly reached boiling point, and where the ruling class was least able to resist the onrush of social change. The proletariat was a minority of society, predominantly made up of poor peasants. But the oppressive nature of social relations in the villages meant that the peasantry potentially represented a powerful revolutionary ally for the working class.

OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR ONE

The brutal and degrading treatment of the national minorities throughout Hungarian history also turned out to be the Achilles' heel of the Hungarian ruling class. What was required was a social force capable of galvanising these forces and leading them in the final onslaught against the ruling oligarchy.

By virtue of its key role in production, its cohesiveness, organisation and class-consciousness, only the working class, despite its numerical inferiority, was capable of fulfilling this part.

The Hungarian proletariat was a later and less powerful class than its Austrian and German brothers. In 1910, only 17% of the population worked in industry, and of these 49% worked in factories of less than 20 workers.

But in Budapest and the surrounding area, large-scale industry had sprung up, nurtured by vast infusions of foreign capital.

More than 50% of industry was concentrated here. Moreover, the uneven development of industry is illustrated by the fact that 37.8% of the total workforce was concentrated in big factories of more than 500 workers. These giant bastions of labour were to play a decisive role in the events of 1918-1919. 82 giant cartels controlled the whole of

Hungarian industry (26 of them Hungarian and 56 Austro-Hungarian).

On the eve of World War One, Hungary was in a clear state of semi-colonial dependence on Austria and Germany, forming an agricultural colony which exported food to Austria in exchange for industrial products. The interests of the Hungarian bourgeoisie were inextricably bound up with those of the Austro-Hungarian bureaucratic police state and the feudal landowning oligarchy, whose political expression was the Liberal Party.

Behind the tinsel of nationalist phraseology by which the Hungarian bourgeois strove to maintain its base among the masses lay the reality of utter impotence and slavish dependence upon Austro-German imperialism, brutally revealed in August 1914.

The Imperialist War threw the whole of society into the melting pot. Enthusiastically supported by the oligarchy and the church, the war against Siberia also received the blessings of the 1848 party, the party of the "liberal" bourgeoisie which had long since discarded its youthful daydreams of national independence to throw in its lot with the imperialist robbers of Vienna and Berlin.

At the outset of the war, as in other countries, the working class was paralysed by the first wave of patriotic enthusiasm. The Social Democratic leaders, despite their previous "left" phrases borrowed from the so-called 'Austro-Marxists' promptly jumped on the patriotic bandwagon. They justified the war as a war to "defend democracy against Russian barbarism," and even a war "for a shorter working day and higher wages," preaching class collaboration and 'class peace'.

But as the war dragged on, the painful reality came home to the workers and peasants. The "war for a shorter working day" meant that the workers had to toil 60 hours a week. Children of 10 and 12 years of age worked 12 hours a day and more in the factories. Profits soared and wages steadily fell. In 1916, the currency was worth only 51.24% of its pre-war value, falling steeply thereafter. War disruption caused a

terrible collapse of industry.

Conditions at the front were worse still. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian soldiers perished miserably in the cold, snowy winter of 1914-15 in the Carpathian Mountains. Out of an army of nine millions, more than five million were killed, wounded, taken prisoner or missing in action by the end of the war. Of these, two million were Hungarians.

Discontent among the Hungarian component of the Austro-Hungarian army led to situations where the Hungarian troops had to be driven into battle sandwiched between German and Austrian soldiers with machine-guns pointed at their backs. Desertion grew to massive proportions as the war drew to a close.

EFFECTS OF OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Throughout 1915 and 1916 there was a steady increase in the number of strikes. The war-weariness of the masses was aggravated in the case of Hungary by a burning sense of national oppression. The growing ferment in the factories, barracks and workers districts provoked internal dissensions within the ranks of the ruling class.

As early as 1915, Count Karólyi founded his pacifist, anti-German Independence Party and tried to establish contact with the Allies, indicating that the more far-sighted representative of the bourgeoisie, sensing the likelihood of a German defeat, were preparing to throw themselves on the mercy of Anglo-French imperialism and climb to power on Allied bayonets instead of German ones.

The February Revolution in Russia gave an enormous impetus to the revolutionary movement in Hungary. On the First of May 1917 a massive strike wave and demonstration led to the fall of the reactionary government of Count Tisza, on the 23rd of May. A new government was formed under Count Esterhazy, who attempted to manoeuvre between the classes in an attempt to prevent the situation getting completely out of

hand. The government coalition was broadened to include different bourgeois groups, whilst the SDP leaders supported the government from outside.

The workers rightly interpreted this move as a sign of weakness and pressed home their advantage. The new government was met by a wave of strikes, which broke out spontaneously, in the teeth of the opposition of the "moderate" trade union leaders. One of these Samu Jásza later admitted that: "Already in 1917 there were many strikes although the trade unions insisted that there should be no interruptions of work." These sorry Labour leaders were compelled to "lead from behind", or lose all influence among the workers.

The victory of the October Revolution in Russia had an electrifying effect on Hungary. The masterly anti-war agitation of Trotsky at the Brest-Litovsk Peace negotiations met with a ready response among the mass of war weary workers, peasants and soldiers. The demand for a "Peace without Annexations and Indemnities" was echoed in the factories, in the villages and in the trenches. Under the irresistible pressure of the masses, the anti-war party of the bourgeoisie, led by Karólyi, the 'Hungarian Kerensky', found fresh courage to press their demands.

The ferment in the factories led to a general strike against the war in Budapest on January 18th 1918, which quickly sparked off mass meetings in which many soldiers participated. The January strike wave swept like wildfire through Austria, Hungary and Germany. It was precisely the hot breath of revolution in the rear which obliged the Austrian representative at Brest Litovsk, Czernin, to adopt a conciliatory position vis-a-vis the Bolshevik government, although this was overruled by the German General staff, in the person of General Hoffman.

For the same reason, the Hungarian government now hastened to extend the right to vote. As always, the ruling class is only prepared to grant serious reforms when it feels itself threatened with the loss of its power and privileges.



A mass demonstration in Budapest

Count Michael's Karólyi during the Council Republic: his agrarian reforms were doomed from the beginning

The bourgeoisie was terrified. So were those right-wing labour leaders who had supported the war and opposed every militant movement of the workers. The Social Democratic leaders, overawed by the rapid extension of the general strike, hastened to call it off on the 21st of January, only four days after it had begun. This betrayal only served to deepen the divisions in the ranks of the SDP and greatly increase the strength of the left-wing opposition.

The depth of the revolutionary upsurge can be seen by the awakening of the more backward and inert sections of the oppressed, notably the working-class women whose heroic role in these events is shown by a secret circular of the War Ministry, dated 3rd May 1918:

"Women workers not only frequently attempt to disrupt factories by interrupting production, but even



deliver inflammatory speeches, take part in demonstrations, marching in the foremost ranks with their babies in their arms, and behaving in an insulting manner towards the representatives of the law."

On 20th June 1918, a new strike broke out as a result of the shooting of workers. Soviets, or Workers' Councils were set up to fight for the workers' demands: peace, universal suffrage, all power to the soviets. The strike spread from Budapest to other industrial centres. Yet once again it was called off after ten days by the leadership.

The masses were prepared to fight for power, but found themselves thwarted at every step by their own leaders. But the unbearable conditions of the masses, and the accumulated discontent and frustrations of the past led inexorably to a new explosion in the Autumn of 1918.

With the collapse of the Bulgarian Front, the wave of desertions turned into a veritable flood which engulfed the country. There were

sporadic uprisings and mutinies in the army and navy. Armed bands of deserters linked up with strikers and rebellious peasants in clashes with the police and participated in land seizures. When it became clear that the Central Powers were about to lose the war, these mutinies became general.

The state apparatus disintegrated and collapsed under its own weight. The government in Budapest was suspended in mid-air. Power had passed on to the streets.

In the midst of strikes, mutinies and street demonstrations, the ruling class was rent with divisions. There were stormy scenes in Parliament. On 17th October a demoralised Count Tisza announced: "We have lost this war." The bourgeois landowning oligarchy, feeling the power slip from its enfeebled grasp looked desperately round for a second line of defence and found it in yesterday's enemy—Karólyi.

On the 28th October there was a mass demonstration in Budapest demanding Hungarian independence. On the 29th October, Hungary was declared a republic. And on the 30th of October there was an uprising in Budapest of workers, soldiers, sailors and students.

The government fell like a house of cards without firing a shot in its own defence. The streets were taken over by the insurgents shouting slogans such as "Long live independent and democratic Hungary!" "Down with the counts!" "No more war!" "Only the soldiers' council gives the orders!" By the nightfall of October 31st the insurgents had occupied all strategic positions, and freed all the political prisoners.

The Revolution had triumphed swiftly and painlessly. The ruling class, caught off guard and lacking any real base, offered no resistance. It was a spontaneous mass uprising like the February Revolution in Russia, without leadership and without a clear programme. The Labour leaders did nothing, or else hindered the revolution which they had not wanted and which they feared like the plague.

The mass of workers, soldiers and peasants, lacking a revolutionary party and a programme,

nevertheless were groping towards such a programme. Perhaps they did not clearly understand what they wanted, but they knew very well what they did not want. They did not want the rule of privileged and corrupt oligarchy; they did not want the monarchy or any substitute for it; they did not want feudal land relations and national oppression.

But in fighting for these burning issues, the masses swiftly came to understand the impossibility of partial solutions to their problems and the inevitability of a clean sweep, a total re-constitution of society along new lines in order to eliminate all the accumulated filth of centuries of feudal oppression and national humiliation.

The workers demanded a Republic. The bourgeois liberal politicians of the 1848 Party and the right-wing Labour leaders resisted this demand as long as they could. These reluctant "revolutionists" had been taken by the scruff of their neck and pushed into the government by the mass movement.

BLOODLESS REVOLUTION

Once in power they dedicated themselves to a stubborn rearguard action in defence of the system of class rule and privilege. Their terror of the masses was a hundred times greater than their aversion for feudal reaction and they clung with all their might to whatever points of support were left to them in their struggle to maintain the status quo.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed" holds good in politics as well as in life. Recognising that their whole future as a privileged class lay in the hands of the hated bourgeois liberals and their Social Democratic partners, the bankers, feudal oligarchs, bishops and generals clustered around the "Hungarian Kerensky", hiding behind the shirt-tails of "democracy". On the other hand, the workers and soldiers, as in Russia after February 1917, placed their hope in their own organisations, thrown up in struggle, the

Soviets.

As in Russia, so in Hungary, there existed the elements of dual power. Unlike Russia, there was no Bolshevik Party capable of steering the pre-revolutionary situation in the direction of a successful socialist revolution. The left wing of the SDP, with its confusion and lack of a clear programme, was incapable of playing an independent role, whilst the right-wing labour leaders were helping Karólyi restore the old class relations under the guise of the "bourgeois democratic" revolution.

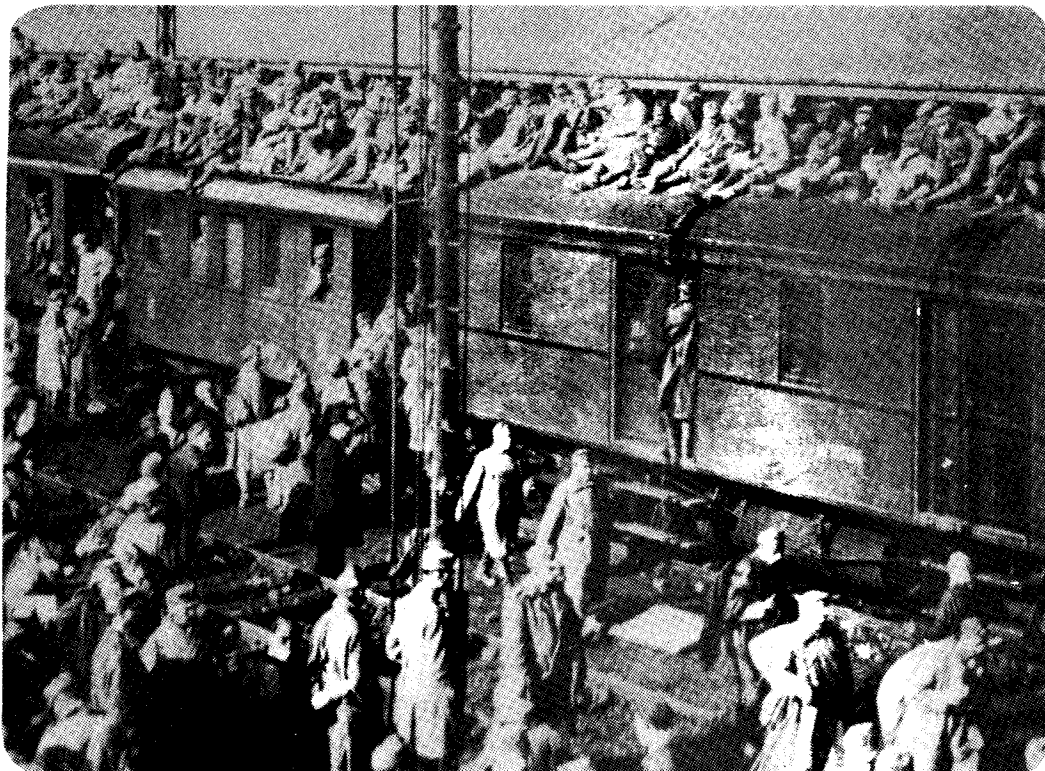
Nowadays the "theoreticians" of the CP characterise this as the "bourgeois democratic" revolution. In reality, the bourgeoisie played no role in the revolution, had no intention of taking power and destroying the old semi-feudal state, and even resisted the institution of a bourgeois republic.

The initiative at every stage remained firmly in the hands of the workers and soldiers, who compelled the liberals to take power, in spite of themselves, and began to carry out the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution from below. In other words, what we had here was not the bourgeois-democratic revolution but the abortion of a socialist revolution because of the absence of a genuine revolutionary leadership and the betrayal of the Social Democratic leaders.

The bourgeois government of Karólyi, which did not, and could not, carry out any of the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Hungary, proved to be a thousand times weaker, more toothless and impotent than ever the Provisional government had been in Russia after February 1917.

On the one hand, the proletariat was the only real organised force in society. Power was in the hands of the workers and soldiers, armed and organised in soviets. On the other hand, the "moderate" leaders of the SDP and the unions blocked their avenue of advance with the false policy of "postponement of the class struggle" for the "defence of democracy", etc.

Like the Russian Mensheviks in 1917, and the Stalinists all over the



Troops return from the front, Autumn 1918: when the defeat of the central powers became clear, there were widespread mutinies and desertions

world ever since, the Hungarian Social Democratic leaders appealed to the workers and peasants to set aside the struggle for socialism in the interests of the consolidation of (bourgeois) democracy.

They did not see that the tremendous contradictions within society were inevitably giving rise to a polarisation of the classes which would only admit of one of two options: either the working class, at the head of all the oppressed and exploited layers of society, would overthrow the bourgeoisie, suppress the fiction of Karólyi's "National Council" and mercilessly crush the forces of reaction which were sheltering behind it, or else these same forces would take advantage of the situation to recover their strength, regroup and launch a new counter-offensive which would cast aside the velvet glove of "democracy" to reveal the mailed fist of fascist reaction.

There was no "middle road". Either the workers would triumph and establish a workers' democracy, or the ruling class would take a terrible revenge on the working class



C.P. orator addresses a demonstration

and poor peasantry. There was no other way, yet the "middle roaders" seemed firmly in the saddle. Karólyi enjoyed a certain popularity, especially with the petty bourgeois masses, as a result of his opposition to the war.

The SDP, in the initial period, grew by leaps and bounds. The masses, newly awakened to political life, streamed into the labour organisations, oblivious of the role being played by the leadership. Not only workers, but many intellectuals, professional people, even policemen and civil servants joined the SDP, some for honest reasons, others as an "insurance policy" with an eye to the future. Suddenly, Social Democrats and Republicans, hitherto persecuted as dangerous radicals, became pillars of respectability, and saviours of society.

Now that the cause of the monarchy was irretrievably lost, all the reactionary elements of society gathered round the banner of the bourgeois republic, staunchly upheld by Karólyi and the Social Democrats.

However, the masses were not slow to grasp the enormous gulf which now opened up between the sort of republic which they wanted and the sort of republic they had got. Emboldened with success, the workers took to the streets to press their class demands, despite their leaders' frantic appeals for calm. On the 16th of November a giant demonstration of hundreds of thousands gathered outside the Parliament building to demand a socialist republic.

They had not overthrown the 400-year-old Habsburg Empire merely to hand power back to the old masters under new names. The soldiers streamed into Budapest from the front. They tore off the insignia from the officers' shoulders. The streets of the capital were full of mutinous troops: 300,000 of them, waiting to be demobbed. Officers and bourgeois were attacked on the streets.

The government of Karólyi was a government in name only. It had no reliable army to rest on. Arms were in the hands of the workers. The economy had virtually collapsed. Hungary was blockaded by the

Allies. The food situation was critical.

In an attempt to pacify the masses, the Karólyi government drew up a land reform programme aimed at distributing to the land workers estates exceeding 500 acres with compensation to be paid by the government.

Karólyi, himself a landowner, gave his estate to the peasantry. But his example was not followed by the rest of his class. Like all the other measures of this government, the land reform remained on paper. As on the land question, so on the issue of the oppressed nationalities, Hungarian bourgeois democracy had arrived with its hands empty. As Karólyi himself later complained: "The situation had now radically changed, and what might have appeared to us an extremely liberal offer had become entirely anachronistic. The minorities of yesterday justly regarded themselves as the victors of tomorrow, and refused to envisage any solution within the framework of the Crown of St Stephen, the very name of which was an offence to them."

"Too little and too late" would be a fitting epitaph for the ill-fated bourgeois democracy in Hungary, which came to power when history had already placed on the order of the day the proletarian revolution as the only way of solving the problems the bourgeoisie was incapable of tackling. To the growing discontent within the country was now added a new and menacing threat from without.

THE FALL OF KARÓLYI

During the first world war the national bourgeoisies of Eastern and Central Europe—that of Hungary included—had enlisted under the banner of German imperialism, but with the defeat of Germany and the disintegration of Austro-Hungary, the ruling classes of a welter of small newly-formed states vied with each other for the favours of Anglo-French-American imperialism, while

simultaneously warring against each other to see who could grab most territory from its neighbours.

The "Wilson Doctrine" of US imperialism which paid lip-service to democracy and the right of self-determination for small nations served as a convenient pretext for a series of predatory little wars which in turn served to balkanise Central and Eastern Europe and bind the newly-formed states even more firmly to the chariot of victorious Anglo-French and US imperialism through the agency of the banks, railways and giant trusts.

The slogan of the Socialist United States of Europe, launched by the newly-formed Communist International, represented the only hope for the peoples of Europe, divided up and bled white by wars, famine and economic collapse. Only the success of the socialist revolution could offer a way out of the blind alley in which the small and backward states of Europe found themselves.

The ruling class of Hungary attempted to shield itself from the storm hiding behind the forms of parliamentary democracy. But the social convulsions set in motion by the war did not admit of half-way solutions. Far more quickly even than the Provisional government in Russia, the Karólyi government revealed its bankruptcy, and in a far more striking manner.

As Lenin put it: "The Hungarian bourgeoisie admitted to the world that it resigned voluntarily and that the only power in the world capable of guiding the nation in a moment of crisis was Soviet power." (Works, vol 29, p270)

The immediate cause of the fall of the government was the ultimatum of March 20th 1919 presented on behalf of the Allies to the Karólyi regime demanding that Hungary should accept a new line of demarcation. At the time of the Armistice, some months earlier, Hungary had already accepted a humiliating loss of territory. Now the Allied robbers assembled at Paris demanded the handing over of lands occupied by a further two million Hungarians.

The helpless Karólyi government tried to stall, suggesting a referen-

dum, which was peremptorily refused. The Allies demanded an answer the same day. Undermined by pressure within and without, and realising his own impotence, Karólyi refused to take responsibility for the affairs of the nation and resigned.

By so doing the whole of Hungarian bourgeoisie admitted its total incapacity to lead the nation at a decisive moment. The following day, March 21st, the Soviet Republic was proclaimed. The proletariat had come to power without firing a shot.

The sudden fall of Karólyi meant a sudden and sharp turn in the situation of the Hungarian Communist Party which after only four months of existence found themselves suddenly confronted with the problem of power. The leaders of this party were young and completely inexperienced. Their views, like those of many of the newly-formed Communist Parties, were coloured by a mixture of youthful ultra-leftism and syndicalism.

Their impatience led them to overlook the dynamics of the revolutionary process and the complicated interrelation between the class, the party and its leadership. In many ways this was understandable. The Russian Bolshevik Party had taken shape over decades. It had behind it the experiences of the 1905 revolution and of work under the most varied situations.

But the new parties of the Communist International in most cases were made up of young, raw and untested recruits who had moved over to Bolshevism in the stormy period opened up by the October Revolution. They had not had time to get their bearings and acquire the necessary experience and authority in the eyes of the masses when they were plunged into the turbulent revolutionary movement of 1918-1920. Nowhere was the transition so abrupt as in Hungary.

The young CP leaders, mostly made up of ex-POWs recently returned from Russia, showed courage, initiative and energy. But from the beginning, their confusion on questions of theory led them to make a serious of mistakes on fundamental issues which would later have disastrous consequences.

On the very key question of land they advocated the confiscation of the big estates, but were opposed to the distribution of land to the peasants on the grounds that this would favour the development of small proprietors and hinder the growth of socialist ideas in the villages. On the national question, instead of clearly coming down in favour of self-determination, they advanced the essentially meaningless slogan of "proletarian self-development."

Nonetheless, in the prevailing revolutionary climate, the Communists gained ground rapidly, in spite of their mistakes, penetrating the barracks, factories and trade unions, hitherto dominated by the right-wing labour leaders.

Given the mood of the masses, the CP experienced an explosive growth in a question of weeks, not only in proletarian Budapest, but in Széged, the second largest city, where a big section of the SDP went over and many of the local garrison openly displayed Party cards. Most importantly, the Youth League of the SDP went over en bloc to the CP in December 1918.

Alarmed at the rapid growth of the CP which threatened to undermine their increasingly tenuous hold on organised labour, the Social Democratic leaders started a scare campaign against the "Russian" Bolsheviks and "splitters" and "counter-revolution from the left". Like the Russian Mensheviks, the Hungarian SDP leaders did not consider Hungary "ripe" for a socialist revolution.

They based themselves on the idea of a lengthy evolutionary process in which, peacefully, gradually, without sudden upheavals, Hungary would pass, firstly through a long period of bourgeois democracy and then, perhaps after 50 or 100 years, Hungarian society would be "ready" for socialism.

Unfortunately for the ideologies of gradualism, the current of events was moving swiftly in the opposite direction. Seeing the failure of the bourgeois democracy to deal with any of their pressing problems, the masses took to direct action. There was a wave of factory occupations.

Workers' control was established in many centres. There were constant street demonstrations of workers, soldiers and unemployed. At the end of January 1919 there were bloody clashes between government soldiers and strikers. Discontent spread to the army. The national question surged up and renewed intensity with revolutionary upheavals in the Western Ukraine. Karólyi's promises of autonomy, far from damping down the movement, added fuel to the flames.

Following the example of Noske and Scheidemann in Germany, where in January Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been murdered at the instigation of the Social Democratic leaders, the SDP leadership whipped up an anti-Communist campaign which culminated in a provocation similar to the July Days in Russia, and the arrest of the leadership of the CP. Béla Kún and his comrades were subjected to savage beatings in prison.

However, the government had miscalculated. In a revolutionary situation the moods of the masses can change rapidly. The arrest served to cast a spotlight on the counter-revolutionary role of the SDP leaders in the government. The raw masses who had looked towards the SDP leaders in the hope of finding a solution to their problems, now turned swiftly against them.

The CP, from being a small minority, now gained the majority support in the key areas of the workers' movement. The workers drew a simple conclusion: if this government is against Bolshevism, we must be for it. SDP leaders now found themselves shouted down at public meetings.

Even right-wing Social Democrats, like Ernő Garami later admitted that "The arrest of the Bolshevik leaders not only did not weaken, but strengthened their fighting capacity." Another of the same stripe, Wilhelm Böhm wrote: "Deprived of their leaders, the Bolshevik movement gained new strength."

The movement was now flowing strongly in the direction of the CP. The arrests served as a catalyst for all the accumulated discontent and

frustration of the masses. Throughout the month of March, there was an unmistakable tendency towards armed insurrection. In Széged on March 10 the local soviet took control, rapidly followed by other towns. Peasants seized the lands of Count Esterhazy, without waiting for government decrees.

Caught off balance by the unexpected turn of events, the reformist labour leaders tried to deflect the movement along harmless channels by advancing the slogan of a constituent assembly. But the SDP leaders were being left high and dry by the impetuous movement of the masses. The heavy battalions of labour in the big factories of Budapest declared for the CP.

The workers were drawing revolutionary conclusions from the whole situation. They had overthrown 400 years of Habsburg rule by their own strength and organisation. The workers' soviets possessed not only small-arms but machine guns and artillery. On the other hand, the government had no armed forces it could depend on to fight its battles for it.

The masses had been through the harsh school of war, revolution and counter-revolution with a democratic mask, and were now prepared for a decisive show-down. The moderating arguments of the SDP leaders now cut no ice.

The workers interpreted them correctly as attempts to divert their attention from the central goal of power. The growing impatience of the workers with the role of the Social-Democratic leaders was expressed in the refusal of Budapest printing workers to print the SDP newspaper 'Népszava'. The printers struck on March 20—the same day the Allies sent their ultimatum to Karólyi. On the 21st the printers' strike had turned into a general strike, demanding the release of the CP leaders and the transference of power to the working class.

This spontaneous movement caused a split in the leadership of the SDP. One section of the leadership, openly identified with the bourgeoisie, was prepared to play the same counter-revolutionary role as Noske and Scheidemann in Germany.

Others were more cautious. The Karólyi government was in a state of collapse following the Allied ultimatum.

Demoralised, the bourgeois liberals handed over power to the reformist labour leaders, who accepted the gift with heavy heart and trembling hands. The bourgeois put all the onus of resolving the crisis on the shoulders of the Social Democratic 'moderates'. But the latter, always willing to accept their 'patriotic duty', were in a singularly weak position.

Their influence among the masses was fast dwindling to nothing. How could they maintain themselves? There followed an event without precedent in history: the SDP leaders, still in the government, went to the prisons to negotiate with the CP leaders, imprisoned with their connivance, shortly before. This fact, in itself, demonstrates the major changes in the correlation of class forces, which takes place in a revolutionary situation.

LENIN WARNS

At first the SDP leaders asked the CP to support them from outside the government. When this was refused, the reformists actually proposed a merger of the parties! What this offer amounted to was a proposal to form a coalition government under the disguise of a 'united' Socialist Party. The wily old foxes who ran the SDP were prepared to sign anything, agree to anything, no matter how radical-sounding, in order to get agreement.

The life-long exponents of gradualism were suddenly converted to the dictatorship of the proletariat, soviet power, revolution—anything at all, to get the Communists to participate in government with them. In point of fact, the Social Democrats were merely recognising the reality of the situation. For while the CP leaders were negotiating for unity with them, the workers of Budapest were carrying out a bloodless revolution, to which the government could offer no resistance. The CP and SDP were

united as a movement when power was effectively already in the hands of the armed working class.

In carrying through this unification, the CP leaders committed a major blunder for which the working class would pay dearly later on. While Béla Kún, the leader of the Hungarian Communists, lulled the workers with glowing accounts of unity as the 'precondition for workers' power', many rank and file Communists were confused by the move and opposed to it. In trying to find an 'easy' solution to the problem of building the Party and a 'short-cut' to power, Béla Kún fell into a trap. Lacking confidence in themselves, in their programme and policy and in the working class, the CP leaders brought about a fusion with the Social Democrats in the worst imaginable way.

This was a bureaucratic fusion at the top, instead of a genuine unification on the basis of patient work to win over the workers from their old leaders. Yet at the time of unification, the influence of the Communists among the decisive sections of the proletariat was far greater than that of the reformists, who were heavily compromised by their collaboration in government with the bourgeoisie and their repressive actions against the workers.

They only hit on the idea of fusion when their own fortunes were at an all-time low and the revolution was already a fact. Their idea was to preserve their prestige and privileges by throwing in their lot with the winning side. Only the most openly counter-revolutionary elements, led by Ernő Garami, refused to participate in the unification. Among those who did there were both honest left-wingers and hardened right-wing bureaucrats.

Despite the lack of information, and the great distances separating him from events in Hungary, Lenin immediately sensed the danger in the move:

"The first communication we received about it (the unification—AW) gave us some grounds for fearing that, perhaps the so-called socialists, traitor socialists, had resorted to some deception, had got

round the communists, the more so since the latter were in prison." (Works, vol 29, p 242).

In a radio telegram to Béla Kún, Lenin voiced his doubts as to the wisdom of unification in the following terms:

"Please inform us what real guarantees you have that the new Hungarian government will really be Communist, and not just simply socialist, that is, a government of the social traitors? Do the Communists have a majority in the government? When will the congress of soviets take place? In what does the recognition by the socialists of the dictatorship of the proletariat really consist of?

"Beyond any doubt the simple application of our Russian tactics, in every little detail, to the particular conditions of the Hungarian revolution would be a mistake. I must warn against these mistakes, but I would like to know in what you see genuine guarantees?" (Works, Russian editions, vol 29, p 203).

Bela Kun replied to Lenin's enquiries with soothing assurances. But Lenin was not convinced. At the First Congress of the Communist International held shortly after the Hungarian revolution, he warned the Hungarian communist László Rudas:

"I regard this unification as dangerous. It would have been better to form a bloc in which both parties would preserve their independence. In this way the Communists would appear before the masses as an independent party. They would be able to increase their strength day by day, and in case of necessity, if the Social Democrats did not fulfill their revolutionary duties, matters could be taken to the point of a split." (Rudas László in 'Szabad Nep' 21/1/49).

Lenin's advice to the Hungarian Communists had nothing in common with sterile sectarian intransigence. In fact, Lenin himself defended the idea of unification, provided it was properly carried out, on a clear-cut revolutionary programme and excluding all the old right-wing leaders. The error was not in seeking unification with the Social Democrats, but in mixing up the banners and programmes in a light-minded

fashion.

The Hungarian Communists, in reality, liquidated their Party into the SDP, whose leaders were given the lion's share of the leading positions in the Party, the unions and the government. By the action of Béla Kún and the others, the most advanced and revolutionary elements of the class were submerged in the more politically backward and inchoate masses.

The mistake proved to be a fatal one. It shows exactly what would have happened in Russia, had the Bolsheviks fused with the Mensheviks after the February revolution, as advocated by Stalin and Kamenev, or succumbed in November 1917 to the pressures to form a coalition 'government' of all soviet parties, successfully resisted by Lenin and Trotsky.

MISTAKES OF HUNGARIAN COMMUNISTS

It is law of revolution that in the decisive moment when the question of power is posed, the leadership of the revolutionary party inevitably tends to come under the pressure of alien class influences, the pressure of bourgeois 'public opinion' and even of backward layers of the working class itself. The Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd in February 1917 were far more experienced than the Hungarian Communist leaders in March 1919, yet Kamenev and Stalin, under enormous pressures, took the line of least resistance, advocating support for the Provisional government and unity with the Mensheviks.

The fear of being 'isolated', of appearing in the eyes of the masses as 'splitters' and 'sectarians' acts as a powerful pressure weighing on the shoulders of the revolutionary leadership. Only a clear overall view of the revolutionary process, sound policies of resisting these pressures. The young and inexperienced leaders of the Hungarian Communists lacked the necessary political insight and firmness, vacillated, and lost their heads.

Had they preserved an independent identity, followed Lenin's

advice of offering a working alliance with the SDP and worked patiently to convince the Social Democratic workers of the correctness of their ideas and programme, they would have swiftly won over the great majority of the workers as well as the honest elements among the leaders, isolating and excluding the corrupt careerists. It was the desire to find a 'short cut' which effectively prevented the CP from doing this.

The new workers' government in Hungary had a series of important advantages. The revolution, contrary to all the arguments always advanced by the reformists about violence, was entirely bloodless. The bourgeoisie was too demoralised and shaken to offer resistance. The mass of the population undoubtedly identified with the new government, not only the workers and poor peasants but also, unlike in Russia, a big section of the intelligentsia which, partly because of the old national-revolutionary traditions, supported the revolution.

On the other hand, the Hungarian Workers' Republic was born at a critical moment in the life of world imperialism. The very foundation of the system appeared to be collapsing under the hammer-blows of the revolution. 1919 was a fateful year in the history of mankind. After the revolutionary upheavals in Berlin in January, Austria entered into a stage of revolutionary ferment. A short-lived soviet republic was proclaimed in Bavaria.

In France, the period of demobilisation was accompanied by extreme tension. In Britain, the shop stewards' movement and the Triple Alliance were at their height. There was the struggle for the 40-hour week and the 'Hands Off Russia' movement, mutinies in the army and the revolt on the Clyde.

As the year wore on there were big strike movements in Holland, Norway, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Italy and even the USA. With a correct policy and orientation, the Hungarian revolution could have carried the flames of revolt into the heart of Europe, as the strategists of imperialism recognised only too well.

Tragically, the leaders of the Hungarian Communists committed

a series of errors which effectively sealed the fate of the revolution. As already pointed out, the party had a completely erroneous position on the land question. This was now carried into practice. Of the nine million inhabitants of the Hungarian soviet republic, 4.4 million worked on the land. There were 5,000 big land-owners (1% of the total), who owned more land than the remaining 99%. There were a million 'rural proletarians'; about 700,000 small peasant families; more than 100,000 middle peasant homesteads (11.7% of the total) and about 70,000 kulak households (8% of the total). A correct agrarian policy could and should have won over the great majority of peasants to the side of the revolution.

In Russia, the decree on land was one of the first decrees issued by the Bolsheviks immediately after taking power. In Hungary it took the new government two weeks to publish the land decree—a long time in a revolutionary situation, which gave the counter-revolutionary elements in the villages a golden opportunity to spread alarmist rumours and anti-socialist propaganda. Worse still, the ultra-left impatience of the Hungarian Communists led to an abortion of the agrarian reform.

Béla Kún and his companions looked on the peasant question in a narrow 'economic' sense. They had not understood the dialectical nature of the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry and looked askance at the Russian Bolsheviks' policy of distributing land to the peasants, which in the short term reinforced the development of small property-owning elements in the villages, but which succeeded in galvanising the mass of poor peasants around the banner of the socialist revolution. "Tibor (Számuel) and I" wrote Béla Kún after the defeat of the revolution, "believed that our agrarian policy was cleverer than that of the Russian Bolsheviks, because we did not divide up the big estates among the peasants but set up socialist production on them, basing ourselves on the rural workers and not turning them into enemies of the proletariat, thanks to the fact that

we did not convert them into owners, landed proprietors."

The impatience and impressionism of the CP leaders led them to exaggerate and idealise the elements of 'socialist consciousness' among the Hungarian peasantry, much as the Russian Narodniks had done in the previous century. Tibor Számueli conveyed these illusions at a meeting in Russia in May 1919 in a speech reported in 'Izvestia' (28/5/1919):

"The idea of organising communes is meeting with the greatest sympathy. **Among the Hungarian peasantry there are no groups which would fight against this idea.**" (our emphasis—AW).

"SOCIALISM NOW"

In reality, the peasantry, because of the entire mode of existence and role in production, is the social class least capable of developing a collective consciousness. Some of the Hungarian Communists seemed to grasp this fact better than Béla Kún. In an article published in the first issue of 'Communist International', L Rudas pointed out that the poor and middle class peasant was "in the best of cases indifferent to the fate of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

This observation, however, is only relatively true. Why were the Russian poor and middle peasants not indifferent to the fate of the Russian workers' state? Because the Russian Bolsheviks had distributed the land to the peasants, they knew that, in defending the workers' state they were defending their plots of land against the big land-owners who supported the White armies. 'Socialist consciousness' did not enter into it.

Yet the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, made skilful use of the land question to win over the multi-millioned peasant masses to the side of the socialist revolution. Far from making enemies of the peasants, the Bolshevik agrarian policy turned them into enthusiastic defenders of the revolution. Without this alliance, the Bolsheviks would not have survived longer than the Hungarian soviet republic did.

The position of the Social Democratic leaders on the question was not better, but worse than that of Béla Kún. 'Nepszava', the organ of the united party, controlled by the Social Democrats wrote: "We can be proud of the solution to the agrarian problem... We were able to resolve the question thanks to a fortunate circumstance (!). In our country, socialist production in agriculture is no utopia. A good part of the cultivated land has been handed over to collective production." (13/6/19)

In practice, these conservative bureaucrats were by nature terrified of any kind of initiative of the masses. To these elements, the idea advanced by Marx and Engels, and put into practice by the Bolsheviks, of a "second edition of the Peasants' War" as an auxiliary arm of the proletarian revolution, was anathema. Hiding behind the CP leaders they lent their support to collectivisation, not out of any revolutionary enthusiasm, but as a possible means of avoiding 'disorder' in the villages.

They carried out the agrarian reform by the most thoroughly bureaucratic means, depriving it of any revolutionary content and appeal it might have had. In their heart of hearts, the Social Democrats opposed the confiscation of the land—in later years Count Karolyi himself revealed that the idea of agrarian reform had been opposed not only by the landowners and the Church, but also by the SDP leaders. The result was an abortion. 'Commissars for Production' were put in charge of the collective farms. In many cases this was none other than the former landowner. He lived in his old house, and the peasant continued to address him as 'master'.

How could such a situation strike a responsive chord in the hearts of the poor peasants and farm labourers? As far as they could see, nothing fundamental had changed from before. This explains the indifference of the poor and middle peasants "in the best of cases" to the revolution.

The village poor were unconvinced by the new situation, which closely resembled what existed previously, though the names had changed. The small proprietors were suspicious of

the government's intentions and easily influenced by the propaganda of the rich peasants and landowners that the government wished to nationalise their land also. Whereas Lenin's policy had succeeded in driving a wedge between the small peasants and the kulaks. Béla Kún's 'cleverer' policy only succeeded in uniting the small peasants and the kulaks in a hostile bloc, opposed to the revolution.

The failure of the agrarian policy had serious results in other fields. The government, conscious of the hostility or indifference of the majority of peasants, did not feel sufficiently confident to requisition grain, as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia. This led to serious difficulties in supplying the towns and the Red Army with food and clothing in the critical months which followed. The mistake was a fundamental one.

In the ensuing months, the government, instead of concentrating all its efforts in widening its base of support and waging a merciless struggle against the counter-revolutionaries, frittered away its energies on all sorts of secondary questions. Under Lenin's insistent pressure the eight-hour day was introduced, together with a number of worthwhile practical reforms to raise the living standards of the people.

But much time was wasted on parades, speeches and celebrations. At a time when the forces of reaction were mustering on the borders and inside Hungary, ministers dedicated themselves to a thousand and one cultural projects. Lenin felt obliged to complain to László Rudas at the light-mindedness of the Hungarian CP leaders:

"What sort of dictatorship (of the proletariat) is this you've got, socialising the theatres and musical societies? Do you really think that this is your most important task now?" ('Szabad Nép', 21/1/49)

The Hungarian soviet republic, which had conquered power with such ease, now found itself in a weak position to resist the onslaught of reaction. The government itself was made up of 13 members, of which only four were Communists. They imitated all the external forms of the Russian revolution (something Lenin had warned them against doing)



Lenin was highly critical of the tactics of the Hungarian CP, in particular their handling of the agrarian question

peasants inspectorate', and even made Lenin 'honorary president' of the Budapest soviet! On the other hand, the Red Army, established by decree on March 30 was really the old army under a new name, placed under the control of the Social Democrat Pogany and staffed by officers of the former regime. Most of the commissars attached to the army were Social Democrats, including the commissar-in-chief, Moor.

The Red Militia included whole detachments taken over lock stock and barrel from the old police and gendarmerie. In this way, instead of completely destroying the old state apparatus, important elements of it were preserved under the new labels. Only gradually were the army and militias purged of the old reactionary elements. In the meantime, priceless time was being lost in the fight against reaction.

In 133 days of its existence, the soviet republic issued no fewer than 531 decrees. If revolutions were won and lost on the strength of paperwork, the Hungarian workers would never have lost. Unfortunately for Béla Kún, the reaction fought with real bullets, not paper ones.

On the economic front also, the impatience of the CP leaders led to enormous problems. After the October revolution the Bolsheviks

had only nationalised the banks and big industries. This was sufficient to concentrate all the fundamental levers of the economy into the hands of the workers' state and the more complicated task of integrating small and medium-sized enterprises into the nationalised sector could proceed at a slower, more orderly pace.

However, the desire of Bela Kun to 'go one better' than the Bolsheviks, caused the Hungarian workers' state to nationalise, without compensation, all businesses with more than 50 employees five days after coming to power. This was trying to do too much, too soon, in a backward country where large-scale industry still represented a relatively small sector.

In fact, within one month, no fewer than 27,000 businesses were nationalised—many of them with less than twenty workers. It is true that the initiative for these nationalisations usually came from the workers themselves. The government was swamped with demands from workers asking to be taken over. Even the wig-makers wanted to be nationalised.

But the idea of the Hungarian CP leaders of introducing 'socialism now' without taking due care and consideration for the problem of the transition between capitalism and socialism caused serious difficulties. Without adequate preparation and sufficiently developed technology, the nationalisation of thousands of tiny businesses was suicidal and brought about considerable economic dislocation. Measures such as the decree requisitioning all cabs in Budapest and other towns regardless of the number of employees concerned antagonised important sections of the middle class, small producers and artisans.

The errors committed by the Hungarian Communists seriously weakened the revolution in the face of the growing threat from the forces of reaction. The imperialist powers, gathered at the Paris Peace Conference, understood only too well the danger posed by the 'Hungarian question'. The possibility of armed intervention was raised. But the underlying weakness of imperialism at that moment is revealed by their

inability to intervene directly against the Hungarian revolution.

Instead the British, French and US imperialists were obliged to rely on the services of the Czech, Rumanian and French bourgeois to do the dirty work for them. On April 16 the Rumanians launched their attack, which immediately showed up the weakness and unpreparedness of the Hungarian soviet republic. The 'Red Army', made up of troops and officers of the old regime crumbled before the offensive, a number of sections going over to the enemy.

IMPERIALISM INTERVENES

The Rumanian army penetrated deep into Hungarian territory without meeting serious resistance. To add to the danger, the Serbs, egged on by the Allies, invaded southern Hungary, while the 'democratic' Czech bourgeois also joined in, attacking in the West with troops commanded by French and Italian officers.

'The Times' of May 7th 1919, voicing the aims of the imperialists demanded the surrender of Hungary, the disarming of the Red Army, and the resignation of the government and the occupation of the country by Allied troops. At the first sign of danger, the Social Democrats in the government wanted to throw in the sponge. Wilhelm Böhm, one of the principal SDP leaders, and former head of the Red Army, drew up a plan of capitulation.

The demoralising activities of these right-wing labour leaders served to paralyse the government at a decisive moment. Undoubtedly, had matters been left in their hands, Budapest would have occupied by the Whites without resistance.

However, the heroic proletarians of Budapest once again took matters into their own hands, forcing the government to change course. In a whole series of mass meetings, the workers ignored the pleas of Böhm and Co and voted to fight. Levies were raised in all the big factories

and flying columns were sent from the workers' districts to the Front. In a few days, thanks to the magnificent initiative of the workers, thousands of volunteers joined the Red Army—factory workers, railwaymen, clerks, postmen, office-boys, transformed the whole situation in 24 hours.

The Red Army was reorganised on a new basis. And on March 2 the Budapest workers succeeded in pushing back the invading forces all along the line. In a brilliant seven-day campaign, the proletarian Red Army passed over from the defensive to the offensive, recapturing many towns and villages from the enemy, against overwhelming odds.

The Czech army was thrown into a panic by the offensive. Large areas of Slovakia were liberated, and on June 16, a Slovak soviet republic was proclaimed.

However, the heroic exertions of the Hungarian workers were being constantly undermined by the SDP leaders in the government, who now began a systematic campaign of criticism against alleged 'harsh methods' and 'needless cruelty'. In point of fact, no-one could accuse the Hungarian workers of excessive cruelty. Rather the reverse was true.

The revolution had been far too indulgent with its enemies, and was now paying a terrible price. To demand the renunciation of 'harsh measures' in the middle of a terrible and bloody civil war was tantamount to demanding surrender to the enemy. Even the most democratic parliamentary bourgeois government will not tolerate defeatist propaganda in time of war. Yet the Hungarian workers had to put up a fight on two fronts: against the open class enemy at the Front and the disguised and hypocritical agents of the enemy striving to undermine the war efforts from key positions in the government itself.

Too late, the CP leaders realised the mistake of unification. Bela Kun grumbled about the Social Democrats and hinted at the need for a split at the very moment when the firmest unity and decisiveness of leadership was needed to fight the war. The government was riven with divisions. The SDPers formed a

majority of all leading bodies of the 'united' party, with very few exceptions. They controlled its 'revolutionary governing council'.

These consummate careerists, who had supported the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to save their positions, now made up their minds not to back the losing horse, and were busily 'mending fences' with the other side. They were seeking to put as much ground as possible between themselves and the 'Bolsheviks' whom they were determined to blame for the whole affair, and to refurbish their credentials as respectable 'democratic' bourgeois politicians who had really meant no harm and had merely participated in the revolution in order to 'avoid excesses' and ensure the whole thing did not get completely out of hand.

If matters did not come to a split, that was because the CP leaders, despite pressure from the Communist International to come out openly against the SDP leaders, wavered and backed down under pressure.

The activities of the SDP in the government provided the green light for imperialism. On the initiative of the 'people's champion', President Wilson, the Paris Peace Conference, now thoroughly alarmed at the successes of the Red Army, sent a further ultimatum to Budapest on June 8, demanding a halt to the Red Army's advances and inviting the Hungarian government to Paris "to discuss Hungary's frontiers". The note was followed by a second ultimatum, threatening the use of force if these terms were not accepted.

This new ultimatum was seized on by Böhm and Co to launch a new campaign for 'peace at any price'. Under pressure, Bela Kun again temporised and advocated a truce. On June 18 Lenin sent a telegram in which he explained that, while negotiations with the Allies was, in and of itself, a correct tactic to gain a breathing space, no trust whatsoever should be placed in the Allies and their offers of peace. In reality, there was not the slightest guarantee that the Allies' promises would be kept, were the ultimatum to be accepted.

With foreign armies still on its soil, the revolution was being asked

to disarm itself on the strength of a scrap of paper. Yet on June 26, negotiations were started, and the Red Army began to withdraw.

There are decisive psychological moments in the history of a revolution, as in a strike. The surrender of hard-won positions without a shot had a disastrous effect on the Red Army. The ill-fated Slovak soviet republic was delivered into the hands of its enemies. The morale of the workers and peasants suffered a body-blow. Lenin had warned against the danger of illusions in the 'good faith' of the Allies, and now the Hungarians fell headlong into the trap. As Bela Kun himself later admitted:

"We did not answer the manoeuvres of Clemenceau with counter-maneuvres. We had not striven to gain time by spinning out the negotiations. We didn't even try to compel them to accept such negotiations, but merely carried out all that they demanded, without the slightest guarantee, without taking into account the possibility of the disintegration of the army in the event of a retreat."

REIGN OF TERROR

The fate of the Hungarian revolution was now sealed. On June 24 there was an attempted counter-revolutionary uprising in Budapest led by self-styled 'National Social Democrats', which was put down in 24 hours. On 20 July, Clemenceau issued a further note stating that the Hungarian government was "not competent to negotiate" and demanding the formation of a new government excluding the CP and composed of "responsible labour leaders." The SDP leaders eagerly accepted the demand, as was to be expected.

They had shielded themselves behind the CP, but now the pendulum had swung the other way, and Bela Kun and Co had outlived their usefulness. Here again, the CP leaders displayed extreme naïvety and confusion. Instead of conduc-

ting a fight to expose the manoeuvres of the SDP leaders (who, incidentally, were directly in contact with the French, British, Italian and the US military mission in Budapest), they eventually agreed to resign "to prevent useless bloodshed".

The coup d'état had been accomplished without firing a shot. The 'responsible' labour leaders concentrated all power in their hands with a view to handing it back as quickly as possible to the landlords and capitalists.

With this episode, the slide towards the counter-revolution assumed an irreversible character. The new Social Democratic government hastened to undo all the measures carried out by the revolution. Nationalised firms were handed back to their former owners. The gains of the workers and peasants were wiped out. Many CP members were arrested, while counter-revolutionary elements were released from the prisons. In their reformist blindness, the right-wing labour leaders imagined that these actions would endear them to the Whites and enable them to make their peace with triumphant reaction. Vain illusion! On the 6 August, the new government was itself overthrown by a handful of military adventurers. Disoriented and leaderless, the heroic proletariat of Budapest was helpless to offer resistance.

With the entry of the Rumanian army into Budapest, a reign of terror began against the Hungarian working class. The landlords and capitalists took their revenge for the fright they had experienced, with no vacillations or qualms of conscience about 'ruthless acts of cruelty'. Wounded Red Army soldiers were dragged from the hospitals and murdered. The Whites used the most barbarous, medieval methods of torture, 5,000 people lost their lives in this period. And the Pontius Pilates of 'gradualism', those reformist labour leaders who had protested loudly at the alleged 'excesses' of the workers and peasants now looked the other way, justifying murder and repression in the most cowardly way in return for the retention of their jobs and privileges.

The defeat of the Hungarian

revolution of 1919 was heavy blow to the international working class. The Russian revolution remained isolated in a backward country, and this fact determined the subsequent degeneration of the first workers' state in the world. Yet defeat was not inevitable. Despite the difficulty of defending a small country without natural defences, a correct policy could have led to a different outcome. The failure to adopt a correct agrarian policy in particular, meant that the revolution had no particular appeal to the peasants soldiers of the invading Rumanian, Czech and Serb armies. Yet the possibility was there. As it was, the 4th, 9th and 161st Rumanian armies refused to fight. During the war there were major strikes of Rumanian workers in Ploesti, Bucharest, etc. The Austrian newspaper 'Deutsche Volksblatt' reported during the fighting on the disaffection and discontent among the invading troops:

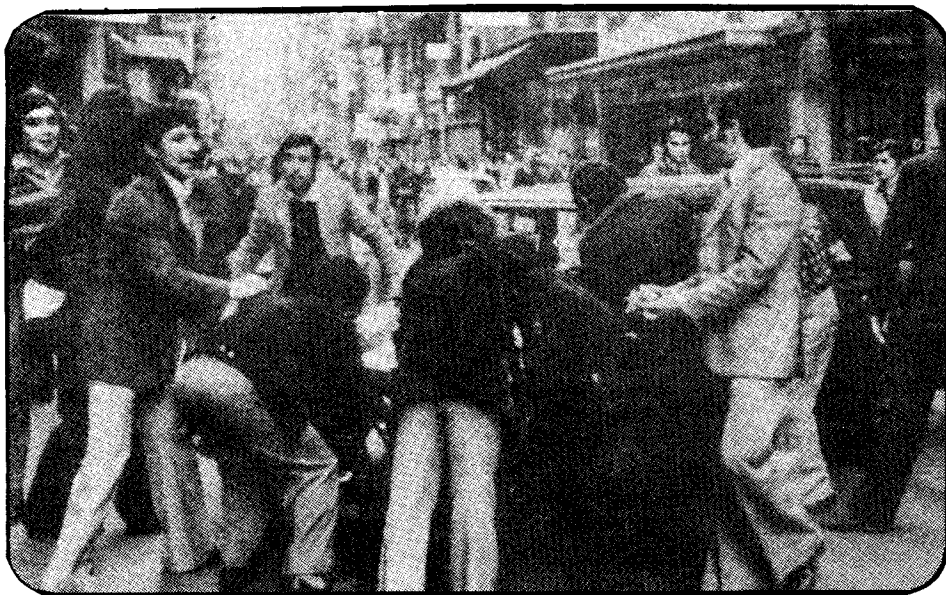
In the Rumanian and Czech armies there is a noticeable slackening of discipline, and Bolshevik ideas are spreading in their midst, which is indicated by the fact that in Bessarabia the workers' and peasants' movement has turned against Rumanian rule."

Some 8,000 Czech soldiers also refused to fight and deserted **en masse** through the Carpathians to Galitsia where they were interned by the Poles. There were also cases of fraternisation on the Yugoslav Front. All of which shows what would have been possible if the Hungarian Communists had pursued correct policies in the revolution.

Today, 50 years later, despite all the mistakes, the brief experience of the Hungarian soviet republic is a source of inspiration for all thinking workers and socialists. Only by analysing the mistakes of the past will it be possible to educate the present generation and prepare it for the tasks which the coming period will once again place before the labour movement in Britain and internationally.

12th November 1979

Letter from Madrid



The onset of winter was characterised this year by a prolonged spell of summery sunshine. For weeks on end the cloudless blue skies over Madrid were blemished only by the heavy fall of industrial pollution which hung like a shroud over the capital and the other industrial centres of Spain, Barcelona and Bilbao. The people did not welcome the unnaturally fine weather. They cursed it. In the strangled, sprawling, unplanned streets of Madrid, the masses of parked cars were covered each day with a fine layer of gritty dirt, which descended in an invisible rain from the contaminated atmosphere. The act of breathing became a torment. Cyclists were seen sporting gas-masks in the city centre. According to 'El Pais', the leading liberal daily, seven hundred people had died in recent weeks directly or indirectly as a consequence of pollution.

After decades of chaotic, unplanned industrial growth under the Franco dictatorship, Spain has paid a heavy price in terms of poisoned rivers, beaches little better than open sewers, workers' suburbs unfit for human habitation, polluted air and impossible roads. Bilbao, the mighty industrial heart of the Basque country, has fared even worse than Madrid and Barcelona. One Basque commented bitterly on the attitude of Madrid towards its northern

neighbours: "Only a regime which hated us could have allowed Bilbao to develop in this way."

SPAIN VOTES FOR A CHANGE

A few months ago many millions of Spaniards voted for a change in their lives in the first local government elections to take place in over forty years. After four decades of town-halls dominated by corrupt fascist 'caciques' working hand in glove with the speculator and the rack-renting landlord, the people wanted a complete break with the past. Only one month after the defeat of the left in the general election of March 1st, the towns of Spain voted overwhelmingly in favour of the left in the municipal elections. Over 70% of the Spanish people now live under town councils run by the left, mainly the socialists and communists, who joined together in a pact at local government level, but also radical nationalist groups in the Basque country, Andalucia and the Canary Islands. In a triumphal atmosphere, the PSOE's candidate Tierno Galvan became mayor of Madrid. Even middle-class strongholds of the Centre Union party such as Salamanca and León voted left in

these elections, after which the voicepiece of the reactionary right 'El Imparcial' asked itself gloomily what future the newly-elected conservative government of Adolfo Suarez could have, with 70% of the town-halls in the hands of the left and the factories in the hands of the 'Marxist' trade unions?

Nine months later, there is no room left for jubilation. The local councils, which inherited massive deficits from the old fascist-run town-halls, are on the verge of bankruptcy. The scandal of the wave of pollution served to show just how little things have changed here since 'democracy' arrived.

People here breathe the same bad air, live in the same expensive and over-crowded accommodation, work the same long hours. Those who are lucky enough to find work (and that is increasingly difficult), must work many hours of overtime to make ends meet. Normally, a married man with children has to have two, or even three jobs in order to live. Have you ever wondered how there are so many barmen, waiters, taxi-drivers in Spanish towns? They are mostly men who work all day in a factory and then take a job in a bar or a café, and some will even work nights as well, driving a taxi, working as a night-watchman or anything else, to make up his wages.

The trade unions want to reduce

over-time. But with prices going up all the time, it's hard to see how this will be possible. A recent economic survey showed that Spanish workers work many more hours than any EEC country. This despite the fact that unemployment here is much higher than in the Common Market. Officially, unemployment stands at 1,160,000 or 8.7% of the active population. The average for the Common Market is 5.5%.

In reality, unemployment is much higher. Earlier this year, the Bank of Bilbao published figures showing that the real unemployment is near 1,700,000, if you include those who do not sign on at the Labour Exchange. By the way, less than half of those officially registered receive any kind of unemployment benefit. And this is only very small, and lasts only six months, after which the unemployed must sink or swim.

THE ANDALUSIAN POWDER-KEG

The position of the unemployed in some parts is really desperate. In the more backward, poorer regions of Spain, Andalucia, in the south, Galicia in the north-west, and Extremadura on the borders of Portugal, unemployment is a widespread and endemic cancer, especially on the land. Here, to be without work means to go hungry. The lot of the agricultural labourer in the south is a terrible one. In the best of times he finds work on a casual basis for a few months a year, harvesting grapes or olives, for a miserable wage. The rest of the time he is without work.

In the years of the post-war boom, the unemployed from the regions could go to find work in France, Germany or Luxembourg. Now, with the coming of the world recession, the safety-valve of emigration has been closed. The young men in the villages have nowhere to go. Over half of the unemployed are less than 25 years old. In Seville alone, the number of unemployed farm labourers increased from 10,741 in August of 1978 to 19,560 this August, that

is, practically doubled. This situation has been made worse by the mechanisation of agriculture in recent years, which has meant less jobs. 'El Pais' (14/10/79) recently commented:

"According to some estimations the loss of employment in Andaluz agriculture between 1971 and 1980 will rise to 138,000 in the four eastern provinces and to 125,800 in the western ones. In Extremadura, the loss of jobs is around 80,400."

This situation is beginning to worry the Suarez government, which fears the possibility of the spread of violence in Andalucia, now widely described in the press as a 'powder keg', of comparable dimensions to the Basque country, which could explode at any time. Rafael Esuredo, president of the regional council of Andalucia has said that "It looks like the government will only take Andalucia seriously when people start getting killed."

An indication of the government's concern was the so-called "Law on manifestly under-exploited farms," which theoretically allows for the expropriation of big estates (latifundia) which can be demonstrated to be under-utilised by their owners. Naturally, the powerful estate-owners will have no difficulty in proving to the law's satisfaction, that their estates are being properly farmed, and the peasants will be left with their hands empty, as always. Madrid has also given 12,000 million pesetas to the local councils in Andalucia for so-called 'community works' for the jobless. Under these schemes, those without work get paid a pittance to sweep the street, plant trees and such-like. But this is not enough. The main trade unions estimate that next year 23,500 million pesetas will be needed for the 'community works' only in Andalucia!

The discontent of the workers, peasants and unemployed in Andalucia was shown on Sunday 2nd of December, on the Day of Andalucia, when half a million andaluths demonstrated on the streets of Seville, Cordoba, Malaga, Granada. These big demonstrations were accompanied by violent provocations by the fascist organisation Fuerza

Nueva, which led to bloody clashes with dozens injured and arrested. The clashes were particularly violent in the city of Cordoba, where the masses besieged the headquarters of Furza Nueva, smashing the windows, till the police dispersed the crowds to defend the fascists.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Next year, both Andalucia and Galicia will go to the polls in regional referendums to decide the question of devolution. Following the statute of autonomy won by the Basques and Catalans this autumn, many other regions of the Spanish state are also clamouring for similar rights. In Andalucia, in particular, as a result of the appalling conditions of poverty and unemployment brought about by decades of neglect by the central government in Madrid, there has been a growing mood of frustration, the clearest expression of which was the vote secured by the previously obscure and mis-named Andaluth Socialist Party (PSA) of Alejandro Rojas Marcos, a middle-class demagogue with links with big business and who had been a local councillor under Franco. The blame for the unequalled rise of this party and of 'andaluth nationalism' must be laid fairly and squarely at the door of the right-wing leaders of the Socialist and Communist parties (PSOE and PCE) who have consistently failed to give a lead to the increasingly desperate masses of Andalucia.

Of course, all socialists must support the fullest possible autonomy for Andalucia, Galicia, Valencia, and any other region whose people express themselves in favour of devolution. But given the catastrophic nature of the crisis of Spanish capitalism, the mere granting of a parliament for the andaluths or galicians can solve practically nothing. This will be seen also in the Basque country, where factory closures and unemployment have also risen sharply. According to the Basque industrialist, Luis Olarra, in order to rescue Basque

industry, a new 'Marshall Plan' from Madrid would be needed, in the order of \$400,000 million to \$500,000 million US dollars. With similar problems all over Spain, and with a yawning budget deficit and inflation inexorably advancing towards 20% by the end of the year, it is hard to see how the Suarez government could contemplate such astronomic quantities of aid.

For the time being, the 'Centre' government has adopted a policy of 'make do and mend' on the economic front. Terrified of a direct confrontation with the powerful Spanish proletariat, Suarez has continued to temporise, granting aid to the ailing shipbuilding and steel industries which were threatened with massive closures.

LEADERSHIP LACKING

But with the looming world recession, Spanish capitalism now finds itself in an increasingly weak and exposed position. In a desperate attempt to get points of support, the government has tried to enlist the aid of the leaders of the socialist trade union (UGT). Foolishly, these leaders agreed and began to negotiate deals with the employers separate and apart from the rival Communist Party-dominated union, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO). What is evidently at stake is the handing-back of the UGT's property, confiscated by Franco at the end of the civil war. In recent months, the UGT leadership has leaned over backwards to show itself 'moderate' and 'reasonable', opposing strikes and mobilisations. As a result, it has suffered a severe slump in membership and left the ground clear to the rival Workers' Commissions to appear as the more radical of the two, though in practice, the only complaint of the latter is that they have been left 'out in the cold' by the government's separate negotiations with the UGT.

The manoeuvres between the government, employers and trade

union leaders have caused a temporary confusion and disorientation in the ranks of the workers' movement. But beneath the apparent surface of calm, there is a groundswell of discontent, reflected by the fact that many more days have been lost in strikes this year than in 1978. Some of these strikes have borne a violent character, notably the 49-day long general strike of the lorry drivers in Asturias last September, which at times looked like a mini civil war. The lorry drivers' pickets fought the armed police with sticks, stones and chains. The police replied with gunfire, killing one worker and wounding others. The leaders were arrested and eventually the army was used to drive the lorries. There have also been strikes of teachers, railwaymen, building workers, bakers, hospital workers, agricultural labourers, shipyard workers and other sectors. The discussion, in the parliament, of the so-called 'workers' statute', a kind of bill of rights for the trade unions, also provoked widespread protests, demonstrations and strikes. The overt wheeling and dealing between the government and the PSOE leaders on this question caused enormous discontent at rank and file level. Despite all attempts to break unity, the UGT and Workers' Commissions in Granada jointly called a one-day general strike to protest against the government's 'statute'.

At first, it looked as though the UGT in the Basque country was also going to call a joint 24-hour general strike together with the CCOO. But under pressure from the national UGT leadership in Madrid, the Basque UGT leaders withdrew. Only the UGT of Alava maintained firm and went through with the strike call which was practically 100% successful.

Discontent at the leadership's stand was expressed by the radical Asturian miners' union which also called a strike and demonstration on December 7th to coincide with the general strike in the Basque country.

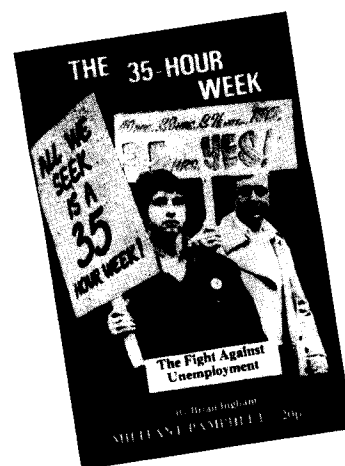
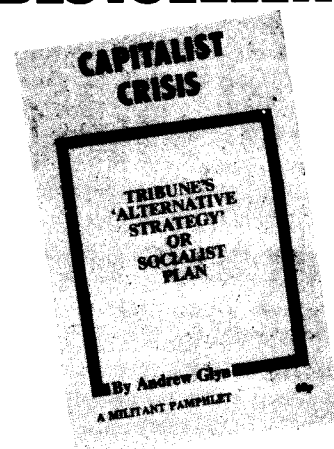
It is clear that the leaders of the PSOE and UGT cannot continue indefinitely with these policies which caused the loss of the general

election on March 1st and massive losses in membership of both the party and the union.

The situation facing the mass of Spanish workers is truly catastrophic. The working class will not give up its hard-won gains without a struggle. If that means taking the leaders by the scruff of the neck and forcing them to lead, then this will be done. The Spanish workers were not intimidated in the past by the Franco dictatorship. They will not be deterred now by the pusillanimous and short-sighted behaviour of their own leaders.

JORGE MARTINEZ
MADRID 12th December 1979

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