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Chile:

**South
Africa:**

**British
Economy:**

International Notes:

Review:



CONTENTS

COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN CHILE

SOUTH AFRICA

BRITISH ECONOMY IN CRISIS

INTERNATIONAL NOTES:

West Germany

Argentina

1911 CHILDREN'S STRIKE

COUNTER REVOLUTION IN CHILE

BY ROGER SILVERMAN



A Warning to Workers Everywhere

The counter revolution in Chile is in full blast. Thousands of workers have died under its blows. An American doctor in Santiago has estimated that up to 25,000 Chileans have been executed. Two American students, who were imprisoned in the National Stadium in Santiago — where even the junta admits to holding 7,000 prisoners — saw with their own eyes the shooting of 400 to 500 prisoners in groups of 30 to 40. A Mexican diplomat has asserted that the regime has a blacklist of 13,115 foreigners to be systematically wiped out — mostly political exiles from Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay and other Latin American police states. Sickening descriptions have been given by eye-witnesses of sadistic beatings and tortures.

In the whole violent history of the South American continent, the classical home of military coups, this is undoubtedly the bloodiest upheaval in more than fifty years. It is a massacre almost on the scale of the Indonesian bloodbath of 1965, where, as in Chile, an enraged officer caste avenged itself on the workers' organisations after overthrowing a government which tried to lean on the support of the working class. The junta has surrounded mines and factories with tanks, and decreed that workers must work on Saturdays and on two public holidays without extra pay. This is reaction at its ugliest. All the hopes of the oppressed masses lie in ruins, under the iron heel of the military dictatorship. A cruel lesson is being given to the workers and poor peasants of the whole teeming continent.

The junta itself estimates that as many as 15% of the work force have been sacked as "militants" and "agitators". These workers are starving and destitute, unable to get new jobs, forced into vagrancy and crime.

The junta has sworn to "stamp out Marxism in Chile". How many times before have we heard this threat? The Generals will find that they cannot order the class struggle to stop. History cannot be pushed backwards. **Marxism** has been prematurely buried over and over again, under the General's gun, the Professor's textbook, or the traitors' lie; but it returns again every time with redoubled force, because Marxism alone corresponds to modern social reality.

The Generals, as loyal servants to the ruling class, have announced that the "immense majority" of companies nationalised by the "Popular Unity" government are to be returned to their former owners. Pinochet, Leigh and the other leaders of the junta have Fascist ambitions. They have vowed to crush Marxism and they have shown unrelenting savagery in their violent war on the workers' parties and trade unions. But they have seized power without any solid social basis. They do not have the organised paramilitary force of demented small businessmen, bankrupts, former officers and thugs, that made up Mussolini's Fascists, Hitler's Nazi SA and SS, or Franco's

Falange. There is a small "Gremialist" movement, based largely on the Catholic University, which stands for the replacement of trade unions by guilds ("gremios") containing both workers and employers, and the other paraphernalia of a corporate state.

But the Gremialists and the "*Patria y Libertad*" do not provide the basis for a Fascist regime which can roll back history even for a couple of decades. Most of the politicians from the orthodox right-wing parties are pressing the regime to set up an equivalent to the Arena, the civilian party which gives a parliamentary facade to the Brazilian military junta. But it will remain an unstable military dictatorship, a regime of crisis.

A regime resting on nothing but its own police and army is always very precarious, no matter how brutal it might be. The Argentine Generals and the Greek Colonels have discovered that. The Chilean coup is similar to the reaction following the defeat of the Asturian Commune in 1934, which killed 30,000 workers. Only two years later, the revolution leapt forward once again.

The workers of Chile will have the last word, and this bitter blow will harden their resolve to carry the revolution through to a conclusion. But the lessons of the Chilean coup extend far beyond Chile's borders. Allende's election in 1970 was hailed as a model of peaceful change for workers everywhere. This was to be the living refutation of those "romantics" and "ultra-lefts" who ruled out the possibility of a gradual and constitutional transition to socialism. It was also, if not quite logically, asserted in the same breath that such a change was *all the more* possible in Chile, because of the unique tradition of parliamentary democracy, respect for the Constitution, the neutrality of the armed forces, etc.

AN "IMPERIALIST PLOT" ?

Allende defended "*the Chilean road*" because "*though it is the most difficult, it is the best and carries with it the fewest risks in human terms.*" His speeches make gruesome reading today, as the thousands of corpses in Chile's mass graves pile on top of the junta's first victim — Salvador Allende.

Why did the "Chilean experiment" fail? The *Morning Star* blamed "*the plots of imperialism and the CIA*". John Gollan, Secretary of the British Communist Party (*Morning Star* 15/9/73) wrote: "*Nixon and the Pentagon are in the thick of this vile crime.*" Tony Chater, another CP leader, (*Comment* 6/10/73) called the coup "*a brutal act of imperialist aggression*", and listed the evidence of American involvement.

Certainly, the hands of US imperialism are deeply stained with Chilean blood. To take the most scandalous example, a letter was unearthed from Hal Hendrix, (head of the private Latin American intelligence service of the multi-national corporation ITT) to a colleague, in which he talked of General Viaux's plans to launch a coup to prevent Allende taking office: "*Rumours that (Viaux) would trigger a coup on October 9 or 10 were rampant Word was passed to Viaux from Washington to hold back last week. It was felt that he was not adequately prepared, his timing was off, and he should cool it for a later, unspecified date As part of the persuasion to delay, Viaux was given oral assurance that he would receive material assistance and support from the US and others for a later manoeuvre.*" There was plenty of other evidence. The *Observer* provided evidence of connections between the Fascist "*Patria y Libertad*" organisation, the big industrialists' association, and two CIA agents in the copper miners' strikes. The Chilean paratroop regiment were trained in the USA. The State Department admitted having prior knowledge of the coup, and the same day, US warships lay off Valparaiso, for "*joint naval manoeuvre*". Neither is there any secret about the cutting off of all loans and credit from 1971 onwards, and the speedy resumption of aid after the coup.

But what was to be expected? American capitalists had lucrative stakes in Chile. After an initial investment of \$50-80 million, 44 years ago, the copper mine owners alone have raked in a cool 4,000 million dollars profit, according to Allende. These were the first enterprises to be nationalised by Allende's government. To expect the military espionage monster of US imperialism to roll over and play dead is as naive as to call the recognition of the new regime by British capitalism "*the stench of betrayal*", as Gollan did. For capitalists to show solidarity against the world revolution is no "*betrayal*" !

Certain reactionaries always explain strikes by the presence of "Communist agitators". In the same way, some sections of the left think that once they have discovered the hand of "American imperialist aggression", there is nothing more to be said. History unfolds not fundamentally through "plots" and "conspiracies", but through the *class struggle*. The hand of American imperialism was not an unseen and accidental intervention from outside, but the major obstacle in the path of the Chilean revolution. It is no explanation to say: the revolution was just getting along nicely, when the ruling class came along and spoiled it. If the ruling class were not hell-bent on hanging on to its power, no matter what the cost in workers' lives, then the Socialist revolution would be not only easy, but unnecessary.

From 1918 to 1921, the Russian workers and poor peasants had to stand up, not just to hidden sabotage and undercover aid to the White Guards, but the direct military intervention of no less than 21 imperialist armies! How did the Bolsheviks respond to this? With complaints at the "unsporting behaviour" of world imperialism? On the contrary, they replied with the implacable arguments of armed resistance linked to bold internationalist propaganda. Faced with an armed people, a militia of ragged workers and peasants ready to fight with their bare fists if need be to defend their revolution, the troops of the intervention melted away. The soldiers and the sailors

became infected with revolution. Mutinies and desertions were rampant. Industrial action by the workers in Western Europe, electrified alike by the power of their Russian brothers, forced world capitalism to retreat. The world revolution emerged enormously strengthened by the courage and skill of the Bolsheviks in the teeth of reaction.

How much flimsier was the challenge facing the leadership of the Chilean workers! American imperialism dared not intervene directly. The days of Panama, Guatemala and Santa Domingo are over. The humiliating defeat in Vietnam, the scramble from South-East Asia, the weakness of the dollar, the degradation of the White House, and the explosive mood all over Latin America, all made military invasion of Chile unthinkable for the American ruling class.

The Chilean workers fought heroically, ready to sacrifice their lives under the tanks, planes and firing squads of the hated junta. From the very beginning, they had rallied loyally to the support of the Popular Unity government. They have earned an honoured place in the long scroll of martyrs for Socialism. Either Socialism itself is just a sentimental dream—or the energies of the workers were needlessly squandered. Any Socialist must conclude that the workers' leaders failed to harness the masses' power; that their false programme delivered them into the bloody hands of their executioners.

Allende's government carried through a programme of reform within the confines of capitalism, hardly equalled in history. Copper, coal, nitrates, steel, cement, telephones, tyres, textiles, banking, fishing, were all either totally or partially nationalised. In the first year, industrial production rose by 13%. About nine million acres of the biggest landed estates were distributed to the poor peasants. Great social reforms were achieved, raising the living standards of some workers by 20%. Children were given free milk and meals at school. Great strides forward were taken in the field of pensions, welfare services, health, housing and education. The poor supported with growing enthusiasm what they saw as "their" government.

WHAT WAS THE "POPULAR UNITY"?

To understand how their hopes were so cruelly dashed, it is necessary to examine exactly to what extent it was "their" government. What was the "Popular Unity"? It was an electoral bloc which tied the two mass workers' parties, the Communists and, to their left, the Socialists—both nominally "Marxist-Leninist" parties—together with the Radicals and five small liberal splinter groups.

These six parties stood for reforms within the framework of capitalism and their main function was to act as watchmen over the workers' parties, millstones around their necks, to hold them back from taking full revolutionary measures against capitalism. It was hence a coalition of conflicting interests, an unprincipled bloc. Allende thought that by "uniting" this assortment of mutually incompatible parties around a minimum programme which represented the lowest common political denominator, he could unite their supporters into a solidly welded monolithic movement for gradual change. The "Popular Unity" government therefore proclaimed its intentions not to proceed immediately to socialist policies, but to complete first the "anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist" revolution, and then to "open the road" to socialism sometime in the future. While carrying through sweeping reforms, it also tried to contain the spontaneous movement of the workers and poor peasants to take over the factories and landed estates.

Every party was thrown into internal convulsions by the upheavals of the three years of the "Popular Unity" government. One wing of the Christian Democratic Party split off to form the MAPU, which entered the alliance and gravitated rapidly to the left. Later there was a further split and the IC (Christian Left) also broke away to support the "Popular Unity". The original leaders of the MAPU, uneasy about that party's radicalisation, left MAPU to join with this new formation. These successive defections from the Christian Democratic Party obviously left that party more firmly under the control of its right-wing leadership under Frei and Alwyn, which emphasises still further Allende's folly in trying to appease the Christian Democrats to the bitter end. The Radical Party too was swept leftwards. At its Congress in July 1971, it passed a resolution accepting "*historical materialism and the class struggle*" and calling for "*the abolition of private property in the means of production.*" This in turn provoked the right wing to break away and form the misnamed Radical Left Party (PIR). Even within the Communist Party, a certain polarisation was beginning to take place in the last days of the Allende government and an opposition to Corvalan crystallised around Jorge Insunza. But the Socialist Party above all became the arena for bitter political struggle. The right-wing around Briones was ejected and the General Secretary, Carlos Altamirano, became the focal point for a strong left wing, which maintained a vigilant and critical stance in relation to Allende. Both the Santiago branch of the Party and the Young Socialists called on the leadership to set up a workers' militia, and it was these sections which played the main role in importing arms into the factories.

If a clear, conscious Marxist cadre had existed within the Socialist Party, it would have become the nucleus for a mass revolutionary vanguard in the stormy events from 1970 onwards. A Bolshevik Party could have been created, capable of articulating the instinctive movement of the working class for power, and of carrying the revolution through to a successful conclusion. But those elements to the left of the workers' parties proved completely adventurist and sectarian. The *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) was a tendency based mainly on students, who isolated themselves from the workers' organisations.

Here and there they successfully encouraged occupations of landed estates and in some cases of factories, but they based their tactics on "single combat" with the representatives of state power. The sporadic occupations were never linked to the overall perspective of mobilising the working masses to take power.

It was this tendency that was founded by self-styled "Trotskyists" who, here as elsewhere, hoped to build a revolutionary movement while bypassing the existing traditional organisations of the most conscious strata of the working class. They sought to mobilise the most backward layers of society, the poor peasantry or the lumpen proletariat (or semi-proletarian) elements in the shanty towns encircling Santiago. Their exploits in seizing certain medium sized estates made no impact on the political consciousness of the activists within the workers' parties. It was only at the end of 1972 that a "regroupment" of some of these grouplets took place, and a new party was founded, once again in isolation from the mass organisations – the "Revolutionary Socialist Party". It is a tragic fact about the Chilean events that those revolutionary elements to the left of the mass parties impatiently followed adventuristic policies of creating "armed combat organisations" to shoot it out with the incomparably mightier repressive apparatus of the state machine, instead of adopting the method of Lenin in April 1917 – only six months before the world's first socialist revolution! – and pursuing a relentless and meticulous policy of "patient explanation" to raise the consciousness of the workers to a sense of their own innate power.

The "Popular Unity" government was similar in composition to the Kerensky regime in Russia, after the direct representatives of the capitalists had been forced out of the coalition. The workers' parties gave permanent right of veto, not only to the Radicals and the other reformist parties inside the coalition, but above all to the Christian Democrat opposition, on whose votes in Congress the government depended. This was the real character of the government led by what the Press called "*the world's first democratically elected Marxist President*".

In reality, the Chilean "experiment" was nothing new. Didn't the Russian Mensheviks in 1917 also patch up a coalition government with the peasant Social-Revolutionary Party, and even, while they could, with the Cadets, the capitalist party, on the grounds that it was necessary to secure the maximum "popular unity" in defence of the "anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist" February Revolution? And what about the "Popular Front" government in Spain, which brought the parties at the head of the revolutionary working class into a coalition with the "shadow of the capitalists", the abandoned relics of the old liberal parties of a ruling class that had already fled to the Fascist camp? That too was justified by the need to "unite the forces of democracy" against Franco.

WHY THE MIDDLE CLASS DESPAIRED

The so-called "parties of the middle class" have always been based on deceit of the middle class. For what are the real historical interests of the middle strata of society? The lower peasantry in the country and the small businessmen in the towns, squeezed dry by finance capital and crushed by the monopolies, face under capitalism only bankruptcy and ruin. They can only be forced down into the ranks of the proletariat. Their only real salvation, then, lies in the victory of the workers and Socialism. The parties which misrepresent them under capitalism are financed by their worst enemies – Big Business – in order to pander to their basest prejudices and rouse them against the workers. The presence of such parties in coalition with the workers' parties can only bring a Trojan Horse of the ruling class into the alliance.

Every such coalition leads eventually to catastrophe. In Germany, the Menshevik policies of the Social-Democratic leaders following the 1918 revolution paved the way to terrible social crisis and the trampling of the workers under the jackboots of Hitler's Gestapo. In Spain, the road of "Popular Frontism" led to the slaughter of a million people and the victory of Franco. In France, it led directly to the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation. In Greece, it led to the colonels' putsch. In Brazil and Uruguay, it had the same consequences. The only reason why it did not end in a horrible defeat in Russia at the hands of General Kornilov – the Russian Franco or Pinochet – is that there was a Bolshevik Party which struggled tenaciously against the politics of class collaboration, and in mobilising the workers for socialism won all the millions of toiling people in town and country into a real alliance to change society. The Bolsheviks formed a coalition government with the left wing of the Social-Revolutionaries – the poor peasants whom they had won away from the treacherous double-dealing of the S-R leadership, and thus created a *real* unity of the working masses.

It is perfectly true that Allende did not have an overall majority of the population behind him, and that it was necessary to win over the mass of the middle class. But he demonstrated tragically that concessions to the Right were no way to do it.

The fact that Allende won 36.2% of the votes, more than either the National or the Christian-Democratic candidates, marked the beginning of the Chile revolution. Only 20 years earlier, he had won a mere eight per cent of the votes! All the workers except the most highly-paid, and a large section of peasants, voted for what they saw as fundamental revolutionary change. Allende began with far more support than the Bolsheviks had in February 1917! Bold propaganda, the formation of workers' councils, mass action, could have quickly rallied wider strata against the big landowners and the monopolies.

The bold reforms, which were carried out mostly within the first year or so of the "Popular Unity" government, did inspire enormous support. The nationalisation of the copper mines was supported by 93% of the population, and even the ultra-Right National Party had to vote for it in Congress. In the 1971 municipal elections, the "Popular Unity" candidates won no less than 49.7% of the votes – more than the British Labour Party has ever won in

any general election! What is more significant still is the fact that it was the Socialist Party on the left of the coalition which raised its share of the vote from 13.9% to 22.4%, while the Radicals, the main force on the right of the coalition, halved their vote from 16% to 8%. It was the radical action of the government, and not its concessions, which was winning support. Even in the "mid-term" Congressional elections of March 1973, which took place amid economic chaos and after the first crippling lorry-owners' strike, the "Popular Unity" candidates still won 44% of the votes. Once again, the Socialists doubled their Congressional seats from 14 to 28, while the Christian Left suffered a decline from seven seats to one.

But why were large sections of the middle class discontented under Allende's government? Not because it was "too Left", but because despite the massive extension of public ownership, overall control of the economy was still not in the hands of the government. For it was above all the chronic rate of inflation which drove sections of the middle class to the right. Inflation was caused initially by the penetration of millions of worthless paper dollars from the USA, into Chile as into the rest of Latin America and indeed the whole capitalist world. It soared sharply in the last period of Allende's government, getting a new impetus partly from the deliberate campaign of sabotage by the capitalists of Chile and the USA, and partly also from the big wage and pensions increases which pumped extra currency into a chaotic capitalist economy. Only a planned economy, rationally harmonising the overall growth of production, could guarantee secure and rising living standards.



Members of the Fascist organisation "Patria y Libertad".

At the end of June 1973, the cost-of-living index had risen by 283.4% in 12 months. In the first six months of 1973, food prices rose by 68.6% and clothes by 166.7%. Money supply was rising by nearly 1% a day! The economy became grotesquely distorted. A senior United Nations executive pointed out, for instance, that a bottle of Coca-Cola cost more than a ton of steel, and a plastic bag more than the cement it could hold! The nightmare of inflation continually undermined the government's reforms. Wage increases disappeared before the ink was dry on the banknotes. To protect the workers' living standards, the government had to grant bigger and bigger wage increases. In January 1972 wages were raised by 22.1% and in October they were raised again by 99.8%. Even this was barely sufficient to catch up with prices. So it was decided to pay workers partly in kind rather than in cash. Naturally, in conditions of dire shortage, grossly exacerbated by the lorry-owners' strike, a black market boomed everywhere, aggravating inflation still further. By the time of the coup, half the food consumed had been bought on the black market. The escudo, valued officially at 350 to the dollar, soared to unofficial exchange rates of over 2000.

The workers were partly insulated against the effects of inflation, by the wage increases and the payment in kind. But the middle class were plunged into a nightmare of insecurity. They depended on cash, and their lives were rocked by instability. In the two weeks preceding the "employers' strike" of November 1972, Argentine beef prices soared by 200%, and those of sugar, coffee, flour, milk, butter and margarine nearly doubled! It is not surprising that they were prey to the strident propaganda of the capitalist Press against the government.

The middle class are doomed under capitalism. They will see that even the Generals, with all their guns and their smart uniforms, cannot command prices to "stand at attention". The only way out of the impasse of inflation lies in the construction of a publicly planned economy. If the Chilean workers' parties had conducted a forthright

campaign on this programme, and exposed the rackets and the profiteering of the monopolies, they could have won far bigger strata of the middle class. But to do this, they would have had to break the "consensus" with the Radicals and the Christian Democrats.

Allende's vacillation, temporising and half-measures drove the middle class to despair. The government faced a rising revolt of the shopkeepers, lorry-owners, doctors, small farmers, clerical workers, bank employees, lawyers, teachers, airline pilots, and the highly-paid copper miners, all of whom participated in crippling strikes. Middle-class housewives took to the streets. It was out of the ranks of the middle strata that recruits were made for the small but ferocious gang of Fascist thugs, the "Patria y Libertad", which reared its head with growing audacity. Allende imagined that parliamentary concessions to the Christian Democratic politicians would endear him to the middle class, regardless of the problems they faced in the real world outside Congress. Allende bargained with the Christian Democrats at every turn, even begging them in the last days before the coup to enter the Cabinet.

It was the Christian Democratic Party, in league with the Nationals, which brought down one Allende Cabinet after another, even impeaching certain Ministers. Finally it voted with the Nationals in favour of the notorious censure motion, which accused Allende of "violating the Constitution" and in the next breath "reminded the armed forces of their duty to protect the Constitution" thus brazenly inviting the Generals to stage a coup.

CAPITALIST OR WORKERS' DEMOCRACY?

Allende's first and most fatal concession came even before his election as President had been endorsed by Congress. He secured the votes of the Christian Democrats only on the basis of accepting a list of crucial demands, including promises not to interfere with the "freedom of the Press" (ie. the freedom of the Press tycoons to pour out a ceaseless daily flow of lies, filth and slander against his government), not to touch the judiciary, and—most deadly significant of all—not to tamper with the armed forces. He promised not to allow the formation of any "unconstitutional private militias", to "appoint no military officers not educated in technical academies" and to make "no changes in the strength of the Army, Navy, Air Force or national police ... except by laws passed by Congress".

Since Chilean politicians have always boasted that Chile has "a Prussian Army, a British Navy and an American Air Force", that was fatal! Why did the Christian Democrats insist on it, if not to keep open the option of a military coup later on? Unlike Allende, who still talked of "strengthening democracy", the Christian Democratic leaders obviously had no illusions about the true essence of the State—the "armed bodies of men". The State apparatus thus remained firmly in the hands of the ruling class. What did this mean for the "Popular Unity" government which nominally presided over it? The Supreme Court, with increasing insolence, overruled its authority, upholding, in one monstrous example, the appeal of the putschist General Viaux, and substituting for the original 25-year sentence a mere two-year jail term—quite a lenient penalty for plotting to overthrow the elected government by force! Allende last June accused the Supreme Court in an Open Letter, of "partiality in the administration of justice". And the armed forces, under the grip of the officer caste trained in the elite military academies, killed the President, dissolved Congress, suspended the Constitution and ruled by decree.

Nobody could reasonably complain that the Generals had not given ample warning of their preparations for military intervention. Two days before Congress ratified Allende's election, the Army Commander-in-Chief, General Schneider, was assassinated for opposing a coup. Then a coup was prepared by General Viaux, General Valenzuela and Admiral Barros—a coup postponed only at Washington's request, as we have already seen. The secret correspondence on this conspiracy, including the clear warning of Washington's support for a future coup, was published in 1971 and common knowledge to every Chilean. Countless beatings and assassinations were committed by the "Patria y Libertad". In the countryside, a 2000-man force was recruited to sabotage transport, water, gas and power supplies. The big landowners stock-piled machine guns. Only weeks before the junta seized power, there was a full-scale revolt by the Admirals and troops clashed outside the Presidential Palace. Allende's own aide-de-camp was murdered. It was against this backdrop of violent tension that the "Comrade President" walked on to the stage, promising to "strengthen democracy" and ultimately "*instal a new system in which the working class and the people are the ones who really exercise power.*"

How was this to be implemented by a government which had just assured the ruling class of unchallenged control of the armed forces, the judiciary, the Press and the civil service? Were the capitalists really expected to sit back and watch their power being dismantled, without any attempt at resistance?

Allende said on one occasion: "*Chile has chosen to carry out a revolution within a bourgeois democracy and will continue to do so, even though it is difficult.*" What did he mean? Was it to remain a "bourgeois democracy" after the revolution had been accomplished? If not, how was it to be transformed? If so, in what did the "revolution" consist? Was it the "anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist" revolution? But if the Chilean capitalists were supposed to be an ally in this fight, why should it be "difficult" to pursue it within a bourgeois democracy?

The truth is that Allende, like many others before him, supposed the State to be a neutral entity, which could be "democratised" and later put at the service of the workers. All the promises to "strengthen democracy" remained pathetic hopes. Allende, in the event, never dared to hold a plebiscite to consolidate his authority and clip the powers of reaction, although he was constitutionally entitled to do this. He never submitted his proposals

for the replacement of the two Houses of Congress by a single, directly-elected unicameral "people's Parliament". He even withdrew his proposal for local "neighbourhood courts" of lay trade unionists and peasants.

There has never been any such thing as a neutral, classless "democracy", and Allende made strange claims for a leader of a "Marxist-Leninist" Party. As Lenin argued in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*: "If we are not to mock at common sense and history, it is obvious that we cannot speak of 'pure democracy' as long as different classes exist; we can only speak of class democracy." Lenin described very vividly the "bourgeois democracy" which Allende regarded as the setting for his revolution. It is "bound to remain restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor."

"There is not a single state," wrote Lenin, "however democratic, which has no loopholes... in its constitution, guaranteeing the bourgeoisie the possibility of despatching troops against the workers... in case of a 'violation of public order', and actually in case the exploited class 'violates' its position of slavery and tries to behave in a non-slavish manner." That was the nature of the "bourgeois democracy" in Chile, and recent events there demonstrate more eloquently than any theoretical arguments, the frailty of capitalist democracy when the ruling class feels its vital interests threatened.

There is only one way to "strengthen democracy": to take the power and wealth out of the hands of the capitalists, to establish workers' management of the economy as a whole and workers' control in the factories. Workers' Councils must be set up in every locality, composed of lay delegates elected from all the workplaces and subject to instant recall. Every Council must elect delegates on the same basis, to a Regional and Central Workers' Council, which would in turn report back to the local and regional Councils. There must be no standing army or police force, but an armed people. No administrator must be paid more than the average skilled workers' wage and all state duties should be rotated to involve the entire working population. That is the foundation for a workers' democracy, as described by Marx, Engels and Lenin: a State which would gradually wither away and dissolve into society, so that "government of the people" would be replaced by "administration of things".

The most consistent theoretical supporter of Allende's programme was Luis Corvalan, General Secretary of the Chilean Communist Party—a Party, incidentally, which was on the Right of the coalition and vociferously defended every concession to the Christian Democrats. Corvalan argued again and again that, as he put it as late as in November 1972, "in the conditions prevailing in our country, changes cannot be effected according to the classical pattern of revolutions. They can be effected only within the frame of the law".

Every scientific socialist since the days of Karl Marx has argued tirelessly that abstractions like "democracy" or "the law" are meaningless unless they are given a class content. Corvalan meant that revolutionary changes could be brought about within the framework of capitalist law. Once again, the experience of all history and its concentrated expression in Marxist theory has long ago refuted this dream.

Marx and Engels concluded from the Paris Commune over a hundred years ago, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes" (Introduction to *Communist Manifesto*). Marx wrote that "the task of the revolution is no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it, and this is essential for every real people's revolution." (Letter to Kugelmann). Engels, again, spelt out the answer to Allende and Corvalan: "From the very outset, the Commune had to recognise that the working class, once in power, could not go on managing with the old state machinery; that in order not to lose again its only just won supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old repressive machinery used against it itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment." (Introduction to *Civil War in France*).

ROLE OF THE ARMY

If this had been a "real people's revolution", the first task would have been to "do away with all the old repressive machinery", disarm the officers by appealing to the troops to set up revolutionary committees, set up Workers' Councils and ensure the right of recall over all officials. Allende, on the contrary, actually began by raising the salaries of the privileged officers, in the vain hope of buying their loyalty, and ended by inviting them into his government! The result was that all the workers' gains have been lost again, with a vengeance.

Lenin wrote: "In every profound revolution, the prolonged, stubborn and desperate resistance of the exploiters.. is the rule. Never—except in the sentimental fantasies of the sentimental fool Kautsky—will the exploiters submit to the decision of the exploited majority without trying to make use of their advantages in a last desperate battle." How would Lenin have described Luis Corvalan?

It is bitterly ironic to read Corvalan's impassioned defence, in one speech or article after another, of the armed forces' "spirit of professionalism, their respect for the Constitution and the law" (*World Marxist Review*, Dec. 1970) —and even their "loyalty to the elected government" (*World Marxist Review*, Nov. 1972). For Luis Corvalan today is languishing in the military dictatorship's prisons, awaiting execution by firing-squad. He is finding that the Generals show no gratitude for his compliments over the past three years.



Leaders of the workers' parties:
Allende, Altamirano and Corvalan (right)

In December 1970, Corvalan described the masses' enthusiasm at Allende's election, and concluded: *"This atmosphere of approval and solidarity, plus the legitimacy of the election victory which no-one can challenge, and the powerful impact of world socialism, explain why US imperialism and Latin American reaction will find themselves compelled to accept the situation in Chile"*. In reality, the ruling class have no scruples about the people's wishes or the legitimacy of election results, when their power is at stake. It was Corvalan above all who advanced the most ingenious arguments in defence of the armed forces. Denying that they were "loyal servants of the imperialists and the upper classes", he wrote: *"Our ground troops and navy were constituted in the fight for independence. Privates and NCOs in all the three arms come from a poor social background, and nearly all the officers from the middle strata. The oligarchy and the prosperous bourgeois have long stopped choosing a military career for their sons... These days, no social institution is indifferent to the social storms raging all over the world, and the tragedy of the hundreds of millions of poverty-stricken people. The attitude of the armed forces of the Dominican Republic and the progressive nature of the military government in Peru show that a dogmatic approach to the army is no longer valid... The military establishment, too, needs change—but that change should not be imposed on it."*

The whole barrage of arguments in defence of the officer caste has been very persuasively refuted by Corvalan's own jailers. But even without them, it would be obvious that no army in history has not been composed mainly of soldiers from a "poor social background". We talk of a "capitalist army" not because we expect to find sons of the "prosperous bourgeoisie" in its ranks, or even among most of the officers, but because it is forcibly controlled by a privileged caste imbued with reactionary prejudices owing allegiance to the ruling class, trained in such military academies as the Christian Democrats were so anxious to protect. The fact that the Chilean Army fought Spanish colonists, that a group of radical officers in the Dominican Army could revolt against despotism only to be savagely crushed by their own fellow-officers, or that the Peruvian military clique combines demagogic anti-American measures with the torture of trade-unionists—these certainly are no insurance that the armed forces are on the side of the socialist revolution. Certainly, the world's "social storms" affect the army like any other group of people—but no real Communist can lump the Generals with the privates into a monolithic mass. Did Corvalan expect the hearts of monsters like Generals Leigh and Pinochet, butchers of Chile, to melt at the "tragedy of the hundreds of millions of poverty-stricken people"? What is "dogmatic" about a class approach to the army? And how is "change" going to come to the armed forces without "imposing" it on the Generals?

The rank and file of the Chilean armed forces, who come from a "poor social background", could easily have been won if any organised appeal had been directed at them. They could not be expected to risk execution for mutiny without such an appeal. A bloodless revolution could have been achieved if the workers' parties had campaigned among the troops for revolutionary committees to be set up.

Shortly before the coup, sailors on two battleships off Valparaiso were found reading Socialist propaganda. So terrified were the Admirals, that hundreds of sailors were arrested and many were tortured to death in the ships' holds—and this while the "Popular Unity" was still in office! It was a betrayal of these sailors that no action was taken against the officers.

Were the Chilean workers' leaders really so childlike as to trust the Generals? Or were they trying to "embarrass" them into passivity? Corvalan wrote in the *Morning Star* (29/12/70): *"To hold that armed confrontation is*

certain implies the immediate formation of a people's militia. In the present situation that would be equivalent to a mark of defiance of the army ... It must be won to the cause of progress in Chile and not pushed on to the other side of the barricades."

Allende, too — as late as June 1973! — "issued a warning against classifying the armed forces as reactionary and thus preventing them from being a dynamic force in Chile's development." Two months later, the armed forces began to play a very "dynamic" role, starting with Allende's murder. What blindness it was, to expect the Generals to respond to such flattery, or that they would be restrained from military action by the fact that the workers were not mobilised! They needed no "pushing" to get on to the other side of the barricades. Their job was to act as the ruling class' armed watchdog. How was power to be taken from the ruling class without "provoking reaction"?

It was this kind of logic that lay behind the cry: don't give the officers any excuses! The British "left" Labour journal *Tribune* expressed it like this: "Allende desires and in fact has no alternative to working strictly within the Constitution. Most observers here say that while he does that, he can count on the loyalty of the Army. That is why the demand of the Leftist groups for more sweeping measures outside the Constitution is a danger, because the Right hopes for provocations." (20/10/72). Eric Heffer, MP, wrote a few weeks later that "most of the senior officers are socialist-inclined"!

Allende criticised the "irresponsibility" and "anarchy" of workers and peasants who "went too far". The Socialist Minister of the Interior, Espinoza, warned: "The government will strictly apply the law in regard to the maintenance of order against those who seek to promote disorder by occupying factories, villages, building sites or land." His successor, Briones — also a Socialist — announced that "enterprises occupied without reason and not intended for State ownership, will be restored to their owners." All this was done to avoid "provoking" the Generals. But who needs "excuses" if he has tanks and planes? Were General Kornilov in Russia, or Admiral Kapp in Germany, prevented from establishing military dictatorships because the workers of Petrograd and Berlin mobilised to repulse them — or because they couldn't think of any "excuses"?

However, Allende made more and more humiliating concessions with every blow from the Right. When the naval officers bungled an attempted coup on June 29, 1973, through their haste and failure to co-ordinate with the other services, the workers' leaders were only frightened into grovelling even more profusely before the Generals. Nobody could have asked for such a rare and unmistakable warning, such a golden opportunity to mobilise; such a precious breathing-space in which to prepare resistance to the menace looming ahead. But instead, appeasement went still further.

Corvalan (in a speech reprinted in the September 1973 issue of *Marxism Today*) praised the "prompt and determined action by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the loyalty of the armed forces and the police", and replied to allegations that the CP were in favour of organising a workers' militia: "No, sirs! We continue to support the absolutely professional character of the armed institutions. Their enemies are not in the ranks of the people, but in the reactionary camp." Allende took advantage of his short new lease of life ... to beg the armed forces to come back into the Cabinet! It was Allende in July who appointed General Pinochet, the new dictator of Chile, Commander-in-Chief of the Army! The Generals on July 4 of course, swore solemnly to give "invariable support to the constitutional regime" and "respect presidential prerogatives". On August 8, he finally persuaded them to re-enter the Government, and he proclaimed this "an indispensable step, not a retreat but the restoration of order and a step forward in the revolutionary process."

At the same time, Allende begged the Christian Democrats to enter the government. When negotiations broke down, he tried to appoint the Rector of the Catholic University as Minister — an offer which was declined "for reasons of Party discipline". Briones, the new Socialist Minister of the Interior, hastened to assure the world that "Chile would have neither a Castroite dictatorship nor at this stage a dictatorship of the proletariat" and he "reaffirmed the government's determination to adhere to democratic and constitutional methods."

But the more obsequious the posture of the "Popular Unity" government, the more contemptuously did the Generals spit on it, and when they felt ready, they put it out of its misery like a man crushing a flea.

The September 1973 edition of *World Marxist Review* — which appeared after the coup — contained a statement by Yanez and Banchero, two leading members of the Chilean CP, which express particularly poignantly the delusions of that party, after the failure of the June 29 coup "The people and the army won an important victory. They defended the government, disarmed the adventurist and criminal elements who had betrayed the glorious traditions of our armed forces. The Chilean soldiers displayed their unswerving determination to defend the government elected by the people. Patriotism and courage triumphed Comrade Luis Corvalan has emphasised that we have always maintained — and despite the recent events have reaffirmed — that in Chilean conditions the anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchical revolution can be carried out by peaceful means; that Socialism can be achieved without civil war If the reactionaries do unleash an armed struggle, they will be defeated. Of that there cannot be the slightest doubt, for the people will rise to a man to crush the enemy." Before this article was off the press, the workers' attempt to defeat reaction had itself been crushed, and solely because their leaders had substituted euphoric phrases for the necessary preparation.

Optimistic as always, Sam Russell of the *Morning Star* (10/7/73) reported: "Chile's Popular Unity government has emerged strengthened and toughened after the defeat of the latest and most dangerous attempt to overthrow it". But Allende's "Marxist" apologist Regis Debray has described how "strong" and "tough" Allende really thought

his Government was: "He discovered that he could count on only four Generals out of 22... For several months, this (state) apparatus had been out of control and was sliding gradually into open insubordination... Allende was no longer making any plans further than 48 hours ahead." (Observer, 16.9.73).

What was Allende's response to this alarming situation? Debray describes how "Salvador, in high spirits... sat us round a camembert and told us about his interview the night before with a plotting General, the Air Force Commander, whom he had appointed Minister of Transport, in order to neutralise him." Evidently, Allende had little faith in the effectiveness of this tactic, as most of his conversation revolved around how he would protect his dignity when the Generals took over... "I shan't let myself be bundled onto an aircraft in my pyjamas," he said, "and I shan't ask for asylum in some Embassy."

However honourable the exit of Allende, it hardly makes much difference to the working class. And his refusal to mobilise them meant that all their courage was dissipated. They were left to organise sporadic resistance on their own initiative, shooting out from the factories, sitting targets for raids from the air, cut off from any prospect of appealing to the troops to come over to the side of the workers. According to Debray, when Carlos Altamirano, General Secretary of the Socialist Party, urged Allende to organise a workers' militia, arguing quite correctly that "the best way to bring about a confrontation and make it even bloodier is to turn your back on it", Allende only retorted: "And how many masses does it take to stop a tank?" Of course, it is not a military but a political question. The same man who was publicly praising the loyalty of the officers to the elected government, privately had no faith in the possibility of winning over the rank and file soldiers!

It is a tragedy that, while the Generals were preparing their forces to seize power and violently crush the workers, Allende was telling high-spirited stories over a camembert, worrying about whether he would be wearing pyjamas when the counter-revolution triumphed and making fatalistic jokes about masses and tanks.

CRUCIAL LESSONS OF THE COUP

Nobody can accuse us of "wisdom after the event". As early as March 1971, we printed an article in *Militant* under the headline "CHILEAN CRISIS - ARM THE WORKERS AGAINST REACTION". On October 1, 1971, we warned: "The sympathy of the soldiers will be of no avail unless the hold of the officer caste is shattered. That is impossible unless the army is faced with a powerful movement of the armed people. While Allende and the CP are busy lulling the masses with beautiful pictures of 'peaceful parliamentary change', the ruling class is systematically preparing for a counter-stroke." In January 1972, we predicted in *Militant International Review* that "Allende's slavish respect for authority - in the form of an army jackboot - will not save his skin when conditions permit the counter-revolution to raise its head." In August 1973, our headline read "CATASTROPHE THREATENS UNLESS WORKERS ARE ARMED."

It is no cause for pleasure on our part that our warnings have proved correct. But why have those who held up Chile as a model for the last three years, said not a word to correct their mistake? The arguments put forward in the *Morning Star* (17/9/73) give no reassurances that the deadly mistakes of the Chilean workers' parties have been absorbed. And if the lessons are not well learned by the workers who face similar traps all over the world, then the Chilean workers will have died in vain. The best tribute to their memory is to learn from their experience.

The *Morning Star* claimed that in Chile "the Communists combined the aim of completing the anti-oligarchical and anti-imperialist revolution without civil war, with warnings about the danger of a coup and the need to resist it should it take place." Buried in the welter of words praising the "loyalty" and "professionalism" of the armed forces, one can find here and there, odd references to a possible coup. For instance, in the same speech where he repudiated the idea of a workers' militia, Corvalan said: "Today, more than ever, we say no to civil war! But we stand ready to crush any sedition!" As we see, the Generals were not in the least deterred by these fine words. Since the workers proved quite unready to "crush sedition", this was obviously just demagogic speechifying. How could they "stand ready" without a militia? Allende now and again talked too of "replying to reactionary violence with laws and justice, and if need be, with revolutionary violence", and appealing "to the law, to the armed forces, and if necessary to the people's forces, to prevent Fascism from achieving its aims." But it was necessary and the people had no forces with which to mount effective resistance. What kind of leaders talk about "the need to resist a coup should it take place"? The Generals were not playing cricket, and they didn't give formal notice of their intentions! It was too late to resist after they had taken power.

The *Morning Star* continued: "The Chilean Popular Unity government came into office in conditions of extraordinary difficulty and complexity. Far from having the support of the majority of the people, Allende got only 36% of the votes in 1970. The objective was therefore to win more and more people to support the government... Whether more could have been done to win them, the extent to which they were antagonised by the adventurist actions and policies of the ultra-left, the tactics adopted toward the armed forces - these and other questions will need serious examination and discussion."

Revolutions are periods when the mass of the population get up on their feet and invade the political arena in the struggle to shape their own destinies. In such a period, their consciousness can grow by leaps and bounds in a matter of days. Chile was undoubtedly entering a revolutionary period, and such periods are by definition "extraordinarily difficult and complex". Revolutionaries prepare themselves for decades to live up to situations such as these. If they explain their failure to meet the challenge by the "complexity" of the conditions, then they are

only confessing that they have degenerated into petty pragmatists.

We have explained above the falsity of hoping to win the middle class by appeasing the Right. If the workers' parties are to bear the odium for inflation and the other evils of capitalism, the desperate middle strata write them off as "fine talkers" who are incapable of action. All the official condemnations of "illegal" factory and land occupations did nothing to ingratiate the government to the middle class. Apparently it is not sufficient that the government should denounce the spontaneous actions of its supporters and invite Generals into the Cabinet—there must be 100% unanimity behind the government's concessions! But it is impossible to cry halt to the class struggle, to hold the entire population in check, while the government majestically issues successive decrees to change society. The class struggle waits for no-one. Allende's election was the signal for all the pent-up energies of the masses to break forth. How can their aspirations to use their power be frozen—especially in "conditions of extraordinary complexity", *ie.* a revolution?

Kerensky in 1917 also hysterically denounced workers and peasants for "provoking" the Generals by their "adventurist and ultra-left actions". It was the Bolsheviks' refusal to desert them, despite all the pressures, that earned them the political authority to carry through the socialist revolution. Kerensky's government could end only in Soviet power or Kornilov's terror. So it was in Chile. We hold no brief for the MIR, but it is ridiculous to blame the coup on them. Our criticism of this ultra-left grouping is not that they encouraged the occupation of factories and estates, but that they refused to work within the workers' mass organisations and dabbled instead with the pre-Marxist methods of "Guevarism" and "Castroism". As for what is called the "tactics adopted toward the armed forces"—to dissuade them from taking power by force by inviting them to enter the government peacefully—Allende learned the same lesson as the Spanish "Popular Front", which also invited a general called Franco into the government in 1936, and likewise saw its "moderation" rewarded with murder.



Chilean workers demonstrate after the first, abortive, coup — marching by the tens of thousands, but armed only with wooden sticks.

The *Morning Star* promises us "serious examination and discussion" of the Chilean coup. But the material produced by the Communist Party since the coup reveals that it has learned nothing from the Chilean events, and that it is still putting forward the same dangerous policies for Italy, France, Britain and elsewhere. A pamphlet entitled "*CHILE — SOLIDARITY WITH POPULAR UNITY*" repeats all the discredited arguments of the Chilean CP.

The aim of the "Popular Unity" government, it explains approvingly, was "for a national democratic revolution, paving the way for Socialism by carrying through basic democratic transformations in the economy and the State": such reforms as "to put an end to the power of the imperialists, the monopolists and the landowning oligarchy". The conclusion which we have drawn from the Chilean coup and from similar utopian "experiments" in the past, is that it is impossible in the epoch of imperialism and monopoly capitalism to separate the "national democratic" from the socialist revolution. The pamphlet admits that "the real reason for the coup" was "the progress being made in weakening the economic and political power of the ruling class, in enabling more power and a bigger slice of the national cake to pass into the hands of the working class and its allies" — and then goes on to defend the CP "strategy" of carrying through "a transitional democratic phase" permitting a "change in the balance of class forces"! Its programme for Britain consists of "a left Labour government, and at a later stage a Socialist one".

The Chilean Communist Senator Volodia Teitelboim wrote in the *Morning Star* (15/10/73) of the CP's "conception of a pluralist revolution in the heart of the people, which brings together Marxist, Christian and rationalist forces", condemned the "traitor Generals" who "betrayed their military oath" and defended the alleged "Leninist teaching on the necessity for the people — legitimate expression of democracy — to take control of the state". Every line

of his article reveals a completely *anti*-Leninist conception of the state, as can be seen from the quotations from Lenin given above.

It was the same Volodia Teitelboim who painted the situation in glowing colours in the *Morning Star* (10/3/72): "The armed forces support the government as it is legally elected by the people The classic Latin-American way of a military coup is more difficult in Chile While the people of Chile have not yet got full power in their possession, they have the fundamental executive power based on the country's constitutional presidential regime.." The *Morning Star* ended its article with the comment:

"It would be a miracle if no mistakes had been made. But that does not mean that the general strategy was not correct. Those who criticise it have the obligation to say what their alternative would have been. If they argue that during the past three years, the Chilean revolutionary movement should have embarked on the path of armed struggle, then they have to show how this would have done anything other than play into the hands of reaction and resulted in the still earlier imposition of a right-wing dictatorship in Chile."

The alternative was not exactly to "embark on the path of armed struggle", but to prepare and organise in advance, and hence perhaps make unnecessary, the resistance of the workers who were mown down fighting reaction anyway. Was it not "playing into the hands of reaction" to leave them almost defenceless, and lull their vigilance with nursery rhymes about the Generals' "loyalty"? Apparently the Generals will always take power whatever you do. What a bleak choice the *Morning Star* offers the workers: defeat today or defeat tomorrow! How little faith it has in the working class!

It is revolting complacency to sit in an editorial office writing "the general strategy was correct", when thousands of workers lie murdered. A "general strategy" which leaves out of account the gathering counter-revolution is useless. Certainly, "it would be a miracle if no mistakes had been made" (although we have still not been told what they were). But what a catastrophe, if the very same mistakes are then repeated elsewhere! The long history of class collaborationism is drenched in the blood of workers left politically and militarily disarmed against counter-revolution. And throughout the world today we see workers' parties preparing just the same kind of "alliance" with "democratic", "progressive", "liberal" parties who abhor the socialist revolution. In France, the "Popular Union" is tying the workers' parties to the small Left-Radical party. In Germany, the SPD is in a coalition with the FDP. In Italy, the CP is wooing "progressive" elements within the Christian Democracy for a coalition. In Spain, a "Liberty Pact" is proposed, linking "all democratic tendencies from Communists to conservatives and monarchists". In Greece, the CP is linked to Papandreou's "Patriotic Front".

Let no-one trust the "democratic traditions" of the armed forces in Western Europe. The French ruling class is openly preparing the police and army for counter-revolution, as Mitterand has protested. Italian Generals linked to the Fascist MSI have been caught hatching several putschist conspiracies already in the last ten years. Let us remember too that Chile was always called "the England of South America". The reaction of the British ruling class to the Chilean coup must never be forgotten. The *Economist* (1/9/73) anticipated the coup by commenting: "The armed forces now hold the key to the future ... The Marxist parties in Chile ... have travelled a long way in less than three years towards destroying the economic base for the opposition parties and the independent press." The *Times* (15/9/73) agreed that "there is a limit to the ruin a country can be expected to tolerate ... The circumstances were such that a reasonable military man could in good faith have thought it his constitutional duty to intervene." The writing is on the wall: let a Labour government begin to "destroy the economic base" for the Tory Party and Fleet Street, and there will be no shortage of Generals who will "in good faith" decide that "the country cannot tolerate any more ruin." The *Times* has stated bluntly that the Labour Party, (unlike the Parliamentary Labour Party) is "dominated by Marxists" and has even talked with alarm of a possible "Chilean situation" in Britain, with a "Marxist Party" in government over a divided opposition. Top strategists like Brigadiers Kitson and Calvert have foreseen situations in which, with the collapse of the British economy, millions of people could have "justifiable grievances" and the Army might need to assist the police force in quelling riots. Note that they do not bother to talk of "terrorists" and "fanatics", but of the justified grievances of ordinary people!

The fact that Chilean servicemen are now being trained in Britain, and that British jet aircraft are being sold to Chile, is the best evidence of the British ruling class' real attitude to "democracy" when the interests of capitalism are at stake.

The British Embassy in Santiago, according to *The Observer*, gave the new junta "undisguised approval" and – almost alone of all the foreign embassies – barred the door to refugees from the military terror.

The British Labour Movement, in preparing to contend with the upheavals of the next few years, will ignore the lessons of Chile at their peril.

SOUTH AFRICA



Workers flex their muscles

BY CHRIS JAMES

At first glance, South Africa appears to be some kind of Orwellian world. This is the country where the secret police are actually called BOSS (Bureau of State Security). The former head of the S. Africa Broadcasting Company and member of the Broederbund, Meyer, called his son Izan (it has to be spelt backwards to see its significance). In South Africa, those of mixed race, the Coloureds, are positively defined in government regulations as "not a white person nor a native". The present Prime Minister, who was interned during the war for Nazi sympathies, declared in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, whilst he was Minister of Justice: "*rights are getting out of hand.*"

Yet the apartheid system is not some kind of mental aberration by a small group of whites, but is built upon the economic interests of different classes in S. African society. Recently there have been signs of a changing situation, inside and outside the Republic of South Africa. In the Republic, some of the formerly tame Bantustan leaders are making radical noises. Amongst the youth, especially Coloured youth, Black Consciousness is having a growing appeal. Most important of all, the black working class has engaged in a whole series of militant strikes, culminating in February 1973 with a strike-wave in Durban. In the rest of southern Africa, resistance to minority rule has had increasing success. In Mozambique, FRELIMO has extended its rural guerrilla war to the country's central province. In N.E. Rhodesia, ZANU's success has meant that the Rhodesian Army now concentrate on the north-east, leaving S.African 'police' to man Rhodesia's border with Zambia. In Namibia, SWAPO's activities combine both guerrilla warfare and industrial agitation in the mines.

All these developments are inter-related, and are affecting the development of the class struggle and the battle for national liberation in southern Africa. The key to the whole area is South Africa itself. It is the economic giant, not just of southern Africa, but of the whole of Africa. With only 6% of Africa's population, South Africa produces and uses over 50% of the continent's electricity. The wealth of South Africa is immense. In the 100 years since minerals were discovered, over £700m worth of diamonds and £6,000m worth of gold has been found. The price of gold enabled South Africa to ward off many aspects of the pre-war depression. From 1933 to 1965, the country had an average real growth rate of 5% per annum. From 1940 to 1965, there was a 600% increase in net national income.

Yet all this wealth has not helped the black population of South Africa very much. According to Professor Wilson of Cape Town University, African miners' real wages are worse now than they were in 1911! Life expectancy for South Africa's black population is far below that for the whites. On average, people of mixed race (ie. Coloureds) will live 15 years less than a white person; there are no reliable statistics for African life expectancy but all the indications are that it is below that of the Coloureds. Of 750,000 black children born every year, 110,000 will die before they are one year old. Sample surveys in rural areas have shown that 50% of African

children will die before they are five. A survey by UNESCO in 1960 stated that 70% of African children suffer from malnutrition.

When he becomes 16, an African must register as a 'work-seeker' with his tribal bureau, unless he is a full-time student or declared to be unfit. He must register in a particular category and will remain in that category for the rest of his life, unless he obtains permission to change it. If he puts a foot wrong, whilst under contract, he can be sent to his 'Bantustan'—his government-proclaimed 'homeland', which he may never have seen before. The Bantustans are nothing more than a labour reserve. They have virtually no industry and provide only 2% of South Africa's GNP. These "homelands" for 75% of South Africa's people, consist of only 17% of the country's land surface, divided into over 1,200 different pieces. Most of the land is useless for agriculture; a former Deputy Minister of Bantu Development admitted that only 29% of the Bantustans was good farming land.

The Bantustan policy was never intended to provide any means of real economic independence for the African people. The majority of Africans live in towns in the white areas. To supervise them, there are the notorious Pass Laws, contravention of which resulted in over 600,000 prosecutions last year. There are also strict regulations which state that Africans (legally) are only temporarily in the towns. These laws operate directly in the interests of the employers, eg under regulation 10(1)(b) of the Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, an African must work for one and the same employer for ten years, before he can qualify for urban residence.

Vorster put the position thus in 1968: *"It is true that there are blacks working for us. They will continue to work for us for generations, in spite of the ideal that we have to separate them completely ... The fact of the matter is this, we need them because they work for us ... But the fact they work for us can never entitle them to claim political rights. Not now, nor in the future ... under no circumstances."*

Yet the situation in South Africa is not a simplistic white-black confrontation, but involves the conflicts of five main groupings.

1. MINING AND FINANCE SECTION OF RULING CLASS

Mining and agriculture were the backbone of the South African economy until the post-war years. The former was traditionally the area of the economy owned by the British capitalists in South Africa. Recently, with the help of the Nationalist government, Afrikaaner influence has grown. Afrikaaners now control one of the nine monopoly mining houses, General Mining.

The aim of the mining financiers has always been to reduce labour costs to an absolute minimum. The Chamber of Mines was founded in 1889 *"to bring native wages down to a realistic level"* and it had considerable success; whilst in 1889, the average African miners' monthly wage was £3.3.6d, by 1902 (partly due to the Boer War) it had been cut to £1.6.8d. In the diamond mines, African wages were stabilised for 30 years.

The mines quickly came into the control of a very few hands. After diamonds were discovered in Kimberley in 1870, there were 3,600 claims in four mines. By 1900 there was only de Beers left, mining 90% of the world's diamonds. At present there are the nine mining houses which control the whole mining industry in South Africa.

The mineowners have proved to be ruthless employers, whatever the 'liberal' pretensions of Oppenheimer, boss of Anglo-American. They have crushed the strikes of white miners (1922) and Africans (1946). Their rewards have been high. In 1972, gold mine profits alone rose by £106 m (ie 63%) to £280 m. The rise in profits alone was more than double the total amount of wages paid to African miners. This trend has been continuing. Anglo-American's report for the first half of 1973 has seen a 17% increase in profit, allowing it to distribute £4,400,000 as an interim dividend (18% increase on Jan-June 1972).

The recent rise in mining profits is largely explained by the 300% rise in the price of gold over the past two years. This has enabled the mine-owners to give a miserly 33% rise in African miners' wages. Yet African miners' wages are still far less than can be earned in the manufacturing sector, and the black-white wage differential of 1:20 is far higher.

Table 1

	Average monthly earnings 1973	
	White	African
Mining	R 400	R 25
Manufacturing	R 360	R 60

(R 1.95 — £1.00)

Because of the above situation, the 'mining houses' recruit most of their African workforce from outside South Africa: 75% of African miners in South Africa come from Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Botswana. They are 'housed' in barrack-style compounds and are not allowed to bring their families with them. The mine-owners have never shown themselves over-zealous regarding safety conditions. In the past 40 years over 20,000 Africans have been killed in mining accidents.

The 'new breed' of mine-owners are worthy successors to the old. On February 2, 1973, the president of the Chamber of Mines, R.C.J. Goode, said that although black wages were below the poverty line, the mines could not pay more because: (i) the miners were not really workers but only peasants in the country; (ii) wages had gone up by 16% in 1972, whilst productivity had not, and (iii) if productivity did not improve, a wage increase was inflationary.

Yet despite the absolute growth of the gold mining industry in recent years, the mining industry as a whole is likely to play a less dominant role in the future. Manufacturing is the leading growth sector of the economy and already some mining interests have diversified into manufacturing, eg. Anglo-American assets are distributed as follows: 38 % gold production, 24 % diamonds, 19 % industrial, 6 % copper, 5 % coal, 8 % others.

2. MANUFACTURING & COMMERCIAL RULING CLASS

The paramount position of manufacturing in the post-war South African economy is clearly shown by Table 2.

Table 2.

	% G.N.P.		
	Manufacturing	Mining	Agriculture
1910	4 %	27 %	22 %
1940	11 %	11 %	18 %
1966	22 %	12 %	10 %

Manufacturing is now equal in importance in the South African economy to mining and agriculture combined. Besides a desire to maximise profits, the manufacturers have an interest in a high consumption market (not necessarily limited to the internal South African market) and an efficient, skilled, stable working-class. In their latter interest, they have triumphed over those 'verkrampste' (hard-line, narrow) interpreters of apartheid, who believed in a purely migratory system for African workers. Manufacturers' interests have also conflicted with and defeated the interests of the rural bourgeoisie, who are not interested in higher wages for their African workforce. Whilst manufacturers as a whole have an interest in seeing higher wages help the creation of a high consumption market, (as long as it does not cut into profit), individual manufacturers have no interest in raising their own workforce's wages. Also, many of the goods produced are orientated towards the white market and thus African wages are not as yet crucial to the market's development; eg. the motor industry is one of the lowest paid areas in the manufacturing sector.

Yet whilst black wages may rise, the black/white differential also rises, and as this colour bar floats upwards, there is an increasing tendency to invest in capital-intensive plants. The manufacturing class, although having a different emphasis than the mine-owners, are every bit as committed to the structure of exploitation in South Africa. Their demands have, however, led to some internal modifications of the system, eg. statutory job reservation by colour, which only applied to 3 % of industry, has declined in recent years (although de facto discrimination still continues).

The clearest example of the changed view of the South African ruling class was shown in the 1973 Budget. The proposals included (i) Special committee to train pre-service and in-service African workers in White areas, to "promote healthy growth". (This is anathema to apartheid doctrine, which states that Africans are only temporarily in the white towns).

(ii) Increase black productivity and pay more attention to black education.

(iii) Upgrade white workers, in co-operation with white trade unions, so black workers fill the

lower places.

(iv) To help manufacturing industry expand, the government would investigate the problem of investment and encourage exports.

(v) Further increase in defence expenditure by 33 %. (Just to show they were not becoming soft).

The manufacturers are facing certain problems at present. Although production rose by 5 % in 1972-3, investment fell. Investment might rise in the future, due to some of the mining profits being diverted, but if there is continued stagnation, there would be an attempt to not only keep down black wages, but also to tackle some white workers. 1972 was the first time in the post-war years when white living standards did not rise. In February 1973 the government was given an indication that it might have to reduce white workers' standards, when the Economic Advisory Council to the Department of Planning reported that investment was decreasing because of the high wages paid to the white workers.

Yet there will be no peaceful overthrow of apartheid by the "liberal, progressive" manufacturers. Economic necessity might alter some of the minor barriers to growth, but the essential structure of exploitation will remain. The manufacturers are no more interested in the independent action of the working class than the mine-owners. eg. in the mid-60's, British Leyland (SA) called in the police to break up a mass meeting of 2,000 Coloured workers discussing the formation of a union. The conflicting interests of the capitalist and the workers are as irreconcilable in South Africa as elsewhere.

3. AGRICULTURAL BOURGEOISIE

This class, together with sections of white workers, gave a mass basis to the Afrikaaner Nationalist movement before 1948. Table 2 illustrates agriculture's waning portion of the GNP. The agricultural bourgeoisie is also declining in political importance. In 1968, only 16 % of the white population were engaged in agriculture (although it still accounted for nearly one-third of exports). White farming interests lie in paying low wages and in getting high food prices, by means of the continuing monopoly pricing policy of the government's marketing boards.

The declining political weight of the farming interests can be seen in a statement by a former Deputy Minister

of Bantu Development: "I make so bold to say that if the farmer would revise the conditions of service, especially in the light of the increased cost of living, he would find that, even though the wage structure might still not be competitive with that applicable in industry, he could still nevertheless attract the black farm labourer. Eventually the farmer will of necessity have to do so." This was not the traditional voice of rural Afrikaanderdom, and the failure of the right-wing split from the Nationalists to pick up any support, illustrates the changing class basis of the South African regime.

4. WHITE WORKING CLASS

Twenty per cent of South Africa's workers are white and for the most part are in skilled or supervising jobs. Like craft unions of the nineteenth century, most white trade unions have had the attitude of a labour aristocracy and a caste-like exclusion of black workers. They have tended to see their interests as both opposed to the capitalist owners and to black workers undercutting their position. They have sought to exclude black workers from skilled positions.

The white working class has had quite a militant history, eg 1913 saw a General Strike by white workers in Johannesburg. But concerned by the influx of black workers (by 1918, 83% of the working class was Coloured or African), white workers tried to push up their wages as scarcity value. This is clearly seen in the strike of 1922, "the Red Revolt". In 1922, the mining magnates wanted to cut down the wage differential and let Africans do some skilled jobs. The white miners correctly saw this as an attempt to undercut them but instead of linking up with African workers for better wages, they campaigned alone. They carried portraits of Marx and Lenin, sang "the Internationale" and marched under the banner of "Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa." They were ruthlessly crushed by Smuts and the mine-owners, who sent in tanks and planes, killing over 200 white miners.

At the subsequent election, the party of the English white workers, the Labour Party, formed an alliance with the Nationalist Party, the party of the Afrikaaner bourgeoisie. This resulted in the Pact government and the introduction of more racial measures. In the following years, many white workers were won over to the Nationalists, although some white workers courageously resisted this trend. But no clear class programme was offered to the white workers which could have led to unity across the colour line. The 'Communist' Party vacillated between reformism and ultra-leftism.

In the 1930's, many Afrikaaners became industrial workers and the Nationalist Party played up two enemies — British imperialism and the black worker. Diederichs (who is now Chancellor of the Exchequer) explained in 1939 that the main aim of the Nationalist Party was to prevent the Afrikaaner worker from developing a class consciousness.

Since 1948, we have seen the virtual destruction of the only attempt to create a multi-racial Trade Union movement (the South African Congress of Trade Unions) and the increasing polarisation by colour of the workforce. Both the major Trade Union organisations in the Republic are racist; the Confederation of Trades Unions is a whites-only body, and the paternalistic Trade Union Council excludes Africans, allows Coloureds and Asian members, whilst ensuring that the overall leadership is white. Since the 1930's, the overall growth of the economy has enabled the capitalists to give considerable concessions to the white workers, so that most of them have a life-style that is vastly different from African workers. The freedom of organisation allowed to white workers gives the lie to those who argue that South Africa is a complete Fascist state. Fascism means the crushing of every independent organisation of the working-class and whilst this has been viciously done in regards to the black workers, white workers still have certain freedoms remaining.

The wage-gap differential in 1971 is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

	Average monthly earnings 1971	
	White	African
Electricity	R 369	R 55
Mining	360	18
Construction	325	49
Manufacturing	307	52
Banking	298	67
Local Authorities	293	45
Central Govt.	282	44
Provincial Admin.	224	35

In the past seven years, the wage gap has increased by up to 20% in all sections, except electricity.

Yet not all white workers are prosperous salary earners. Sections of them still have very low wages. In OK Bazaars (South Africa's equivalent of Woolworth's) white shop assistants earn only R 90 a month. (African workers who are not allowed to be shop assistants, earn R 50 a month). Whilst this is clearly a high differential, it is still not of the 20:1 scale in mining, or 6:1 in manufacturing. The class nature of South African society is shown by the fact that OK Bazaars, with a profit last year of £4m, is owned by just four families. In September 1973, these families agreed to a take-over bid by South African Breweries. As compensation, the families got £13m in cash and £11m in shares in the new combine.

White workers have no long-term interest in maintaining such a system. But the long history of racialism in South Africa, the different standards of living and the colour divide in the workers' movements are barriers to class unity. The leadership and the main force to overthrow capitalism in South Africa will be the black working class. But groups of white workers, especially the poorer sections, could possibly be won to a united struggle, if they saw the likelihood of a change in the situation.

African miners, passes in hand, on the way to work.



5. BLACK WORKING CLASS

Eighty per cent of workers in South Africa are black (about 66 % African, 10 % Coloured and about 4 % Asian). Despite some differences within the black labour force, its overall interests lie opposed to the mining, manufacturing and farming class and in opposition to caste-like attitudes amongst white workers. They are the most exploited section of the population of South Africa. A survey conducted between March 1972 and March 1973 found that 13 % of Africans earned below £5 a week, 50 % below £8 a week and only 16 % above the princely sum of £10 a week.

They are herded into townships outside the main cities, townships which can have power, communications and food supplies cut off if there is any industrial trouble. Denied decent education, despised and feared by apartheid ideology, the black population of South Africa face daily discrimination on account of their colour. Black workers are doubly oppressed, by colour and by class.

The black workers have a history of great militancy, stronger than any other working class on the continent of Africa. Almost every industry has a history of working class battles. In the docks, there have been six actual strikes and two threatened since 1910. The first strike in 1919 saw the general labour rates increased. During the 1940 strike, the police brought the dockers' leader, Phungula, from jail on condition he spoke against the strike; instead he urged them to continue. The 1958 strike against special rates for the tribal chiefs' representatives, saw 80 arrests. But this did not prove sufficient and the following year, the whole of the Durban dock force was dismissed, sent "back" to "their" Bantustan, and a new one recruited. This did not prevent further militancy and ten years later another 942 were sent "home". In 1971, the dockers at Durban just had to threaten a strike to get a 30 % increase and in 1972, a one-day strike gained a further 30 % wage rise. This history of struggle can be repeated in almost all other areas of South African history.

During the 1920's, the Industrial and Commercial Union created one of the greatest African mass movements seen in South Africa. Founded in 1919 with only 24 members, by 1928 it claimed 250,000 members and an annual income of £15,000. But it refused to link the industrial struggle with one for political rights. In 1926, it expelled communists from its organisation and although ICU's leader, Kadalie, was a good orator, this did not make up for the lack of political programme, an action programme or organisation. Gradually the ICU disintegrated.

Despite the collapse of the ICU, strikes still broke out. In 1946, 50,000 African miners struck under the leadership of the African Mineworkers' Union. The 1950's saw a whole series of workers' struggles, both economic and political and although the 1960's saw a lull (due primarily to the suppression of the African nationalist movements) the past two years have seen a great upsurge in industrial struggles.

Strikes have occurred in all the main industrial centres of South Africa. It is still far from being a revolutionary situation at present, more a flexing of unused muscles. But it has given the ruling class its greatest shock for over a decade. Following a successful African busdrivers' strike in Johannesburg in May 1972 and a dockers' one-day strike in Durban in October, wholesale strikes broke out in Durban in February 1973. During February, 50,000 Africans (ie. one-third Durban's African workers) were out at some time or another. It affected all sections of industry: textiles, chemicals, shipbuilding, the City Council, Metal Box, Pepsi-Cola etc. Police were flown in; there were baton charges, tear gas, but although the buses were ready to take troublemakers 'home', wage increases were hurriedly given. Since then, strikes have broken out all over South Africa and a protest by migrant foreign mineworkers resulted in the death of 12 Africans. The regime is prepared to use both the carrot and the stick.

The reaction of the ruling class shows the potential power of the black working class. The spokesman of the manufacturing 'liberal' capitalists, the *Rand Daily Mail*, worried that the strikes would spread to the Rand, the heartland of South African capitalism. Under a heading "If it happened here" they quoted the opposition leader, de Villiers Graaf, who (correctly) pointed out that the strikes were "a greater threat than guerrilla warfare".

The *Rand Daily Mail* argued that higher wages should be given as "that is the only way to save South Africa and to safeguard its future profits" (10/2/73). Suzman, spokesman for the 'progressive' capitalists, said that African Trade Unions should be created as a safety-valve as "orderly trade unionism is far less dangerous than wildcat strikes". Vorster, modestly admitting that he had learnt from the strikes, is investigating the possibility of allowing more useful forums of African opinion than the present Works Councils, so that he can intervene before a situation reaches crisis proportions. He is clearly considering allowing some form of black trade unionism. But it will be carefully supervised and any independent attempt by black workers themselves to organise and mobilise (eg. Black Allied Workers Union) will be stamped upon.

Yet all the regime's careful preparations will be as nothing when the black working class resumes the struggle. The regime's defence will rest upon the strength of its armed forces. To counter this threat and the existing repression, economic militancy will not be enough; a revolutionary party is required. The limits of spontaneity can be seen in the recent strikewave. A syndicalist approach cannot topple the vicious South African ruling class.

As the revolutionary party would be built primarily upon the black workers, it is to a discussion of the resistance movements that we now turn.

LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

It is instructive to look at the former leading mass African movement, the African National Congress. In the ANC there have been, and still are, many of the very best militants, some of whom have been greatly persecuted for their beliefs and activities. Some have been killed, others imprisoned or confined to the helplessness and despair of house arrest, or seen their families suffer. Yet it is not enough to have people who are prepared to suffer for their ideals in order for a movement to succeed. It also requires correct analysis and actions which flow from that analysis.

Founded in 1912, up until the 1940's, the ANC was mainly a middle-class organisation, petitioning the government to right certain grievances. In 1944, the Youth League pressure group was formed in the ANC. It included in its membership Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobakwe. The ANC adopted its Programme of Action in 1949, which included an implication that Africans were oppressed purely as a nation and not at all as a class. The 1949 programme envisaged large-scale protest, but had no firm ideological base on how its demands would be realised; they would come apparently by "mass pressure from below". The 1952 civil defiance campaign attracted many Africans to the ANC and its membership rose that year to 100,000. Yet the passive resistance campaigns were broken by the police, despite heroic struggle. In 1955, the ANC joined with the Coloured People's Congress, the Indian National Congress and the (white) Congress of Democrats, to produce the Freedom Charter. This charter was strongly influenced by the banned "Communist" Party.

It was a mixture of socialism, liberalism, social welfare, and did not please some Africanists as it did not include a clear demand for 'one man one vote' or link up the struggle with that of the liberation of all Africa. But the Freedom Charter did include the revolutionary demand for the nationalisation of the banks, minerals, monopoly industry and government control of all industry and trade. Unfortunately there was no clear conception of how these demands would be realised. The CP and the ANC played down the class issues in favour of liberal reforms. Luthuli, then leader of ANC, was a Christian and explained that his conception of the ANC was an organisation which would impress, by fear, the white population, or a section of them, on the need for change. He claimed he had never read Marx and that his politics were left-wing of the British Labour Party (in the 1950's!).



Life in the townships.

ANC lacked a clear ideology, a worked-out perspective, on how they would achieve their aims and a tight organisation. Even by the end of the 1950's, it was a loose organisation, more of a mobilisation group than a revolutionary political party.

In 1959, the Pan-Africanist Congress broke away on the Africanist issues for which it criticised the Freedom Charter. It proclaimed that South Africa would be independent by 1963, but declarations were no substitute for a planned strategy to take power. It was the PAC, in fact, who led another peaceful protest, which resulted in the police massacre at Sharpeville in 1960. The regime promptly banned both PAC and ANC.

But from a campaign of protest by demonstration, the African movements turned to one of protest by sabotage. Realising that there was no peaceful road in South Africa, they substituted themselves for the mass movements and tried to set off a spontaneous revolution. It was very heroic, but it was doomed. Instead of patiently rebuilding their forces amongst the African working class and building a revolutionary party, the leaders of ANC, together with members of the CP, went in for a bomb campaign, under its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. PAC launched its armed wing, Poqo, a year later, in 1962. The result was a disaster. The movement never gained mass support (how could it, in a non-civil war situation?) and the leaders of ANC were arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Since then, the movements have been attracted to the idea of guerrilla warfare, or even of utilising the 'Bantustans' to challenge the regime. They have been attracted by the success of liberation movements to the north,

especially FRELIMO. But a rural guerrilla war in Mozambique, which is the only real possibility in a country which lacks any substantial industry, is a vastly different from that of one in South Africa. South Africa is the most urban of all African countries and it is where the majority of Africans actually live in the urban areas. Clearly, a successful revolution would require the armed support of the peasantry. But the crucial area is in the towns, amongst the black working class. The African peasantry have no independent chance of success.

All the main liberation movements have had a basically rural orientation in the 1960's. They postponed organisation in the townships, or gave it a minor role. Unity movement, which claims to have a Marxist analysis, helped organise rural uprisings in Pondoland, 1957-62. The PAC tried to send an advance guard through Mozambique, in order to set up a rural liberated area; most of the group, under G.K. Kondlo, were killed by the Portuguese before they even reached South Africa. ANC sent armed militants, together with ZAPU fighters, into Rhodesia, in 1968. The idea was to fight with ZAPU whilst in Rhodesia, and then infiltrate into South Africa. They were located by the Smith regime whilst in the Wankie Game Reserve, and despite inflicting severe losses on the Rhodesian troops in the subsequent fighting, the operation proved an abortion and has not been repeated.

Much of ANC's rural orientation can be ascribed to the CP, who are the dominant tendency in the ANC at present, eg. at the Conference in Moroforo (Tanzania) in 1969, the ANC praised Russia against China and supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Some people in the resistance movements have also argued that the Bantustans are the Achilles heel of apartheid. Yet the Bantustans would never be allowed to develop into a viable economic socialist alternative to South African industry. Their "political independence" (as fragmented units) may even be allowed, but not economic independence, or their use as a revolutionary base. Some Bantustan leaders are against the apartheid system and have made strong criticisms of it. They have linked up with some of the manufacturing class, the "Progressive" capitalists, in asking for alterations. But as the preceding analysis has shown, the manufacturing class are committed to the basic exploitative system in South Africa. There is no short cut to a democratic South Africa for all the people, by way of the Bantustans.

However much resistance movements refuse to recognise the fact, the leading force in the revolution and in the revolutionary party, in South Africa, will be the black working class in the cities. It may begin as a struggle for basic democratic rights or a wage increase. But in fighting for these demands, they will come up against the whole capitalist class. One cannot separate the democratic from the socialist struggle, for there is no possibility of a democratic South Africa without overthrowing capitalism.

This was best put by an American, ex-Assistant Secretary of State, George Ball: *"Even if a multi-racial society could be brought about by either military or economic coercion, would that be in our interest or in the interest of anyone else? Would we like to see the white entrepreneurial class in South Africa driven out of society?"* Quite correctly, Ball sees a multiracial democratic society as being incompatible with the continuation of capitalism.

To talk just in terms of anti-apartheid or anti-imperialism is to mis-interpret the nature of South African society. The road to democracy is also the socialist road. A socialist South Africa would have enormous repercussions on the Bonapartist states north and south of the Zambesi. The wealth of South Africa could be harnessed to the potential wealth of all Africa in the common fight against poverty, disease and exploitation. It would open up for the first time, the possible formation of a Socialist United States of Africa.

After the 1973 strike wave in Durban, the Mayor announced that he was making arrangements with private enterprise for them to take over gravedigging. It will be the task of those in the struggle in South Africa and internationally, to make sure that private enterprise's grave is well and truly dug in South Africa and throughout the world.



Black workers hold the key to South Africa's future.

BRITISH ECONOMY IN CRISIS

BY BOB McKEE

The imposition of drastic restrictions on the British economy means the utter collapse of the Tory government's policies, and the end of the feverish boom that gripped the economy over the past year or so. A payments deficit **over £350 million in a single month**, a minimum lending rate of 13%, a slump in share prices, a further slide in the value of sterling — this is the face of the "boom that went bust". A new recession is inevitable, coming on top of the other problems of British capitalism — a record balance-of-payments deficit, roaring inflation and bitter industrial confrontations.

The British economy has been rather like a battered old motor-car careering down a hill at 90mph towards a brick wall. The chauffeur, Ted Heath, and his co-driver, Sir Michael Clapham of the CBI were proclaiming loudly with forced smiles on their faces, that if they kept accelerating they could crash straight through the wall (of 'stop-go'), and the economy would 'take-off' into a period of trouble-free growth. In the back seat sat the experts, the strategists of British capitalism. They knew the state of the car and had seen what brick walls can do on previous occasions. They shook their heads in disbelief; only a firm touch on the brakes could save the economy from a crushing stop when they met that wall.

So while Ted Heath told us how well the economy was growing and how much better off we all were, he complained about the back-seat driver who had no faith in his policies and hopes. Even his own advisors, like Lord Rothschild, had to be disciplined for suggesting that Britain is just being relegated to the lower divisions of the economic league in world production.

Yet there was no basis for the Tories' optimism about growth in the British economy. Since mid-1972, the growth rate has been about 5% in real terms. Investment in manufacturing industry has risen by 7% in real terms. Exports have risen sharply, unemployment has fallen by 30%, profits have risen by 40% and money wages by nearly 15%. Ronnie Macintosh, Director General of the National Economic Development Council claims that there has been "*a significant increase in the under-lying growth potential of the UK economy in recent years.*" Sir Michael Clapham, of the CBI, believes Britain can go for a 6% per annum real growth rate and "*there are sound reasons for us to expect that growth will continue at a higher level and that investment will be rewarded... The economy is well placed for a take-off.*"

The much-publicised boom during 1972 and 1973 was not new in the British economy since the war. It is usually followed by a persistent and damaging period of stagnation. As it is, since the war, the UK economy has the lowest growth rate in Western capitalism, averaging about 2.6% p.a.

Table 1 (NEDC Report, Sept. 1973)

Growth in total expenditure created by upturn in economy:

	private consumption	public & private investment
1962-mid 64	40%	23.3%
1966-68	40%	20%
1971-mid 73	51%	6.8%

Table 1 shows that the boom was even more based on expenditure on consumer goods than previous booms in the economy and even less based on real productive expansion of investment, vital to future long-term growth. The expansion of consumer expenditure has mainly been achieved by borrowing on credit and not by increased value created by the economy.

While it is true that investment has risen in the last 12 months, it would have to rise by 20% in real terms to make up for the severe decline in manufacturing investment suffered in the previous two years. Compared to other western capitalist countries, British capital investment as a share of Gross National Product remains one of the lowest. According to the NEDC pamphlet "*Industrial Review to 1977*", the investment/employee ratio in the UK is significantly lower than competitor countries. Amongst the major West German vehicle manufacturers, gross fixed assets per man were 80% higher than UK manufacturers' during the period 1967-71. Increasingly, the British

capitalist class has been unwilling to invest in new machinery and plant, or in new methods of organisation and technique, and as a result, production has not responded. More and more British capitalists would rather invest in speculative ventures like land, stock exchange speculation or in foreign investment. In 1972, investment overseas doubled so that it has nearly reached the figure for total manufacturing investment in Britain as a whole! So much for the patriotic calls to "Back Britain" - "Buy British" that we heard such a lot about in adverts in the Tory press just a few years ago. For the capitalist, patriotism stops where the profits dry up.

And it is the failure of profits to increase which is the cause of the increased unwillingness of British industry to invest. The Marxist theory of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall over a time, has been graphically demonstrated in the case of the British post-war economy. In 1960 the rate of profit on capital assets employed was 16.5%, now it is below 12%. Profits in the company sector in 1972 were only 68% of 1963 levels, when price inflation is taken into account. The share of national income going to manufacturing profits has declined from 13.1% in 1948, to only 6.7% in 1972. While total profits have risen in real terms by 18% in 1972-73, there has been no change in the rate of profit at all (according to CBI report, Oct. 1973). The CBI estimate that to recover to the level of 1963 profits, in real terms, there must be a rise of over 50%.

Thus it is not surprising that British capitalism will not invest. But above all, these figures show the serious crisis with which the British capitalist is faced. Unless it can drastically alter the state of profit levels, Britain will be unable to survive on world markets for manufacturing goods. But a revival can only be done at the expense of the living standards of the working class.

CLASS CONFRONTATION

When the Tories came to power in 1970, they initially attempted to solve this problem by direct policies, of confrontation with the working class, and drastic slimming down of British industry. With the Industrial Relations Act, increased social service charges, cuts in taxation for the rich, they hoped to shackle the unions and shift incomes in favour of the receivers of profit. With the policy of ending investment grants and regional subsidies, they attempted to dispense with the 'lame ducks' of industry and allow unemployment to rise, to weaken the resolve of the workers to fight.

As we know, all these initial policies failed, because far from weakening and demoralising the working class, 1971 and 1972 were the most militant years in post-war British labour history. The strength of the trade union movement represented by the miners, the railmen, dockers and others threw the Tory government back on its heels. The Industrial Relations Act has been effectively paralysed, at least as far as its general use is concerned; the 'lame duck' policy has been quietly forgotten, in the wake of UCS and Rolls Royce.

The Tory policy of *direct* attack on the real wage levels of the working class in order to raise real profit levels, was abandoned. The Heath government now aims *indirect* attacks on workers living standards, through an incomes policy, rent and price increases. The Tory government now attempt to guarantee profits for the capitalist class, by bigger and better investment allowances and subsidies to the regions. Unemployment has been reduced by giving big hand-outs to industry and removing restrictions on credit facilities to buy consumer goods and services.

But these big hand-outs to industry have still not restored the magical 'confidence' necessary to revive investment and long term growth. Since the Treasury began economic forecasts in 1968, they have regularly predicted higher increases in capital investment than have actually been realised - on average almost twice as high. Now they predict a 15% increase for 1974. Even if this was met, it would only restore the levels achieved in 1965! Meanwhile, British industry continues to founder in the competitive world markets. As it is, since 1950, Britain's share of world manufacturing exports has fallen from 25% to about 8%, and this share continued to fall during the present 'boom'. The motor vehicle industry particularly suffered. For the first time in British industrial history, the UK became a net importer of cars, as the share of foreign cars in home markets rose to 31.6%. Not only could British industry not compete in overseas markets, it could not defend its own markets from competition. Thus we had the pitiful spectacle of Lord Stokes, the great supporter of free trade and the Common Market, demanding that the government introduce an import ban for foreign cars, TV, radios and electrical equipment to protect British industry. In the year of the world boom, British car production exports actually fell in absolute terms!

The main reason for British industry's failure to compete was, simply, that their goods cost more. The government spent over £2000m more than they received in revenue from taxes in 1972, in order to revive production. This year the deficit will be at least another £2,500m - the biggest in budget history. But far from a real revival in growth and investment, this expenditure, not backed up by a real increase in production of commodities, has merely fuelled the fire of inflation, now running at near 10% p.a. Since 1970, when the Tories came to power, growth of production has been lower than any major industrial country, while prices have been increasing faster. (See Table 2).

Table 2

Production & Prices 1970 to July '73.

(1970 = 100)

	Production	increase last 12 mths	Prices	increase last 12 mths
W. Germany	114	8½	119	7½
France	123	9	117	6½
Britain	111	6½	127	9½
Italy	117	15	120	10½
USA	126	18	113	2
Japan	128	18½	121	5½

(from *Economist*)

That this inflation is being fuelled by government expenditure financed by the printing of paper money, is demonstrated by the dramatic rise in the money supply since 1970:

Table 3

Money Supply to July 1973

(1970 = 100)

		last 12 mths.
W. Germany	145	13
France	146	17
Britain	165	25
Italy	139	21½
USA	145	12
Japan	168	25½

Only Japan and Italy can rival the British government in this spending spree, not backed up by any real growth of commodity production.

This is the key to the inflationary spiral that is gripping the economy at the moment and is creating a massive balance of payments for 1973 — approaching £1,500m (without any effects of the impending oil crisis being considered).

The Tories tell us that it is the unfortunate rise in world commodity prices which has driven up the cost of our imports and created the deficit. As soon as world prices steady, our deficit will begin to disappear. Yet this argument is falsely based. The government's Stage 3 Consultative document argued: "World price increases have turned the terms of trade sharply against us at heavy cost to the balance of payments and the effect of this on the exchange rate has added to the menace"

Yet on the evidence of last year, it was really the poor state of the balance of payments for the UK which led to the drastically sinking pound (now devalued by 30% since 1967) which also led to the worsening terms of trade, ie, the value of exports that have to be sold to meet the cost of imports. In fact, if world prices had been lower, imports would probably have been *larger*, not smaller, and exports *lower* because British industry is so weak it would not have been able to combat even cheaper foreign imports. An explosion of world prices should affect all alike, unless you already have a major inflation problem, in which case, it will speed up prices and add to the deficit on the balance of payments. As the *Financial Times* remarked: "rather more than half the trade deficit was the inevitable result of the government deficit". (Nov. 1, '73)

The bogus reasoning that Britain's inflation problems are mainly due to the world situation: the wheat harvest internationally, the trade winds in Peru, sun spots etc, that Heath has been stating in Parliament, was exposed by the argument of the *Financial Times* in August:

"It is simply false to regard the payments deficit as reflecting just the explosion of import prices. The National Institute has just published an interesting chart showing the ratio of export to import volume completely independent of price changes. This shows that the physical export-import ratio has improved, as Ministers claim, only if one makes a particularly near-sighted comparison with 1972. Over the whole period since 1969, the trend of this ratio has been downwards, and it is extremely unlikely that the exceptionally favourable terms of trade of early 1972, which allowed us to get away with such a low ratio, will be typical of the future."

What this all means is that the balance of payments will get *worse*, while government-stimulated inflation continues, *even if* the acceleration in world prices slackens off. If and when that happens, the Tories are certain to turn to their favourite whipping-boy for inflation: the trade unions. 'Wage increases for one man are price increases for another', so the argument goes — à la Harold Wilson. Even some Marxist economists have been prepared to accept this Tory argument. And yet it does not bear up to the truth.

Average earnings for the British worker are by no means the highest in Europe. For working longer hours than his European brothers, with shorter holidays and less benefits, the average British worker received £38.96 in 1972, compared to:

Belgians	£54.70
French	£40.35
Germans	£59.00

Only the Italian worker did less well.

But that is not the argument, say the Tories, it is that the British worker has increased his wages *too fast* compared to others and thus forced up prices. Again this does not bear up to the truth:

Table 4 % increase in man. export prices, hourly earnings & wage costs per unit output since 1967

	Prices	Earnings	Wage-costs
France	14	64	18
W. Germany	30	62	21
Japan	29	101	23
Italy	23	62	32
Britain	26	58	27
USA	18	31	13

(*Economist* 1/7/72)

As Table 4 shows, hourly earnings have risen more slowly in the UK than in most other competitor nations, yet export prices have risen nearly as fast as countries with higher hourly earnings increases. This is explained by the fact that *wage costs per unit of output produced* have risen faster since 1967 than every country except Italy. And since the Tories came to power, it has risen by 24%, faster than any other industrial country, while in the same period, export prices have increased by 26% in the UK compared to Germany (4%), France (4%), or Italy (2%). This means that it is not wage increases which are causing inflation in Britain, but inefficient British industry which, rather than invest and raise the productivity of the labour force, merely raise prices and preserve their profit levels. As the *Economist* put it: "After all, it has been Britain's failure of productivity rather than wages which has made us more inflation-prone than other countries." (4/11/72).

So it is not the greedy workers who are creating inflation by asking for too much; or even uncontrollable world prices. It is the basic inefficiency of British capitalism compounded by increased government expenditure not backed up by any real increase in investment used as a vain attempt to raise productivity.

As it is, despite post-war 'affluence', nearly 40% of the British population continue to live in either overcrowded accommodation, or dwellings without hot water, bath or exclusive WC. Four out of every 5 households have less than the average income. *If we were as tall as our incomes, the richest 1% would be 10 miles high, while the rest of us would be dwarfs.* Over 10m people live below the official poverty line. In 1886, the low-paid worker got 68.6% of average earnings. In 1920 he got only 67.3%. In 1949 the poorest 30% of wage earners received 14.6% of national income; in 1972 they only received 12.5%. In the meantime, the power and wealth in society have been concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Now 100 companies control two-thirds of the net assets of industry and 300 control 87%. It is these companies which maintain the inequalities in British society and dictate workers' lives.

The Tories, in representing the monopolies' interests, have now reverted to a policy of statutory wage restraint in an effort to boost profit levels and hold down the workers' share. Of course, prices have continued to rise when wage increases have been curbed. Since the beginning of Phase 1 to August 1973, earnings rose 9.5%, while prices rose by 6.8%. When you remove tax and other deductions, it means that even on official figures, there has been no rise in real incomes since the Tories introduced their incomes policy. Fair treatment for all under Phase 3 means that some women workers at the Co-op can be refused an increase by the courts, which would only increase the total wage bill by £130 a week while one person, Sir John Stratton, managing director of FMC, can receive over £300 a week without question!

And there can be no respite in the future for the working class under capitalism. While Heath and the Tories ignore the signs of the disaster for the economy that lies ahead, their economists continue their warnings. A group of ten economists, some Conservatives, issued a statement recently which said: "if inflation continues at its present rate, it will lead to a complete breakdown not only in the monetary system, but in the political system as we know it." (my emphasis - B.Mc). Thus the danger is made clear that a serious economic crisis could lead to a confrontation of classes which would end the political rule of capitalism in Britain.

The very economic situation will force the Tories to apply the brakes, or that brick wall will stop the economy in its tracks. And this could happen at the same time as the other major industrial countries enter a period of 'recession' or small slump also. Already the international trade body, GATT, is warning that severe financial stringency within each country in 1974 "could bring about a spreading and cumulative deflationary effect capable

of setting back world trade, production and unemployment." In Germany, where unemployment has been steadily rising during this year, utilisation of industrial capacity is falling, and during the boom period of 1972 to early 1973, still only reached 92% of the previous boom level. Various German bankers have predicted a "full-scale recession in the first quarter of 1974", with half a million unemployed early next year. In the USA, the purchasing power of the American working class actually fell during 1973, and recession fears are also growing. There has been no real lasting solution to the world monetary crisis which crystallised in early 1971 and has been smouldering since (see *Militant International Review*, no. 5). So Britain's industry, given its already weak state, will face a narrowing export market and world-wide slump in 1974, which will crush the Tory dream of free enterprise growth that they blindly boast about now.

In this situation, only a bold programme of socialist action designed to really take over the economic levers of power, the big monopolies and banks, to plan and control production through public ownership and workers' management, could avoid the inevitable decline in living standards, redundancies, cuts in social services and increases in taxation, which even a small slump of 1921-22 proportions, would bring.

And yet the Labour leaders seem as blind to the dangers that lie ahead, as the Tories. They continue to talk in terms of more housing, more schools, better wages, an end to inflation, better pensions etc, without any clear idea how this is to be achieved. The Labour Party is committed to increasing pensions to £10 a week at 1973 prices, when returned to power. This miserly sum would nevertheless be an advance. But when the practical details of how it is to be paid for, are worked out in the pamphlet "*Financing Labour's Programme*", it becomes clear that it will be done by increased taxation, and some utopian hope that the economy will continue to grow at 4% a year. And even then, the pamphlet makes clear that having done this, there will be precious little left over in the kitty for the other social reforms Labour is committed to.

But even this reform for pensions, small as it is, will be in jeopardy if Labour comes to power in late 1974, faced with a severe run on sterling, a massive balance of payments deficit, large foreign loans to pay back, a slump in investment and the beginnings of rising unemployment. It will be a situation many times worse than the heritage the Tories left Wilson in 1964. And then he and Jenkins, following orthodox capitalist policies of higher taxation, devaluation, cuts in social services, wage restraint etc, took six years to get British industry prepared again to consider even a small amount of investment — all at the expense of working people who had elected them.

Wilson and the Labour government had the choice then to break the power of private monopolies, take them all into public ownership and plan the economy for need and not profit, but they chose to follow the dictates of the City of London to try and make capitalism work. If they do so again, then the convulsions that it will produce in the Labour Party, would not only probably end the reign of the next Labour government before the end of their term, but split and rend the party itself apart. That can only be avoided if, instead of back-peddalling on even the limited and inadequate programme of public ownership adopted at the 1973 Conference, at the first signs of hostility, the leadership firmly grasped the nettle and launched a full-blooded socialist programme to capture the imagination and direct the fight of the working people to a successful transformation of society.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Developments since this article was written in November 1973 confirm the prognoses on the British economy.

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INTERNATIONAL NOTES



WEST GERMANY

The prospect of a world recession next year has shattered all the myths of post-war capitalism, even its most cherished "miracles" like Scandinavia, Japan and West Germany. Italy was the first of these bubbles to burst, leaving a picture of bitter class battles, stagnation and political chaos. But no legend was more jealously protected than that of West Germany, where the "honest German workers worked hard, and never went on strike" and where consequently the economy flourished.

In reality, the economy leapt ahead on the basis of the injection of massive capital investment through the Marshall Plan, the market opened up by a ruined economy and the development of industry according to the most modern techniques, plus the huge influx of labour from the expelled communities of Eastern Europe and from the

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migrants of Southern Europe. The political level of the German Labour movement, traditionally the most developed in the world until its extinction by Hitler in 1933, suffered accordingly. At the end of the war, the SPD was demanding nationalisation of the monopolies and the creation of a Socialist United States of Europe. But the post-war boom had an effect even more dramatic than in the other capitalist countries. For the German workers, the contrast was between Nazi slavery and the most successful boom in Europe. In addition, the repellent effect of the Stalinist states to the East, lowered the socialist consciousness of the workers at a time of unprecedented prosperity, albeit at the expense of long hours, women working and the super-exploitation of immigrant labour. Hence the SPD leaders in 1958 achieved what Gaitskell failed to do in 1960 in Britain: the deletion of the socialist clause in the Party Constitution.

That was the excuse for a sprouting of sectarian grouplets. The SDS, the "Extra-Parliamentary Opposition", the Baader-Meinhof group, the "Red Army Faction", the KPD... All wrote off the SPD as a "bourgeois" party. The Interior Minister, Genscher, announced in June 1972 that there were no less than 390 "extreme left" organisations, with a total membership (a very dubious estimate by the police) of 89,000! In addition, there were 220 groups of "foreign agitators" working among the immigrants, with a membership of 65,000.

But the events of the last year or two have disturbed the calm of the SPD. The real traditions of that party are coming to the fore. With the economy facing serious problems, a spate of scandals exposing the corruption and cynicism of the Parliamentary apparatus, has rocked West Germany. Already some of the most hard-bitten right-wingers have deserted in fear of the movement shaking the ground beneath their feet. They have seen the wave of political strikes in support of the Brandt government when it faced censure by the CDU CSU on the "Ostpolitik" question. They have seen the sharp class polarisation that took place during the 1972 election campaign, making the SPD the biggest single party, commanding 45.8% of the votes, for the first time. And they have seen the emergence of the Jusos, with a nominal membership of 300,000, campaigning, in words at least, for a return to the Marxist traditions of the SPD. Their reaction has already begun, just as it has already in Italy, in Australia, in Japan, in Holland, and a number of other countries, and just as it will tomorrow in Britain too: a split-off to the right by the worst careerist elements. Muller in Munich stood as a "moderate" in opposition to the "Marxist-dominated" SPD — and got a derisory vote. Professor Schiller, the German Roy Jenkins, resigned as Economics Minister and soon afterwards left the SPD. Dr Gunter Wetzel, Secretary of State for Defence, also resigned, complaining that the SPD nowadays was "a different party from the one in which I have been active for many years" as it had been "infiltrated by radical forces".

MARXIST TRADITIONS

The workers expect "their" government to work in their interests, and they are exerting pressure to that end. The economic outlook for West Germany threatens them with the first real cuts in their living standards since the war (with the exception of the minor recessions of 1966-67 and 1971). Inflation has now reached European rates, with the cost of living rising by at least 8% a year, and the result has been a whole rash of unofficial strikes — almost unprecedented in German history — by workers demanding "inflation pay". This was the beginning of the long-expected "hot autumn", when a new round of wage bargaining began for millions of industrial workers — half the labour force. 220,000 Ruhr steel workers are demanding a 15% increase to cover the next year, and engineering workers are fighting for similar rates, again rare by German standards. This is at a time when domestic demand is stagnating. The retail trade has slumped by 3% so far this year.

The spectre of unemployment now faces them. The influx of millions of dollars and pounds into Germany has forced drastic measures on the government again and again — repeated revaluations, repeated credit restrictions, repeated tax increases and cuts in the Federal budget. The chairman of Daimler-Benz has warned of a severe recession, as profit margins are eaten into by the struggle to keep prices competitive on the North American market. Brandt, like Heath and Nixon, is trying to blame the coming world recession exclusively on the crisis, but already Fords and Opels are working short-time, and production has been cut back at Hoechst. There are now 267,000 unemployed and 67,760 on short-time, and the government has ominously barred the door to any more foreign immigrant workers. Plant is working at 15-20% below capacity. The last bout of unemployment in 1966 brought down Erhardt's government and pushed the SPD into a "Grand Coalition" for the first time. The effects this time will be explosive.

It is significant that the ruling class, like those of France, Italy and Britain, have begun serious preparations for future class battles. Using the excuses afforded them by the Munich Olympic massacre and the exploits of the Baader-Meinhof group of terrorists, the government has passed legislation "strengthening internal security", set up a special police unit and embarked on "research" in the USA and elsewhere on how to equip the police with "more effective arms" for riot control and "anti-terrorist" techniques. The 2,600,000 "Gastarbeiter" from Spain, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Portugal and North Africa — 10% of the labour force — will be the first target — like the immigrant workers of Britain — especially since they played a courageous role in the recent strike wave.

In the storms of the next few years, we can be confident that the present generation of German workers will be worthy of their forebears, and will carry their work to a victorious conclusion.

ARGENTINA



The Argentinian military junta has disintegrated over the past two years, while in every bordering country the brutal jackboot has established its rule. Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil are all military dictatorships of one form or another. The ruling classes of the whole region look with concern on the truly revolutionary processes which have begun to unfold in this country, which is now the key to the revolution in Latin America. The workers have forced out the generals and threatened to oust capitalism itself, a threat to the very tenuous basis of all the regimes in the region and the stability of capitalism internationally. What an effect there would be on the unfolding revolution in Spain if capitalism were overthrown in the Argentine! Imagine the international repercussions for the working class! Because the successful outcome of the movement will hinge in part on a clear analysis and elaboration of clear perspectives and strategy by the marxists in the Argentine, it is a situation which commands the attention of every socialist worker.

The most dramatic move has been the re-election of the old dictator, after 18 years in exile. After his stooge, Campora, gained nearly 50% of the votes in March, Peron himself quickly came to the fore as the only really viable "strong man". Out of 12 million votes, he gained 62%; a remarkable result in any relatively 'free' election under capitalism. It was a tremendous demonstration by the mass of the working class and the youth, for fundamental social change, as well as of hopes in the magic of the old man himself.

Peron clings to the grand illusions of his past, trying to play out his magnificent role of more than twenty years before. Yet Marx explained many years ago that history repeats itself — first as a tragedy and then as a farce! This faded demagogue has come home with a third-rate pantomime troupe, complete with barber and make-up man, who groom and dye his hair before going 'on stage'. He has even tried to recapture the massive veneration of his early years through his third wife Isabel, although she has failed to live up to the high standards of the popular Eva Peron.

But farce is tempered with deadly seriousness when it is realised that between the capitalists and the working class stands Peron. So desperately is he needed that extraordinary measures were taken to hide his recent heart attacks, as his death would leave the ruling class almost nothing to shield them from the masses. Despite the fact that he was ousted 18 years ago because his continued rule could not safely guarantee the property of the capitalists, he has been recalled to hold the line!

After Peron was ousted, economic decay really set in, although all the problems were gathering force before then. Although one of the most advanced and industrialised economy in Latin America, it is still predominantly an under-developed nation, dominated by imperialism and dependent upon raw materials and agriculture. In the hey-day of Peron's rule immediately after the second world war, Argentina's products were at a premium. Wheat exports were 36% of the world's in 1940, but fell to 15% by 1955. Similarly with beef, lamb, wool etc. Terrible economic dislocation and inflation have beset the economy as in most of the so-called "Third world". For example, in the first 10 months of 1972, the cost of living in the Buenos Aires region, in which 7 million live, rose by 61.1% and the real income of an industrial worker fell by 6.8%.

No wonder the mass of workers tend to look upon the "good old days" with some longing. Then Peron was able to exploit the favourable market in order to grant enormous concessions: minimum wages; 8-hour day; paid holidays; housing; health and social security schemes, and so on. In Bonapartist fashion, he ruled from above, balancing between all classes, yet leaning on the massive support of the workers, playing the capitalist right of his movement against the working class mass, but granting considerable material gains to both. In particular, he was able to serve the interests of the local capitalists by striking blows against imperialism, and at the same time grant reforms to the workers; but all this was temporary. By 1955 world conditions had changed and action was being taken against the workers.

Since then the conditions of the masses have drastically worsened. In the early days, the Argentinians ate the most beef of any nation in the world, yet recently the military junta has decreed 'meatless' weeks in order to conserve meat for export. The squalid shanty towns which surround the cities are testament to the lack of progress on the land. Still dominated by the wealthy ranchers and big capitalist food concerns, it has been impossible to provide even a bare living for the peasants and labourers there. As a whole, the economy has faced worsening crisis, unable to compete with the giants of the capitalist world. The agricultural processing industry which was the lifeblood of Buenos Aires, has stagnated as food production has actually fallen.

The ruling class had no alternative to Peron, because the social support for the military rulers had simply melted away. In the election, the alliance which was openly associated with the junta gained only 2½% of the votes! The splits at the top with one clique following another, showed the revolutionary crisis erupting below. But coups and counter-coups could provide no solution for the capitalists who oscillated between repression and conciliation and back again. Such weakness and vacillation only fuelled the workers' militancy once they began to move, and made it necessary for the generals to prepare for open elections.

There has been a state of open revolt in reply to the generals' permanent 'state of seige'. One general strike followed another, which led to barricade fighting and local insurrections in some towns. Only the massive authority of Peron himself, backed by the right wing of his machine, could possibly hold back such a tide, or at least turn it away from its objective. Like in Spain, France and other countries before the war, the ruling class have been forced to hand over to the leaders of the workers, as the means of derailing the revolution. So Peron has been coaxed back, with, so it seems, the endorsement of his candidacy by the Jockey Club, the US State Department and the British and French ambassadors.

Peron "mopped up left-wing votes by appealing to anti-American sentiment all the stronger after the coup in Chile, and he picked up a substantial number of right-wing votes by promising a law and order Government," according to the *Economist* 30/9/73.

He has demagogically mobilised working class anger behind a meaningless but left-sounding programme of a "national and Christian people's socialism", which in the present conditions can pose not one iota of a solution to the workers' immense problems. In true Bonapartist style, he has lost no time in comforting the capitalists that their property is safe. Within hours of his election, he outlawed the ERP, a so-called 'urban guerrilla'

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group which had been involved in numerous acts of individual terror, kidnappings etc. Promises were continually hinted at in relation to purging his own movement of the left-wing and marxist currents which are massively supported by the youth. Most indicative of how he will move, was the very speedy recognition of the brutal junta in neighbouring Chile.

But even if all classes look on Peron as their saviour now, within a short space of time, his magic will evaporate; for no class in the Argentine can he pose any viable solution. The distinctive brand of Bonapartist rule of 20 or more years ago was predicated on a peculiarly favourable set of circumstances which have changed immeasurably since then. Never have the capitalists been in such desperate straits. All the pressure will be on him to take decisive action against the so-called "extremists" within and without his movement and to take repressive measures against the working class.

Paradoxically, the massive Peronist trade union movement contains within itself the seeds of capitalism's destruction and on the way, that of the old general himself. From a weak force, *General Peron*, the *bourgeois dictator*, initiated the organisation of the mass of workers into a 5 million-strong trade union federation, the CGT which even today has over 3.7 million members — a colossal achievement in an under-developed nation. The old right-wing, bureaucratic machine will have its hold on the workers shaken to pieces by the awful experience of the cruel disillusioning events they will suffer over the next few years. The attitude of the mass of Peronist workers is far from blind loyalty; they expect him to deliver the goods. The left-wing youth in particular, were very critical even before the elections, shown by the reported statement that they would *make the revolution with or without Peron*.

Peron's class position and his minute room for manoeuvre determine that he will take an increasingly open capitalist stand, which will seriously aggravate the discontent of the workers, in turn preparing all sorts of splits and conflicts within the Peronist movement. A foretaste could be seen at Peron's homecoming, when 3 million came out to greet him. This demonstration turned into a fiasco, when left and right Peronists fought each other in a five-hour gun battle. It is reported that it was gunmen hired by the right wing to deal with the marxist youth who were the main cause, an explanation which seems highly probable. Since then, Jose Ricci, a leader of the CGT, and Enrique Ginsberg, a youth leader, have been assassinated; the former, it is claimed, by the ERP, but in fact more likely by the right-wing provocateurs.

Bitter strike struggles will once again develop as the workers see their standards even further eroded and no action taken to rectify this. This would mean further fighting, clashes with the police and army and probably once again, widespread action, even to the extent of further local insurrections. But out of this situation, an enormous political process will develop, by which many of the lessons of the past few years will be understood by the advanced workers and in particular the youth — *the Peronist youth are undoubtedly the key to the revolution now*. From their ranks will come the marxist fighters, who will develop the leadership necessary to carry through the revolution to its conclusion: the taking of power by the workers and the expropriation of imperialism, the oligarchy and the native capitalists.

But with a peculiar blindness, many so-called marxists have failed to observe or understand the developments which have already taken place within the Peronist youth and to outline a perspective for the mass of the workers in general. Groups such as the ERP have opted for what appeared to be the quick solution, the route *around* the masses via kidnapping and ransoms. The marxists in the Argentine must face themselves towards the mass movement above all else, and begin systematic work among the *revolutionary youth* in the Peronist youth movement. By outlining bold slogans, by clear and patient explanation of all the issues, by being prepared to work in the same struggles as the youth themselves, it should be possible to build a real basis among the *working class youth*, with the aim of winning a majority of them. Only along that road will it be possible to really penetrate the mass of the working class and prepare a movement for the conquest of power.

The 1911 childrens' strike

In the summer of 1911, unrest broke out in every industrial town in Britain. The superficial calm of Edwardian Britain had already broken the year before, and by the next year the first ever national strike had been waged – in transport and the mines. These were the really bitter, formative years of the labour movement as we know it today. The working class was feeling its potential strength. Shop floor organisation grew enormously and national trade unions were forged from the proliferation of local and often feeding associations. The National Union of Railwaymen was created in 1912 and sprung in months from 150,000 to 300,000 members.

These were years of bitter struggle. A movement of millions established the basis for those trade union and political rights which today are under fire from the Tory government. Today's seizure of the Political Funds of the Engineers was echoed sixty and more years ago by court judgements which tampered with union funds and limited drastically the rights of unions to use them for political purposes.

The whole decade before the First World War was torn with social strife. Proud "Britannia", the unconquerable, suffered dissent at home and across the Irish sea. The "Irish Question" was a permanent irritant for the ruling class; middle class women were taking a militant stand on the question of the vote which was denied them; for the first time for decades, inflation was eating at workers' wages as the former position of total economic dominance in the world was challenged, in particular by Germany.

Starting with seamen and firemen in Southampton, the strike movement of the summer of 1911 swept the ports like wild fire. It was in the waterfront jungles and dense slums of Hull, Dundee, Glasgow, Liverpool and London that the struggle raged most fiercely. In the aftermath of this, and *learning directly from it*, the school children in these areas came out on strike. The first action was probably in Llannelli, where two striking railwaymen had been shot dead, and within days the elementary schools in every industrial town were affected.

In a new pamphlet by Dave Marson in the *Ruskin History Workshop* series, he lists 62 towns which had school strikes in the September of that year, and he estimates that to be an incomplete list. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. Crowds of boys paraded outside schools, calling out the others. "Rolling columns" akin to flying pickets, were organised by strike committees. In Hull and Dundee, where the strikes had most support, thousands of children marched through the streets carrying placards to advertise their demands.

Particularly disliked teachers were stoned in some cases, and in Liverpool a teacher was killed! On the other hand, in many areas the threat of head-teachers, police and magistrates were sufficient to break up the courage and solidarity of the children.

Who were they and what did they want? The pamphlet is based on an exhaustive study of local newspapers of the time, and makes it very clear that the mass of those involved were from what was called the "Truant class" – the poorest and most downtrodden slum children. The photographs show them with shaved heads to keep down the lice, and bare feet. But what is most clear is that they were the children of those workers who had begun that summer to raise their heads; the dock labourers and warehouse workers who had begun to organise against the most horrific conditions imaginable.

The direct relationship between this upsurge of working class children and their parents' fight, was not lost on the ruling class:

"First the sailors and dockers; then the millers, cement workers, timber workers, railway men, news boys, factory girls and now the school boys" (Hull Daily News)

"Their conduct of the strike reveals a close intimacy with the methods employed in the railway and dockers' strikes" (Birmingham Daily Mail).

But neither was it lost on the boys: "Our fathers starved to get what they want; what our fathers have done, we can do," one boy is reported to have told a reporter. At Ashton-under-Lyne, pickets pinned cards to their coats with the word 'pickets' written on them.

By interviews with retired workers and the use of other material, the author paints a brief but vivid picture of the conditions which existed in docklands in 1911. For example, where there were never less than 7,000 men looking for work on the docks, even at the height of a boom there was only work for 4,000 in Hull. Such conditions were responsible for the ruthless role of the employers, poverty, disease and starvation. It was against this that the most ferocious battle had to be waged for even the right to regular work. Small wonder that Ben Tillet led the London dockers on Tower Hill in 1912, in a prayer "God strike Lord Devonport dead" (The chairman of the Port of London Authority).

The children carried all the scars of these conditions; they bore the brunt. From the earliest age, hunger, disease, filthy dwellings, drunkenness, prostitution, were well known to them. At the same time, forcibly dragged into the state elementary schools, often up since dawn as butchers' boys and the like, they were treated

in the most humiliating fashion. Dave Marson brings to life the sort of daily miseries heaped onto the heads of these children by their stick-wielding teachers: how they were singled out as 'dunces'; how school began with daily 'inspection' and public humiliation for the unwashed.

At the benevolent discretion of the head, poor children could get hand-outs. Arriving bare-foot, they were sent with a ticket to a clog maker who provided clogs marked with a circle on the toecap so they couldn't be pawned.

Similar humiliations are heaped *today* on the heads of the children who have to queue publicly for free dinner tickets!

These youthful members of the working class saw their fathers stand up for themselves and fight and somehow gathered the courage to do the same. This was in some ways even more difficult for school-children — even then no employer was able to systematically beat his workers if they struck. They were also young, 14-year olds at the most. A pair of strikers aged six and eight were hauled up in front of Tower Bridge Magistrates for "*wandering abroad without proper guardianship*" as if the authorities cared too much in "normal" circumstances about the tens of thousands of vagrant and half-starved children in the East End and docklands of London!

Their demands varied from area to area, but always the demand for the end of the cane. Very common were the calls for payment and for free meals. In Leicester, they carried banners saying "*We want 30s a week and less hours per day.*"

But just as with the less widespread but important movement in London schools in the spring of 1972, the particular demands were often confused and unclear. It was a general revolt against their conditions and a striving for fundamental change, in the wake of tremendous and exemplary struggles of the organised working class. It was particularly the miners in early 1972 who had impressed on all layers of the working class, the possibilities of dealing the Tories a blow through action. Working class school students in London were champing at the bit and took inspiration from the miners; only a small spark set thousands to demonstrations in the centre of London.

It is not accidental that the capitalist press reached new depths of low abuse and lies against these children as it had done in 1911. The London evening papers excelled themselves in filth against their 13 and 14 year old adversaries with no voice to answer them. The ruling class was scared stiff of these movements. In both cases, notice was served that the rising generation of young workers was already learning to fight. That was the message which struck terror in the bosses' hearts.

And were they so far wrong in 1911? I don't think so. A bit of arithmetic puts it in perspective. The leaders were around 13 years of age in 1911. All old enough to have been hurled into the carnage of the First World War. Those who came back would have been around 21 years old in the year or so following, when revolutionary events took place in Britain in the wake of the Russian Revolution. It is a fair bet that many of the very same school strikers of 1911 were in the vanguard in the post-war industrial battles, many being seasoned fighters by the 1926 General Strike. It is just such a repetition over the next few years which explains the present ruling class's fears about schools today. It is the reason for the increasing campaigns about 'indiscipline' in schools.

But history is never repeated in the same way. Education in modern capitalism has a much bigger role than in 1911 — all working class pupils now stay until they are 16 and vastly increased numbers stay beyond that. A situation of near breakdown and crisis is already developing, and general social changes have determined that working class children start at a far higher level of confidence and preparedness to struggle. Similarly, the 1911 movement was in part "broken" by the working class mothers who, afraid of the consequences rather than because they had no sympathy, hauled their children back to school. Girls played very little role except in Scotland. It is difficult to imagine either being the case in modern conditions.

This pamphlet is limited to a vivid and lively account of the events. There is little or no context or perspective developed. Nevertheless, a 'must' for socialists, particularly Young Socialists. One thing is certain and that is that in the next few years, explosive movements of the working class will be echoed in the comprehensive and secondary schools such as to eclipse even this first, long forgotten but magnificent fight of over 60 years ago. A study of this pamphlet will help in understanding and future intervention in these struggles.

BY BOB REEVES



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