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PORTUGAL:

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN !

BY ROGER SILVERMAN



This article written soon after April 25th coup, has been translated into Portuguese and circulated as a pamphlet in Portugal, where it has been enthusiastically received, especially within the Portuguese Socialist Party and Young Socialists.

Events since it was written confirm the points made in the article on the position of the workers' parties. The Communist Party, including its Minister of Labour Goncalves, have slanderously denounced the initial spontaneous wave of strikes as being the provocations of 'Fascists trying to break the alliance of the people with the armed forces'. The Socialist Party leaders too have urged 'restraint' in view of the economic problems. But the PSP rank and file have swept the Party well to the left of the PCP, so that even Soares has had to assert that 'the PSP stand on the basis of Marxism'. PSP publications in contrast to those of the PCP, talk in the language of Marxism, of the fight against the monopolies, the need to abolish capitalism and exploitation, the class struggle, the creation of Socialist society. Working class militants will polarise around such demands increasingly, and with growing determination seek to compel the PSP leaders to turn these fine words into deeds!

EDITOR

It is said that when the French king Louis XVI heard in his palace the distant cheers of the crowds storming the Bastille, and nervously asked one of his courtiers: "What's this, a rebellion?", he received the respectful reply: "No, Sire, it's a revolution."

When the tanks rolled into Lisbon in the early hours of April 25, and hundreds of thousands of people poured on to the streets to celebrate the overthrow of the hated Caetano regime, the British popular press also tried to pass off the revolution as a simple officers' coup together with the trimmings of an exotic Mediterranean fiesta, with colourful scenes of happy citizens dancing in the streets, showering the soldiers with food, drink and cigarettes, and with red carnations blooming everywhere. It was only in the more confidential columns of the editorials in the "quality Press" that they dared breathe the awful truth: that this was "one of the most important and far-reaching events since the war" (*Guardian*); that "the crash made the statesmen and nations of at least two continents tremble. For like the single stone that starts an avalanche, Portugal's coup may be more a beginning than an end of things." (*Sunday Times*). Without a doubt, the downfall of the Caetano regime marks the beginning of a new era in world history.

The fascist regime in Portugal lasted longer than any other of its kind in history. Ever since 1926 it had cowed the population into terror and despair through its grisly network of informers, executioners and police torturers. It rose to power on the wreck of the great 1910 Revolution, which deposed the rotten Portuguese monarchy but soon polarised into its mutually antagonistic class components and threw Portuguese society into turmoil and deadlock. In 1917 there was a military coup, abruptly terminated with the assassination of the dictator some months later. In the following three years there were no less than 16 governments, and the currency fell within five years to one-twentieth of its previous value. After years of coups and counter-coups, assassinations, strikes, uprisings and repression, the exhausted working class fell prostrate at the feet of the fascist thugs, who had learned well from their heroes already triumphant in Italy, and following their example had stormed into power after a systematic campaign of blackmail, intimidation, beatings and murders. In 1927 the fascists squared accounts bloodily with the workers, and from then on ruled with a rod of iron. As Minister of Finance, Colonies, War, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, the dreaded Dr Salazar succeeded for the first time in well over a century in balancing the budget, shoring up the investors at the expense of the misery of the masses. To this day, the Portuguese are the most downtrodden people of Europe, with a per capita income of £400 a year, and a death rate of 1.11%. With the African and other colonies securing a market for cheap goods and with an enslaved labour force, Portugal attracted an

influx of foreign capital and became, like Imperial Russia, both oppressor of backward nations on behalf of world imperialism and at the same time a satellite or even a colony itself, in particular of British imperialism.

The brave pioneering days of the Portuguese adventurers of the 15th and 16th centuries, who crossed uncharted seas to establish trading outposts in South America, Africa and the Far East, dealing in the lucrative merchandise of slaves, spices and gold, were doomed while Portugal rested on such a narrow home economic base. It could not sustain the unending struggle against piracy and contraband, and its domination by Spain for sixty years up to 1640 effectively strangled it as a world power. It was rapidly eclipsed by Britain and Holland. The loss of Brazil began the break-up of its Empire, and throughout the 19th century it was racked by financial bankruptcy. As in Spain, sterile liberal revolts by the enlightened intelligentsia, soon to be brutally stifled by military counter-putsches, succeeded each other again and again, ending finally in Salazar's tyranny and the violent turning backwards of the clock of history for nearly half a century. A so-called "New State", a self-confessed "corporate republic" was imposed on Portugal, in which only the official Fascist political party was permitted to exist, and in which trade unions and the right to strike were illegal. The workers were herded into State company unions — "*sindicatos*" — and the employers formed guilds ("*Gremios*"), while sole negotiating rights and absolute arbitration powers were vested in official "corporations". A President, appointed by an electoral college chosen exclusively by the "educated strata of society", had absolute powers to appoint the Prime Minister, the "Corporate Assembly", which shared nominal consultative powers with the "National Assembly", and the "Council of State" which consisted of the five leading Ministers plus "ten public men of superior competence who are appointed for life." The Portuguese Gestapo, the PIDE (recently re-named the DGS) were universally hated — that was eloquently demonstrated by the raging crowds who so fervently hunted them down following the coup, together with the countless informers whose names were unearthed when the files were torn open. The vaults of PIDE were crammed with arms, torture implements, diagrams and lecture notes for the instruction of efficient torturers, and even sadistic photographs capturing for ever the horrible grimaces of their victims in their agony. When the African independence movement developed, its fighters faced mutilation, mass execution, beheading, crucifixion, and atrocities like the notorious Wiriyamu massacre in which 400 villagers were slaughtered in one incident in the Tete province of Mozambique.

That was the fearful regime which lasted half a century and which has suddenly burst apart like a pricked balloon. Under the calm surface of the tyranny, violent tensions were rotting its foundations. Finally it disintegrated because it had lost its social basis, had become utterly irrational, in irresolvable conflict with reality. Every revolution in history begins with splits at the top and the collapse of the old political authority. The events in Portugal are similar in essentials to the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the overthrow of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in Spain in 1931, or the downfall of the military clique in Argentina last year. Karl Marx explained that revolution always begins at the top. The first condition for revolution is a crisis within the ruling class. There is nothing surprising about it: it is the rulers, together with their hired strategists and thinkers, which become aware earliest of the dangerous storms ahead. As the contradictions within the old society intensify, they cast around in panic for new panaceas, squabbling furiously among themselves as disaster approaches.

That explains the paradox: that a junta composed of three Generals (including the former Chief of Staff), one Brigadier, a Colonel and two Captains, is apparently leading a revolution.

General Spínola has been cast by the popular Press in the role of a knight in shining armour, a St George tilting valiantly at the dragon of Portuguese fascism, severing its head with a single daring stroke of his sword. In reality, Spínola, the son of one of Salazar's closest friends and confidants, volunteered to fight for Franco in the Spanish Civil War and volunteered again to fight with Hitler's armies on the Russian front. From his exploits in Angola and in Guinea-Bissau, where he was Commander-in-Chief, he earned the title of the "butcher", and he was responsible for the murder of Amílcar Cabral, the Guinean rebel leader. Until recently he was a director of two monopolies: CUF which owns one-tenth of Portugal's industrial capacity, and Champalimaud, the steel and banking giant. In short, he was the arch-representative of the rulers of Portugal — right down to his monocle, his riding whip, his cavalry cape and his jackboots.

To explain how such a man finds himself so unexpectedly at the head of a revolutionary junta, we must examine the crisis which faced the ruling class. The war has been raging in Africa since 1961, when simultaneously with the Indian seizure of Goa, the Angolan liberation movement was launched. This was followed by the revolts in Guinea-Bissau in 1963 and in Mozambique in 1964. Since these wars began, Portugal has spent well over £800m to prop up the rickety trappings of imperial rule, sacrificing 48% of its budget and at least 1,500 soldiers killed or wounded every year. Out of a total of 218,000 troops, about 160,000 are bogged down in the African jungles. Pitting 30,000 soldiers against an estimated 12,000 freedom fighters in Guinea-Bissau, Portugal has had to abandon two-thirds of the territory of this tiny swampland, and the African government is recognised by more than 70 countries. If the mightiest military super-power in history could not defeat the ragged peasants of tiny Vietnam, then the most backward country in Europe cannot hope to win three colonial wars at once. Like Algeria to France, like Vietnam to the USA, the African wars represented a crippling cancer on Portuguese society.

To escape ordeals of conscription lasting anything from 18 to 48 months sweltering in disease-ridden jungles, constantly risking surprise ambushes or stumbling on minefields, and often surviving on starvation rations, a mass movement of desertion and draft dodging gathered impetus. The rate of emigration, mostly to countries in the EEC, soared to some 100,000 a year. Between 1960 and 1970, the total population actually declined. It is calculated

that Portugal lost 1,600,000 out of a labour force of 3,100,000, due to the dual effects of conscription plus emigration. As a result, Portugal's two worst economic ills were further inflamed. The dire shortage of labour leaves the big estates of the South largely to run to waste, and severely holds back the development of such grandiose projects as the building of shipbuilding and ship-repairing plants, the mining of coal, copper and pyrite deposits and the building of processing plant, the development of the oil-refining and petro-chemical industries. More than half of the value of Portugal's exports are still traditional consumer goods like wine, sardines, textiles, cork and wood products, and a huge trade deficit is only bridged by a booming tourist industry. In addition, the fact that Portugal has the highest rate of inflation in Europe, estimated at anything from 16% to 30%, is partly due to the influx of about 15,000 million escudos (nearly £250m) in remittances from the wages of workers abroad, sent home to supplement the meagre family incomes.

Meanwhile, Portugal was less and less capable of exploiting the potential wealth even of its own African colonies. To build the great Cabora-Bassa dam in Mozambique, irrigating the soil and providing hydro-electric power for Southern Africa, Portugal had to attract the necessary capital investment from stronger powers like the USA and West Germany. The great oil and iron ore deposits of Angola, too, could be developed far more productively. The colonies, maintained at such a crippling cost, were increasingly falling under the sway of world imperialism as a whole, thus losing their key importance as a dumping ground for Portuguese goods. By 1971, Britain had replaced the African colonies as the principal market for Portugal, and the bulk of imports, too, now came from West Germany and Britain, in the shape of machine tools, transport and electrical equipment, etc. As a founder-member of EFTA, Portugal had a special Trade Agreement with the EEC, and the capitalists increasingly turned their eyes towards Europe.

Against this background, the monopolies pressurised Caetano into making cautious moves to reorientate the guidelines of the regime. In 1969, officially-approved "opposition candidates" were allowed to stand in the elections for the National Assembly.

Due to police harassment, the Press censorship, the hysterical slanders of the Fascist candidates, and above all the fact that there was only a 20% suffrage, the Fascists won 88% of the votes and all 130 seats. In the 1973 elections, the opposition candidates all withdrew some days before the election. Of the MPs elected in 1969, ten were hand-picked "liberal" elements, carefully chosen to ventilate some responsible criticism in the Assembly. The two leaders of this wing last year walked out of the Assembly in protest at the official neglect of their urgent appeals for mild reforms. But only certain insignificant gestures were made by Caetano to adjust the rules of censorship and give a nominal measure of "autonomy" to, once again, the "educated strata" in the colonies.

Then General Spínola wrote his famous book *"Portugal and the Future"*, and the monopoly CUF published it last year. Spínola openly raised the question of splitting the nationalists and creating a "moderate" African party around a black elite, pointing to the comforting examples of the Congo (Zaire) and Malawi to suggest a way to extricate Portugal from Africa, and arrest what he called *"a crisis of social survival, a crisis which touches the very essence of the nation"*:

"The amity enjoyed in Katanga would be an attractive precedent on which the Europeans in Portuguese Africa could base their hopes. But nothing can guarantee that this will materialise in a situation of continuing intransigence".

While this would break up the white alliance with Rhodesia and South Africa, which were jointly prosecuting a deadly war against the guerrilla movements, this might not be unacceptable to the Republic. One South African Nationalist MP was quoted recently in the *Guardian* as saying: *"We would far rather have an African government we can handle in Rhodesia, rather than Smith and his men."*

But if that might have worked ten years ago in Angola and Mozambique, it is out of the question after so much bloodshed, especially as there is no white settler capitalist or even rich farmer stratum, certainly in Mozambique, but only the pampered employees of the monopolies, outnumbered 7 to 1 in Angola and nearly 40 to 1 in Mozambique.

President Tomas and other Generals, more loyal to their fascist heritage and convinced of Portugal's *"Christian civilising mission in Africa"*, resisted Spínola tooth and nail, and Caetano, who had given Spínola a sidelong wink to publish, was forced to dismiss both Spínola and the Chief of Staff Costa Gomes. The right wing argued, equally correctly, that Spínola's perspective was a pipe-dream, and that without the colonies Portugal would be an insignificant little country — and yet they could not keep them either. So fierce had the argument become that in December there was an attempt at a right-wing coup to pre-empt any moves along the lines suggested by Spínola. And after Spínola's dismissal, some lower army officers staged an abortive coup in March, which ended in the arrest of 30 officers and 200 soldiers.

Every section of the population was beginning to stir. The capitalists were bickering and uncertain which way to turn. The working class, enormously strengthened by the labour shortage, mounted a series of heroic strikes which turned the fascist law-books into worthless scraps of paper. In recent months, over 15,000 workers were on strike, at Plessey's, ITT, Algot, Signetics Electronics, Control-Data, Hoechst, Leyland, Fords, Flandria Cycles, Aumina, Babcock and Wilcox, Timex, Sorefame, Bis, Electro-Arco, Geffa, Melka, Cotese, Cometna, Sacavem.... bank employees, airport workers, and even agricultural labourers (who also held a certain bargaining power owing to the severe shortage of manpower in the countryside) fought heroic strikes, often unsuccessful, in the teeth of armed police operations.

The middle class, especially the youth, were bitterly opposed to the regime. The missionaries and even some

Bishops based in Mozambique have attacked the authorities. Since 1968 there has been a rash of student demonstrations, including in recent months at Lisbon University, the Economics Institute, the Medical Students' Union, in Oporto and Coimbra, and even at the Lisbon Military Academy. One sign of the students' radicalisation, and incidentally a clear indication that a UDI in Mozambique would be impossible, was the stormy meeting held after the coup at the University of Lourenco Marques in Mozambique. These students — mostly white — called for firm measures against any UDI by "reactionary fascist-type elements" and for the dismissal of officials "directly involved with the fascist colonial regime."

It was the lower army officers from the middle class who were in the vanguard at this initial stage of the socialist revolution. In a brilliantly organised operation, they moved an armoured regiment into Lisbon from Santarém before dawn, surrounding the Presidential headquarters. Garrisons in Oporto, Lamego, Viseu and the Carragigueiro barracks all radioed their support. Three waves of the 7th Cavalry Regiment were sent against the rebels, of which the first immediately rallied to their side, the second came over after their commander had been arrested and the third wavered and capitulated after a few minutes of half-hearted fighting. Then the crowds poured out to greet the troops as liberators. It was like the flood of workers on to the streets of the cities in the north of Italy, celebrating the dismissal of Mussolini in 1943 by the fascist Grand Council — a revolutionary movement only crushed by the repression of the Allies and of Hitler. Negotiating through the Minister of Information, Caetano insisted on talking to top-ranking officer, and finally offered to hand over power to his old friend, Spínola. Only after agonies of indecision did the rebel Captains and Majors accept this deal, having first written out a charter of democratic promises which they presented to Spínola as a *fait accompli*. Spínola considered the demands dangerously radical, but he had to choose: adopt them, however much they stuck in his throat, and try to keep events under control; or let history pass him by, and, in the words of Caetano's last arrogant sneer "hand over power to the mob."

STATE MACHINE DISINTEGRATED

The abscess had burst. Even in exile in Madeira, Caetano and Tomás had to endure the humiliation of a demonstration, 10,000 strong, demanding that they be put on trial. In the whole of Portugal, only one section of the population was prepared to resist the coup: the secret police themselves. That was no last defiant expression of selfless devotion to the Fascist cause. It was sheer panic, as the angry crowds of workers, many of them former inmates, or their friends and relatives, bitter and intent on vengeance, surged in their thousands around the DGS headquarters, threatening to tear their hated tormentors limb from limb. One frightened wretch opened fire from the rooftop, wounding 50 people and killing five, one of them an 11 year-old girl, and another a man running to save her and waving a white handkerchief. That was the last spiteful kick of the PIDE.

The *Observer* (5/5/74) painted a poignant picture of the plight of a bourgeois couple on the evening of May Day, faced with the disintegration of the old state machine, with half the PIDE men hiding in ditches and the other half languishing in their own prison cells, and with the soldiers and the sailors decked with flowers, marching with the million-strong May Day crowds, red carnations sprouting from the muzzles of their rifles and tank guns. This couple were "sitting in a hotel lounge, middle-aged, elegant, the man in a blazer and white polo-necked sweater, the woman in Swiss shoes, both in dark glasses. He held a red carnation listlessly between his fingers. They did not speak." The same reporter commented "Portugal is a State with a head but no body." That is true. The ruling class has its Generals, but at the moment it has no Army. When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917, he called it "the freest country in the world". He did not have any faith in the democratic principles of the Provisional Government, especially of its ten capitalist ministers; he meant that the old state machine was temporarily — very temporarily — incapable of being used decisively in the defence of the ruling class. That is the situation in Portugal today.

Now the floodgates have burst open. In every square, on every street corner, in every factory or office, in every barracks, people are holding meetings, arguing, hungrily devouring the fruits of democratic rights. That is the picture given us by every reporter. In the heady atmosphere following Caetano's overthrow, banks, radio stations, newspapers and factories were occupied by their employees. Workers' committees sprang up and the old managers were sent packing.

At the moment there is no coercive force on earth that could hold the workers back. If there were a revolutionary Bolshevik Party in Portugal, the workers could be in power today. Such a Party would have mobilised the whole working population through crystal-clear slogans aimed at concretising and consolidating the gains of the revolution:

*Disarm the reactionary officers!
Form revolutionary committees in the armed forces!
Arm the workers!
Link up the workers' committees at local, regional and national levels!
Occupy the factories and offices!
For a workers' government!
Nationalise the banks and the monopolies!
A decent minimum wage! Work or full pay!
Full trade union rights; free access to printing presses!
All officials to receive the average skilled workers' wage!*

Armed with demands such as these, a revolutionary party could rapidly have united the vast mass of the population, and the workers could have come to power peacefully, at a moment when reaction is impotent. The whole face of the globe would be transformed. Spain, Italy, France, Greece and soon afterwards the rest of Europe would follow the Portuguese example. So would Brazil, coming to the aid of the Argentine workers and reversing the defeats of their brothers throughout the South American continent. No power on earth, East or West, could survive such a world-shattering event. Even what has already been accomplished, the overthrow of fascism after half a century, has sent great shock waves around the world which have strengthened the morale of the workers and, as the *Sunday Times* commented, caused the rulers of at least two continents to tremble.

At the time of writing this article, the exact composition of the Provisional Government is unknown. However, it is obvious that Spínola will be President, that the leaders of the Socialist and Communist Parties will be represented and that top posts will go to elements like Sa Carneiro, the lawyer who spent four years as a "liberal fascist" member of the National Assembly, and even possibly Professor Simão, who was actually the Fascist Minister of Education for four years.



Spínola inspects his troops in Guinea

ONLY A REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP IS MISSING

If either the Socialist or the Communist Party were revolutionary parties, the workers could be in power today. But instead, we see all the authority of the leadership of these parties prostituted at the service of the capitalist class. The role of Soares, leader of the Socialist Party, during the dark days of fascism is best summed up by the petition he presented to Caetano on taking office in 1968, humbly beseeching the Fascist dictator to graciously bestow democracy on Portugal. It ran in part: *"The signatories stress that they are not violent revolutionaries, but moderates who wish to create a situation in which normal community life will be possible... We acknowledge the danger of extreme right-wing reaction if reforms are made too rapidly, but promise our full support to Caetano if he presses ahead with a policy of amelioration."* The petitioners warned Caetano of the danger of *"an uncontrollable explosion of discontent"*, if their views went unheeded.

Soares has described the nature of the Provisional Government. It will not even be a Popular Front! *"What we are aiming for,"* he explained at a recent Press conference, *"is a much wider concept — a programme of national salvation, as the junta describes it. A front of national unity, an alliance of many forces. And so you will see conservatives, Catholics, liberals, Socialists and Communists all working together in the new civilian administration."* As we have seen, the government will even include "progressive" Fascists like Eduardo Corrêa, friend of Veiga Simão, and Sa Carneiro! Soares has expressed the hope that *"Spínola will be a Portuguese De Gaulle"* and his attitude to the situation in Spain will be guided by *"the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries"*!

The Socialist Party has had no tradition of struggle under the Salazar/Caetano regime. Nevertheless, it will undoubtedly grow into a mass workers' movement in the present conditions, just as the Mensheviks became a huge mass force in February 1917, despite the fact that in 1914 the Bolsheviks had had the support of 80% of the organ-

ised working class. The millions of politically naive, untutored masses pouring on to the political arena will not at first distinguish between the different working-class tendencies. That makes it all the more vital that the Communist Party, with its prestige among industrial militants, should tirelessly and patiently explain the dangers of leaving the power in the hands of the capitalists. That is how the Bolsheviks won the overwhelming support of the Russian workers within a few hectic and stormy months, and led the world's first socialist revolution in conditions far less favourable than those existing today in Portugal.

But what has the CP leader Cunhal said? *"We need a union of all political movements to strengthen democracy in Portugal. United we shall crush the last of fascism and create a free democratic society."* That is the language of Menshevism. Lenin tore to shreds the abstract concepts of "pure democracy", devoid of any class content. The only secure democracy is the sturdy tradition of workers' democracy, based on nationalisation of finance and industry under workers' management and control.

"Unity" with Big Business under the guise of a "fight against fascism" will spell catastrophe to the workers at a later stage. Soares has vaguely stated that *"the Portuguese Army is not the Chilean Army, and I hope its intervention aims at restoring democratic liberties."* It would be mad to leave the question there. On the eve of the bloodiest coup in Latin America, Allende and Corvalan were soothing their supporters with the assurance that the Chilean Army was not like the Uruguayan Army. In Uruguay, the leaders had said the Army was not like that of Greece. In Greece, that it was not like the Brazilian Army.... Certainly, to use the Army in its present mood would be unthinkable. But that is an argument for acting now, before reaction has had a chance to mobilise support among the middle class under conditions of crisis and class deadlock.

We have already noted that in April 1917, military counter-revolution in Russia was impossible. But already by August, the bloodthirsty General Kornilov was at the gates of Petrograd at the head of a counter-revolutionary Army. In Spain in 1931, the officers brought down the monarchy and the dictatorship in a movement very similar to that taking place in Portugal today. But by 1936, Franco was at the head of a Fascist Army which killed a million workers.

Above all, the history of Portugal itself is rich in lessons for the working class today. It was the soldiers and the sailors, together with armed civilians, who launched the great 1910 Revolution. But that did not prevent the Generals carrying through a reactionary coup in 1917.

SOCIAL CRISIS

On a capitalist basis, terrible social crisis lies ahead. A coalition with the capitalists can only serve the interests of the enemies of the working class. Spinola may be talking today in liberal phrases — but what will he be saying when the new trade unions put in wage claims bringing them up to European living standards? How can foreign capital be attracted when Portugal is no longer a reservoir of cheap labour? What programme can the capitalists offer to end inflation? How will entry into the EEC help the Portuguese workers, when it has hit the British workers so hard?

So far, the role of the CP has been limited to policing the workers in the interests of the junta. The CP has condemned the workers' spontaneous action in occupying the factories, and now a planned steel strike has been called off after an appeal by the CP. It is reported that a Ministerial portfolio has been offered to the CP on the understanding that it will seek to restrain the activity of "left-wing extremists".

The other left groupings will be bypassed by all but a handful of workers. The numerous Maoist and "guerrillaist" groups sprouted weakly on the unhealthy soil of frustration and demoralisation under the dictatorship. It is to the trade unions and the two workers' parties — the CP and the SP — that the masses will turn, first befuddled with reformist illusions, then for a time half-heartedly seeking excuses for their leaders, and only finally, threatened with the extinction of all the gains of the revolution, restive and increasingly angry. Both parties will face inner upheavals as their leaders' policies come more and more into conflict with the real interests of the rank and file.

Already some workers are instinctively uneasy at the course of events. The reporter from the *Observer*, testifying to the "euphoria" and "naivety" of the workers, quoted the example of *"one solemn clerical worker, standing frowning on the edge of a colossal May Day crowd"* who *"said that Spinola should have gone already; Portugal should already be in the hands of workers' committees"*. And this was less than a week after the coup!

Portugal today is a hot-house of political discussion. In these revolutionary conditions, a Marxist tendency with strong roots in the working class can rapidly be created. Through the ebbs and flows, the upsurges and retreats, the workers will be gripped in waves of hope, disappointment, inspiration, frustration, even at times despair. But one thing is certain: the Socialist revolution has begun!

NORTHERN IRELAND:



ULSTER WORKERS' COUNCIL BARRICADE

THE CRISIS DEEPENS

BY JOHN THRONE

The killing and suffering in Northern Ireland continues. One thousand people have died since 1969. The same amount of deaths per head of the population in England, Scotland and Wales would be over 50,000. The violence has changed slightly in form over the past years. As the cities and larger towns became more and more fortified by the army — Belfast and Derry city centres are sealed off with steel gates, manned by army searchers through which everyone must enter and leave — the small towns and rural border areas also became main arenas of conflict. Sectarian killings and more recently attacks on groups of workers, mostly Catholic, have accounted for the greatest proportion of deaths over the past 18 months. Special Air Service (SAS) units, known in the North as Special Assassination Squads, have undoubtedly been responsible for some of these murders. The policy of the SAS is, it seems, to *“create tension (through assassination) so as to divide the people from the revolutionary organisations”* (Dublin newspaper *Sunday World* 24/3/73). The numbers of the SAS in the North have been swollen by over 100 in the past few weeks. The reinforcements came from a camp in Hereford where they had been mustered for the past three months in preparation for use, if necessary, against the striking miners. The events of the past five years have deepened the sectarian division in Northern Ireland. Intimidations from places of work and out of homes are so common they no longer warrant coverage in the press. In some areas, friendship with a person of the opposite religion can mean a bullet in the head.

This sectarian horror, which is the lot of the Northern Irish working class, is the direct result of the tactics and strategy of the British ruling class over the past 400 years. When British landlordism was the main agent of exploitation of the Irish masses, the tactic of divide and rule was a vital weapon. The plantation of Ulster in the early 17th century was the clearing of whole counties in the North-east of the country of the native population and the “planting” of as many new tenants from England, Scotland and Wales as possible. The terms of division of these confiscated lands illustrates the reasoning of the British ruling class at that time. The seized land was divided into lots of 2,000, 1,500 and 1,000 acres. The receivers of the largest lots were forbidden to take Irish tenants; the receivers of the 1,500 acre lots were not, but if they did, their rent, payable to the Crown, was increased from £5.6.8 per 1,000 acres to £8 per 1,000 acres. The total of this land given to Irish tenants did not exceed 10% of the whole and was usually the worst land. The pattern can be seen in some rural areas to this day, where the hilly, mountainous areas are occupied by Catholic farmers with obviously Irish names, while the valleys have larger farms whose owners have Scottish or English names and are mostly Presbyterian or Church of Ireland. The plantation was an attempt to set down tenants in a hostile environment who, because of this, could always be counted on to be loyal to their British masters. Thus providing a secure base from which to dominate and exploit the country as a whole.

This strategy received a severe shock with the coming together of sections of the Protestant and Catholic peasantry and artisans, craftsmen and small manufacturers in the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen led by Wolfe

Tone. While this rising drew some inspiration from the French revolution, it had two main driving forces. One was the artisans, craftsmen and small manufacturers who were restricted by the domination of the Irish economy by the British ruling class. The latter saw Ireland as a source of agricultural produce and wealth in the form of rents etc. while at the same time taking measures to see that industrial competition did not come from that quarter. The other was the wretched conditions of the peasantry. These had given rise through the century to the struggles of the Whiteboys in the Southern part of the country. This organization physically resisted evictions and assassinated landlords and their agents. Parallel organizations sprang up in the Monaghan-Tyrone-Armagh area— the Oakboys: this was made up of both Catholic and Protestants; and in the areas of Antrim and Down, the Protestant Steelboys.

This rising evoked ruthless repression from the British ruling class and an intensified campaign to divide the masses along sectarian lines. The Orange Order, after its establishment as a small local body in the early 1790's, was developed and financed by the ruling elements for this latter purpose. The poverty of the great mass of the population provided the perfect seed-bed for such tactics. Marginal privileges were distributed through the Orange lodges to sections of the Protestant population. The sectarian division was thus deepened.

This process was accentuated by the particular military and strategic needs of British imperialism during the 19th century and early decades of the 20th. The British ruling class were increasingly opposed by the developing strength and combativity of the British working class. The other was the movement in Ireland for Home Rule, the spine of which was the struggle against the landlord system. The famine of 1846-47 gave an impetus to this struggle. This famine, which reduced the population of Ireland by one-third in 10 years, is commonly believed to have been caused by a failure of the potato crops, the main source of food for the Irish peasant — but more accurately it was caused by the landlord system. The peasant grew two main crops, potatoes to feed himself and his family and corn to pay the rent to the landlord. When the potato crop failed, the landlord still demanded his rent and while the rural population was being reduced by death and forced emigration to just over half, there was enough grain and cattle being exported to feed the starving people twice over. The Roman Catholic church insisted on the peasantry paying their rent.

The rising of 1848 followed, then the Fenian movement and rising of the 1860's, the Home Rule movement that was given a boost by these events and finally the co-operation of the latter with Michael Davitt and the Land League in the land war of 1879-82, nudged the most conscious elements of the British ruling class into action. Opposing Home Rule, mainly for military reasons at this time, fear that a foreign power would use Ireland as a base from which to attack, they tried to take the steam out of the Home Rule struggle by placating the peasantry. A series of Land Acts were introduced, stretching from 1870-1909. These made it possible for the peasantry to buy land. It subsidised the landlords, so that in most cases they got more than the market value. Between 1870 and 1910, 13 million acres were taken over by half a million tenants at a cost of £120 million. They also, as Randolph Churchill put it in 1886, played "*the Orange card*", stirring up sectarian riots in Belfast and the North-east, playing on the fears of the Protestants and claiming that "*Home Rule would be Rome rule*".

A new and more cohesive force was developing in Ireland: the Irish working class. The first meeting of the Irish TUC was held in 1894. James Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896. Especially worrying as far as the British ruling class was concerned was the developing militancy of the unskilled workers. Their wages were approximately one-third less than that of their British counterpart. In 1907 in Belfast, Jim Larkin conducted a determined struggle against the local employers to organize the unskilled dock workers. The bosses used the sectarian weapon and the workers developed the sympathetic strike. Support for the workers came from a split-off from the Orange Order — the Independent Orange Order. Out of this struggle were laid the foundations for the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). Another after-effect was the founding of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1909. The Irish Labour Party was founded in 1912 by the Irish TUC, under pressure from Connolly and Larkin, but it was the 1913 lockout in Dublin which really struck terror in the hearts of the ruling class. The employers locked out all members of the ITGWU. The struggle went on for eight months. The sympathetic strike developed in Belfast in 1907 was used again; battles were fought with the police daily; workers were killed and the Irish Citizens Army was founded. This was the first "red army" in Europe, a trade union defence force to defend the picket lines.

This bitter struggle raised the militancy of the British workers to an even higher pitch. They had already been moving against the bosses with determination. The 1910-11 Cambrian Combine strike in the Rhondda in South Wales, and in 1912 the nation-wide six week strike of over 1 million miners for a minimum wage, reflected this. In 1911 the Parliament Act went through the House of Commons. This removed a lasting veto of the House of Lords.

All these factors coming together, prompted the British ruling class to resort to the most drastic methods to prevent the passage of the "Home Rule" Bill. They had seen their Parliamentary veto considerably curtailed. They had witnessed the insurrectionary events in Dublin in 1913, with the young Irish working class predominantly unskilled, demonstrating the same audacity and freedom from routine as the Russian workers in 1905 and 1917. Britain, as Lenin pointed out at the time, stood on the verge of civil war between 1912-14. The movement of the workers in Ireland threatened to dovetail with the struggles of the British working class. At the same time, Ireland as a sea base assumed decisive importance so far as the British ruling class was concerned, in view of the approaching clash with their German rivals. An additional factor was that even the limited "Home Rule" would reverberate throughout the "Empire" and give a further push to the struggles of the Indian, African and other peoples for

national freedom. It was for these reasons that the dominant sections of finance capital, represented by the topmost leaders of the Tory Party in collusion with the officer caste, organised the military rebellion at the Curragh in 1914. This conspiracy forced the Liberal government to abandon the milk and water scheme for Home Rule.

The organiser of the anti-Home Rule movement in Ulster was Sir Edward Carson, a Dubliner who had been Solicitor General in the Tory government from 1900-1906. Thus sectarianism was whipped up and the basis of the future partition of Ireland laid as a means of cutting across the movement of the Irish workers in the direction of a social revolution and as a way of organizing an armed force both inside and outside the British forces themselves for the defence of the wealth and power of the British ruling class. The sectarianism and the division amongst the working class in Northern Ireland today, along with all the deaths and suffering that have resulted, have been caused by the British ruling class and their tactics and strategy over this period.

The 1916 rising and the six-year Independence struggle that followed, was permeated through and through with the struggles of the Irish workers. From 1916-18, trade union membership rose from 65,000 to 250,000. The take-over of creameries, mines and land, the flying of the red flag, the Limerick soviet and the 1919 engineers' strike in Belfast demonstrated this. The leadership of the Labour movement stood by, subordinating themselves and the demands and needs of the working class, to the leadership of the Nationalist movement, made up at that time of Griffiths, De Valera and Collins. Griffiths, who condemned the workers in the lock-out in 1913 and who at one stage had called on the British troops to intervene against Irish workers on strike. Tragically, with Connolly's execution in 1916, no Labour leader with anywhere near his class consciousness had emerged. Only a clear class lead by the Labour leadership at that time could have united the workers North and South and the country on a Socialist basis. With the signing of the treaty in 1922, partition became a reality.

SECTARIANISM

Behind the tariff walls erected around the 26 Counties state, the Southern ruling class attempted to build an independent economic base. The task was beyond them. They finally acknowledged this by signing the Free Trade Agreement with Britain in 1964. This effectively opened the 26 Counties' economy to British investment and the take-over of Irish industry by the major monopolies and multi-nationals. During the 1960's, British capitalism contributed around 25% of total overseas industrial investment in the 26 Counties. This was stated in a speech by Keating, minister for Industry and Commerce in the Southern government, reported in the *Financial Times* 29/11/73. He went on in the same speech to explain that after a fall in British investment during 1970-72, due to the situation in the North, the Industrial Development Authority anticipated that of the 16,000 jobs created by inward investment up to March 1974, 4,500 would be the result of capital expenditure by British companies. This opening of the 26 Counties' economy to outside investment meant a sharp upturn in the process of industrialization. Industrial exports rose from £51 million in 1960 to £400 million in 1973. Approximately two-thirds of Britain's largest 100 companies have subsidiaries in Ireland, and by the end of 1972, over half the fixed assets of all the 26 Counties' registered industrial and service companies were foreign-owned. With the 26 Counties becoming an increasing source of profits for British capitalism and Britain becoming an increasing source of investment for the Irish economy, with the consequent rake-off for the native capitalist, the relationship between them underwent a change. The political and economic system in the 26 Counties suited the British ruling class better than that in Northern Ireland. Their profits and investment were being protected and assured in the South.

With the collapse of the military might of British imperialism — a consequence of its economic decline — Ireland assumed less importance. During the Second World War it still remained a vital factor in the naval strategy of British imperialism; Churchill even considered an invasion of the South in order to secure the ports for British vessels in the U-boat war. The development of modern weapons — Polaris submarines etc — now renders Ireland "obsolescent" from a military point of view.

At the same time, British imperialism saw that a United Ireland would suit them best. This was reflected by the Lemas-O'Neill talks. Unfortunately for them, even though the tactical and strategic measures that had led to partition had gone, the sectarianism that they had created and institutionalised in the Northern Ireland state had not. As Marx explained, ideas taken up by the masses can become a material force. The accuracy of this has been brutally borne out over the past few years in the North. The Protestant workers' opposition to a united Ireland has been the main obstacle to any movement towards unification. What British imperialism created in the past now stands in her way.

The British Army was not sent in in 1969 because the British ruling class wanted to prevent the slaughter of Catholic workers by the B Specials, RUC and sectarian groups of Protestants. The army was sent in to cool the situation which threatened to spill over into a civil war and the possible involvement of the 26 Counties. In this process, factories would have been burnt down, investment ruined, profits would be hit and the possibility of a social revolution rising out of the flames could not be ruled out. 40.5% of total company investment in Northern Ireland comes from Britain (*Financial Times* 10/12/73). This factor alone warranted intervention.

Armed workers make the bosses nervous. Even though they may be shooting each other at present, if a strike situation developed, it's a short step to using the gun to settle the strike in the workers' favour. The effect of such a conflict on the British workers in a period of increasing class tensions, was also uppermost in the minds of the British ruling class. Workers in UCS threatened to turn the Clyde into a Bogside (a no-go area) if their jobs

were not saved. Ideas cross the sea.

The rising of the Catholic working class in the Civil Rights (CR) movement came after half a century of discrimination and oppression, within a state where the conditions of the working class as a whole was one of high unemployment, low wages and bad housing. When Callaghan came to Derry in 1969 as Home Secretary, he met a deputation from the Derry Citizens Defence Association. A member of this deputation showed him a photograph. In it, Callaghan was talking to an unemployed man in Derry when he'd been on a trip there 20 years before. It was this same man he was meeting again and he was still unemployed! This man has since died in an explosion. This incident epitomises the worst of the Catholic ghetto areas in places like Derry, Belfast, Newry and Strabane. The CR movement raised the hopes of the Catholic working class, especially the youth. Its refusal to take up issues like wages, unemployment, housing and redundancies from a working class viewpoint, closed the door to the Protestant workers. The movement was held to these democratic demands by the domination of the Civil Rights Association (CRA), by the reformist politics of the Communist Party of Ireland and the Official Sinn Féin. It was only the Labour movement, by taking up the CR demands and linking them to the class programme for a change in society that could have united the working class in the North and shown the way forward. While the problems of workers in the North have been caused by British imperialism, the onus for solving them lies with the Labour leaders. These leaders remained silent.

Sections of the Southern ruling class did not! Alarmed by the developments in the North and afraid they would spread to the South, they worked actively to split the republican movement. This allied to the frustrations and impatience of elements of the Catholic population, and the Provos were born. Their ranks were swollen by Catholic youth who were constantly harassed, beaten and humiliated by the army and the police. They saw friends being killed or imprisoned by corrupt courts and the lying testimonies of the so-called security forces, and the Provos seemed to offer the means of striking back. Against a background of unemployment and its attendant misery, literally thousands joined after Bloody Sunday.

The Provos' leadership produced *Eire-Nua* – their blue-print for a new Ireland. This calls for the setting up of a Democratic Socialist Ireland. While the Provo leadership holds right-wing Republican views, the working class instinct of large numbers of the rank and file prevented the complete abandonment of Socialism as an objective. How this socialist Ireland is to be achieved is nowhere understood or explained in the document. In the 10 "more important and fundamental features of the programme" of *Eire Nua* neither the working class nor socialism get a mention. While it calls for "the means of production, distribution and exchange to be controlled by the people", it also assumes that "private enterprise will have a role to play in the economy". Its denial of the class struggle is spelt out when it states later in the document that "the Irish nation must organize itself in such a way as to defend itself against the economic forces associated with the imperial system which tends towards its depopulation and impoverishment."

As far as ending partition was concerned, their military campaign had no chance of success from the start. The Protestant working class, two-thirds of the population in the North, were not going to be forced into an extended 26 Counties with all the loss in material benefits that would entail. Lower social welfare, educational and health standards and the threat from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the Southern state. The Catholic working class, while identifying the escape route from their position in the North along the lines of some sort of United Ireland, would not be prepared to accept an even worsening of their conditions that an extension of the Southern state would mean. The only way to unification is within the framework of a socialist Ireland. A transformed 32 Counties: only the working class can carry through this task.

Trotsky showed in his theory of Permanent Revolution, written in and confirmed by the Russian Revolution, that in the modern epoch the bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries is incapable of completing their own revolution – thoroughgoing land reform with the elimination of all feudal and semi-feudal relationships in the countryside, the unification of the country and the development of the economy along modern lines. The effete capitalists in these countries, linked through the banks to the landlords, are incapable of carrying through such a land reform. They fear their own working class more than imperialism. They have come too late onto the stage of history – the working class is already knocking on the gates to the future. The Irish bourgeoisie proved no exception to this rule. As explained, it was the British ruling class who, for tactical reasons, through the Land Acts of 1870-1909, carried through the distribution of the land and the Irish bourgeoisie were incapable of unifying the national territory, finally accepting the treaty of 1922. A remnant of the national question is all that remains. Only the working class can solve this and only in the process of the socialist revolution itself.

Understanding this, the Provos' campaign is more than ever seen to be a cul-de-sac for the Catholic youth. The armed campaign, basing itself at its height on one-third of the population in the North (no more than 10 or 15% of Catholics now support them) with the other two-thirds opposed to it, the Southern working class cut off because of the lack of working class programme and the nature of the campaign itself, could only have resulted in the present situation: a deepening in the divide between Protestant and Catholic workers in the North; the falling away of the support that existed in 1968 and 1969 amongst workers in Britain and the South and in the death and demoralisation of sections of the most self-sacrificing Catholic youth. The campaign has thrown back the development of the working class struggle. If it had not taken place, the increased attacks on workers' living standards North and South, through the increased cost of living along with the restrictions on wages, would much more effectively have been pushing workers into struggle together on these basic class issues. The building of a united working class, the only force in Ireland capable of defeating British imperialism, would have been much nearer today.

The Provo leadership have learnt nothing from the failures of the campaigns of the '40's and '50's. Nor have the so-called Marxists, who from positions of relative safety chew on the efforts of the Provo activists, learnt anything from the struggles of the Russian Marxists against the Narodniks and Social Revolutionaries. The "terrorism" of these two groups was of a different form; mostly the assassination of landlords and Tsars and their agents, as opposed to the bombings of the Provos and the effects that these have on working class families in the North. Still, Lenin and Trotsky and the Bolsheviks waged a determined struggle against these tactics. As Trotsky recalled in 1933, *"when at the beginning of the century we struggled against the petit-bourgeois illusions and adventurism of the Social Revolutionaries, many good people not only in the Narodnik camp but even in our midst, indignantly broke with the Leninist Iskra, which, you see, allowed itself to criticise terror unmercifully at the time when the terrorists were perishing on the hangman's noose. We replied: the aim of our criticism consists precisely in tearing away the revolutionary heroes from individual terrorism and in leading them to the road of mass struggle."* From the time when the first bomb went off, from the first shot fired, the *Militant* supporters have been the only ones to determinedly and patiently explain the impossibility of finding a way forward through the campaign. When the smoke clears and hundreds of working class people have died, what will be the answer of the so-called Marxists who supported the methods of the Provos, when the rank and file ask them: *"why did you not tell us it couldn't succeed?"* Marxism has long been clear on these questions. The Clerkenwell explosion of 1867 was condemned by Marx, who was in close touch through Engels with leading Fenians at that time. If we came upon an impatient and angry youth who wants to attack a patrol of armed police, the only way in which to help him is to explain to him that there is another way. Not to cheer him on as he rushes to his own assassination.

The tactics of British imperialism in the North has been to draw together the middle class Catholics and middle class Protestants into the power-sharing alliance, while using the armed forces of the state to repress as brutally as possible any opposition from working class areas. This has led to upto 2,000 political prisoners and internees and the assassinations by the army of republicans like Joe McCann, the mass murders of Bloody Sunday and the murdering of Protestant workers in areas like the Shankill Road. The dominant mood of the Northern working class after five years of such repression and suffering is war-weariness and inertia. A desire for peace. While maintaining the repression, the Sunningdale Agreement, it was hoped by the British ruling class, would seem to provide the escape route from the troubles. The straw that the war-weary population would clutch at. The Agreement means all things to all men. Faulkner was *"pleased with the declaration from the Southern government, that there would be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until the majority demanded it."* Gerry Fitt was pleased that *"the British government would support Irish unity if the majority in the North so wished it."* The Southern government has stated recently that Northern Ireland is a part of the U.K., while at the same time their constitution claims it as part of the national territory!

SUNNINGDALE FAILURE

The Sunningdale Agreement represented the traditional methods of British imperialism — a combination of "concessions" and repression. The Catholic middle class were offered a share in the state pie, in the form of "power sharing". The more blatant examples of discrimination were to be eliminated. Grandiose promises on housing, social services, education, etc were made. At the same time, the military onslaught against the Catholic and Protestant "extremists" continues unabated. But, as anticipated by the Marxists, within months of its announcement the Agreement has foundered. All the violence in Northern Ireland is rooted in the terrible social conditions of Catholic and Protestant worker alike and the sectarian poison disseminated over centuries. What hope is there of replacing the slums of the Falls Road, of the Shankill Road, of the Catholic Bogside or the Protestant Fountain Street area in Derry, at a time when Britain builds less houses than at any time for 25 years? How is it possible to remove the cancer of unemployment at a time when Britain as a whole faces the prospect of anything upto a million unemployed towards the end of this year or next? The spokesmen of British capitalism boast that the unemployment rate has been cut from 9% in 1971 to 6% today. What this conceals is that a big percentage of those "gainfully employed" are in schools "training" to be labourers! At the same time, unemployment still stands at 50% for the male population in the Catholic Ballymurphy estate in Belfast.

Optimism has given away to pessimism bordering on despair in the ranks of the British ruling class, in relation to Northern Ireland. They have in the main greeted the decision of the new Labour government to legalise Provisional Sinn Féin and the Ulster Volunteer Force. They hope thereby to demonstrate the narrow base upon which these organisations rest. This is accompanied by talk of the "phased release" of internees under "sponsorship" and the return of "security" to the RUC.

Cross-border "co-operation" between the Southern and Northern regions — particularly by extradition of terrorists, for trial, or an agreement that arrests and trial will take place in the South for offences in the North or vice versa, is to be stepped up. But none of these expedients is capable of offering a solution to the problems in Northern Ireland. Temporarily it is possible that the violence can be reduced "to an acceptable level" as the spokesmen of capitalism call it — acceptable to them, that is, not the mainly working class men, women and children who will continue to be killed and maimed. But a recrudescence of violence and of sectarian conflict is inevitable on a capitalist basis. It is lodged in the very pores of Northern Ireland society. Only the working class, by taking power, can eradicate it once and for all.

The Southern ruling class, while for political reasons not doing away with the claim to the 32 Counties in the Constitution, are working zealously with the British Army to put away all Provos. Their economic links with Britain bind their futures closer and closer together. Inclusion of the Six Counties holds no attraction for them at present. What would they do with the Protestant and Catholic workers, with their history of militancy and struggle? It was stated at the January conference of the Confederation of Irish Industry that it would mean an extra £300m expenditure if Northern Ireland was to become part of a 32-County state. This did not include the present cost of "security" in the North. It suits the Southern ruling class better to let the British Army deal with the situation in Northern Ireland in their own way.

The internment camps in the North are overflowing. Protestant internees are now swelling the numbers. The Special Criminal Court in the South is a disguised form of internment. The word of a Garda superintendent that he believes a person to be a member of an illegal organization, is sufficient evidence to warrant a jail sentence. The ending of internment in its various guises North and South and the repeal of all the repressive legislation on the statute books is an immediate issue which must be taken up by the whole working class movement. These measures will be used against the labour movement in the future.

Workers continue to be murdered in the North. There is an immediate need for defence against the maniacs on both sides of the divide. The increasing attacks on groups of workers over the past few months have highlighted this. The trade union movement, based as it is on all sections of the working class, is the only structure which can draw the workers together in their own defence. Trade union branches and groups of workers have called on the leadership of the unions to act. This points the way forward. The struggle for the unconditional withdrawal of the British Army must be continued and linked to the demand for a trade union defence force, by a conference to be called by the trade union leaders, of all trade unionists, shop stewards, defence committees and tenants associations. This could be the beginning of the setting up of the structure of a trade union defence force. Linking this to the class programme put forward in *Militant Irish Monthly* and understanding the objective economic factors developing in society, which are pushing workers together in struggle against the bosses, a transformation in the situation could be achieved.

This demand for a trade union defence force has met with opposition from practically every group on the left. Official Sinn Féin have called for it on a few isolated occasions. It is decried as "not practical" as there is a deep sectarian divide amongst the workers. This is a position which could only be taken up by reformist groups with no understanding of Marxism. Of course it is true that a sectarian divide runs through the workers in Northern Ireland. It is also true that as long as this present consciousness (sectarianism) continues, there can be no means of defence or an end to the conflict once and for all. But we don't start from a position of accepting the present level of understanding of the workers, but from a position of stating what their objective needs are. We then put forward demands that relate to their objective needs, fight for these demands and conduct a struggle to transform and raise working class consciousness and consequently transform the situation. Socialism itself is not possible unless the understanding and consciousness of the working class is transformed. On this basis it would mean we do not demand a Socialist society.

Militant supporters have always held that a consistent class appeal should be made to the troops in the North. Evidence to support the correctness of this has come from an unexpected quarter recently. Army chiefs reported in the *London Evening Standard*, talked about how worried they were about the possible reaction of the troops in the London *Evening Standard*, talked about how worried they were about the possible reaction of the troops when asked to deal with civilians in Northern Ireland, on being used there first. This worry was removed and the authority of the reactionary officer caste reinforced when soldiers began to be spit on, blown up and shot. Supporters of the Derry Labour and Trade Union candidate were pleasantly surprised at the reaction of the troops there, over the recent Election. They were overwhelmingly supporting Labour in Britain. Like most regiments, they came from working class areas of high unemployment. While thug regiments like the Paras and SAS elements would probably be an exception, a class appeal to the troops would find an echo. Especially if it raised the demand for trade union rights for soldiers (TU rights for soldiers exist in some other West European countries), over-time rates and the election of officers.

Having a clear perspective, the *Militant* supporters have consistently put forward a programme which at all times reflected the objective needs of the working class. We have not bent like all the other elements on the left in Britain and Ireland, to whatever moods are prevailing in the working class, or in some cases the petit-bourgeois, areas in which they were based.

The immediate future for the working class, North and South, is one of a rising cost of living and a holding down of wages. In the North and Britain, the official estimate of price increases for 1974 is 16-18%. For essentials, which take up most of the workers' wage packet, the increase will be over 20%. In the South last year, essentials like food, clothing, footwear, transport, fuel and light rose by over 20%. This was when the official Consumer Price Index was 13.5%. Government figures estimate the Consumer Price Index will rise this year by 15%. The growth rate in the South is expected to fall by almost half to 4%. These are the objective factors which will move the working class into action. While this process in the South will be initially restricted and uneven because of the collaboration of the Labour and TU leaders in the national wage agreement, the Labour Court and the Coalition government, the process is nevertheless inevitable. A crucial question for Marxists is what organisations will the workers use as they fight back against the bosses? The traditions of the workers show this clearly. The organizations that they've built in the struggle throughout their history are the trade unions and the Labour

Parties North and South. It is to these traditional organizations that they will again turn.

In the North, the situation cries out for a mass Labour Party to take up the working class issues. The Protestant workers more and more see the real nature of British imperialism. This is reflected in statements from groups like the UVF calling for a socialist Ulster and attacking the upper class elements who have always dominated them. Leaders like Paisley and Craig show no solution. The idea of UDI, which is their last resort, would mean raising £300 extra per year per head of the population in Northern Ireland and this is not counting the cost of so-called security: Army, police etc. The Catholic workers are seeing the futility of the Provos campaign and the sell-out of the Social Democratic Labour Party. A Labour Party based on the trade unions, taking up the issues of low wages, rising prices and rents and mortgages and linking up with the Labour Party in the South, to fight the employers on a 32-County basis and for workers' control and management of the economy, is the only way forward. In the North at present the only party with any links with the trade union movement is the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Pressure must be exerted for the leadership of this party to take up this demand along with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the leaders of the Irish Labour Party. The latter's coalition with the arch-conservative Fine Gael must be broken and a fighting lead be provided for the workers. Connolly showed the way in 1912 when he pressurised the ITUC to set up the Irish LP and put his forces inside this party to fight for socialist policies.

The class battles that lie ahead in Ireland and Britain will cut across the mood of inertia and weariness now existing amongst the working class in the North, due to the events of the past years. With the increased militancy and consciousness that will result in the ideas and programme of Marxism finding an ever-widening support.

In a previous *Militant International Review* (No 3 Autumn 1970), we have explained that the repression, the slaughter and the poverty conditions of workers North and South are the result of the system of imperialism and capitalism. That the only force that can smash this system of exploitation is the working class. The only way to end internment and repression for good and build a future which ensures a decent standard of living for all, is through the struggle of the workers for the expropriation of the commanding heights of the economy. The end of the post-war boom internationally, the developing crisis within the capitalist countries has led and, as the crisis deepens this process will intensify, to savage attacks on the living standards of the working class. These attacks are pushing the workers into struggle to defend their living standards. This will be reflected more and more in the trade unions, the Labour Parties and in a raising of the consciousness of the workers North, South and in Britain. As the workers move into action, unity can be forged and the working class can carry through to a successful conclusion the struggle against capitalism and imperialism, and for a socialist united Ireland and a socialist Britain. The struggle of the *Militant* supporters for the adoption of a Marxist programme by the workers' organizations is the key to this success.

POSTSCRIPT 10th May 1974

The above was written before the May strike organised by the Ulster Workers Council. This event serves to confirm the analysis made in the article. The strike has at one and the same time shattered the strategy of the British ruling class and completely undermined the assumptions on which the Provisional IRA have based their policies and actions.

The strike was historical retribution for all the past crimes of British imperialism in Ireland. They created the sectarian monster — they taught Catholic and Protestant to hate and fear each other. In the past they urged on Protestants to military rebellion to prevent a united Ireland. Now the sectarian monster refuses to lie down at the bidding of the British master.

The UWC organised the strike by recruiting the support of a minority of the Protestant working class in key industries like the power stations. All the evidence showed that there was considerable opposition from the Protestant working class at the outset of the strike. Thus 90% of the Protestant working class of Derry were at work on the first day of the strike and only "responded" to the strike call when threats were made to burn out their families. In the giant Harland and Wolff shipbuilding yard — employing 10,000 workers — only 500 attended a "strike" meeting and only 100 voted in favour of coming out. Support for the UWC call was gained by threatening to burn the workers' cars. The same pattern of massive intimidation was repeated at Mackies, Sirrococs and other workplaces.

At the same time once the effectiveness of the strike was demonstrated, it gained support from the Protestant working class. The five years of bombings and violence, together with the fear of being incorporated into a capitalist united Ireland, fuelled their support for the strike. Above all, it was the speeches of Gerry Fitt, with his sweeping characterisation of all supporters of the strike as "fascists", and Wilson, with his infamous "spongers" speech, and the use of the army in the petrol stations, which served to unite practically the whole of the Protestant population behind the UWC call.

But the strike was organised for reactionary ends. There were genuine fears on the part of the mass of the Protestant working class that they were to become the new minority — discriminated against and permanently subjugated — in a capitalist united Ireland. But the leaders of the UWC — with their diatribes against "communists and Trotskyists" — and their political allies, Paisley, Craig and West, played on these fears in an attempt to turn back the wheel of history to the pre-1969 situation. They wished to re-establish the Protestant Ascendancy — their own Ascendancy.

The strike was aimed not just against "Sunningdale" and the "Irish dimension", but in order to force back the Catholic population into the position they occupied before the Civil Rights campaign.

Nevertheless, the strike also demonstrated in a distorted form and on a reactionary issue, the colossal power of the working class when it moves into action. The whole basis of life in modern society depends on the working class. Nothing moved in Northern Ireland without the permission of the working class. Even bourgeois commentators, hostile to the aim of the strike, were forced to comment on the power and ingenuity displayed by the working class. Thus the *Times* correspondent commented on the situation in the Protestant Sandy Row district of Belfast.. *"Between fifty and a hundred men have operated a rubbish clearance service, going round in the backs of lorries while others sweep the streets. At the weekend, brown paper rubbish bags arrived and 22,000 have been given to families in the past three days."* Connections were made with sympathetic farmers who supplied the areas with cheap food.

The significance of the strike — the enormous potential power of the working class — has been remarked on by the spokesmen of capitalism. Faulkner has warned the rulers of Europe of the implications of the "political strike". The English *Times* has had editorials on the same theme. The semi-official organ of Fianna Fail — the Southern Green Tories — the *Sunday Press*, remarked.... *"it (the strike) is more insidious than open rebellion with gun and bomb, because on present thinking and because of the implications for legitimate strike, military force cannot be used against it.... there is no escaping the implication that if a people elect an administration.... that irritate trade unionists.... then temptation will be to over-ride the electoral decision by general strike."* (2/6/74). The conclusions drawn by the strategists of the Southern bourgeoisie is that *"If that weapon (the strike) is bent for political purposes.... then it is surely finished as an economic weapon.... the community, in order to protect itself against the greater evil will have to outlaw them."* The Southern capitalists cannot cancel out with a stroke of the legislative pen the hard-won rights of the Irish working class. But they understand, along with their Northern and British counterparts that the working class throughout these islands will have noticed the power of the May strike. It will not be lost on the British workers that the Protestant working class were able to use their industrial might to topple a government. When the need arises, they will seek to emulate this example, only on a progressive class basis.

The Executive, the British government and the 16,000 troops in the province were powerless against such a movement. In the aftermath of the strike, the Southern Irish capitalist press have interpreted the reluctance of the army to move against the Protestant workers and break the strike, as a modern version of the Curragh mutiny. Nothing could be further from reality. Generals King and Freeland, the army commanders in Northern Ireland, have opposed even the use of troops in the petrol stations because they understood the army were incapable of running even "essential services". At the same time, the Army tops were afraid that in a shooting war — a definite possibility if the army would have moved against the strike — they would not be able to hold the Protestants, who had 100,000 guns ready to put in the field.

A NEW PARTITION!

This in turn is a crushing answer to the leadership of the Provisional IRA, and their attorneys in the ranks of the quasi-Marxist sects in Ireland and Britain. The Marxists, around *Militant* — *Irish Monthly*, have consistently argued that the Protestant population would resist with arms any attempt to bomb them into a capitalist united Ireland. Moreover, we pointed out that it would be the Catholic workers of Belfast which would bear the brunt of any backlash. The Provo leadership characterised the threat of Protestant resistance as an "Orange bluff". They maintained that it was the presence of the British army which was the only cause of the conflict. Remove the army, they said, and the *"Orange bully boys would face reality and draw in their horns."*

Yet in the wake of the UWC strike, Rory O'Brady, head of the Provo's political wing, has stated that they would like to see *"a phased withdrawal of British troops over a number of years, in order to avoid a Congo situation."* But if the Protestant population will just come to heel in the event of a British pull-out, why call for a "phased withdrawal"? Why mention a "Congo situation" — a clear reference to possible wholesale attacks on Catholics in the Belfast area and the prospect of civil war — if a withdrawal of British troops will call the "Orange bluff"?

It is clear to all with eyes to see that the awesome power displayed in the strike is a guarantee of determined Protestant resistance to incorporation into a bourgeois United Ireland. On a capitalist basis, religious civil war is guaranteed if British troops are withdrawn and nothing is put in their place. Perhaps there are some in the ranks of the Provisional IRA leadership who believe that out of the ashes of such a civil war will be born a united Ireland. In reality, a new partition would be the result. As in India in 1947, mutual indiscriminate slaughter would be inevitable. The Catholics would be driven out of Belfast, the Protestants from the border counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone and parts at least of Derry. In the past few weeks, "doomsday" schemes, whereby the British Army would hold "corridors" to allow Catholics to escape from Belfast, have appeared in the capitalist press. More than in 1922, a rigid line of demarcation would be drawn between Catholic and Protestant. An exclusively Protestant statelet would be left in the North. The prospect of a united Ireland would be postponed for decades. Even worse, from the standpoint of the labour movement, a new partition will blunt the class struggle North and South. It was James Connolly who predicted that *"a carnival of reaction"* would result from partition. And so it proved to be. But the reaction which followed the 1922 partition would be as nothing to what would

follow a new division of Ireland. The situation would be analogous to the conflict between Israel and Palestinian people. The displacement of the Palestinian people, the setting up of the Israeli state and the consequent guerrilla attacks have tended to blur the class issues both in Israel and in the Arab world. An exclusively Protestant state in the North could only come into existence by creating Catholic refugees. This in turn would provide fertile soil for recruitment of guerrilla forces to be used against the North. The labour movement in the South would be bedevilled by the tide of nationalism which would engulf the country. The Protestant workers, in the face of the inevitable guerrilla attacks would be driven into a bloc with their own capitalists.

The British bourgeoisie, despite the threatening noises in the aftermath of the strike, would only withdraw its troops when it has exhausted all other possibilities. It is paying a heavy price for maintaining its presence in Northern Ireland. It has been forced to foot the bill for the £65m damage to property, the £7m for death and injury, in addition to the yearly subsidy of £430m. But this would be as nothing to the cost — economically and socially as explained above — in the event of a civil war.

Its first attempts at "power sharing" has collapsed as the Marxists predicted. The historical cross-currents which dragged down this attempt to put together a coalition of Protestant and Catholic middle class politicians, was revealed by the dilemma which confronted Wilson on the use of troops during the UWC strike. Wilson could only keep the SDLP in the Executive if he promised the use of troops. But the use of troops led to the shipwreck of the Executive! Now the British ruling class is weighing up the possibilities of fresh Assembly elections and some further attempt at "power sharing", this time between the loyalist coalition, or parts of it, and the SDLP. This will be combined with a continued drive against the Protestant and Catholic ultras. It cannot be excluded that some kind of coalition can be established to temporarily paper over the cracks in the Northern Ireland society. But there can be no solution to the violence, the murders, the sectarianism, which pervades society in Northern Ireland.

Only the labour movement can show a way out of the impasse. Only through their own organisations, the trade unions, can the working class dispel the threat of a sectarian holocaust which hangs over the ghettos of Belfast, Derry and the other towns and villages of Northern Ireland. For five years, the trade union leaders left the field free for the bigots. Only with the "Back to work march" was some kind of serious stand against sectarianism attempted. But this went ahead without any real campaign — mass meetings in the factories etc — amongst the workers, to explain the issues involved. Nor were any steps taken to provide adequate defence for any workers to participate in the demonstration. Workers were expected to brave barricades, UDA pickets and threats to their families in order to reach the starting point of the march. The march could have only been guaranteed of success if it had been coupled by a clear call to the working class to take a class stand. At the same time, only a trade union defence force could have provided the means of defence to withstand the intimidation against workers wanting to participate in the demonstration.

In the aftermath of the strike, the very existence of the trade unions as a body cutting across sectarian lines is endangered. The UWC, fresh from its victory over the Executive, in the aftermath of the strike has spoken about "clearing out the communists and reds" in the trade union movement. There is only one way to guarantee the defeat of the right-wing attempt to split the trade union movement on religious lines and that is by posing a clear class solution. This would link the low wages in Northern Ireland — £6-£8 less than in Britain — together with the appalling housing, social services etc. and the sectarianism, with the existence of capitalism. The purpose should be to drive home to the working class that even their meagre standards are put in peril if they allow themselves to be duped by the bigots on both sides of the religious divide. A Trade Union Defence Force, starting from the need to defend the working class from the sectarian maniacs and assassins, could lead to united class action on the other social issues affecting the working class.

A sectarian catastrophe cannot be ruled out in Northern Ireland; particularly if the trade union movement fails to act now. But Marxists reject the siren voices who speak and write of the "inevitability" of religious civil war. Events in Britain and Southern Ireland can exercise a profound effect in the North of Ireland. The worsening economic situation in Britain and its effects in Britain will provide the opportunity for cementing a class movement of Catholic and Protestant workers. But as in the past, these opportunities can be missed if the lessons of the last six years are not learnt. The bitter religious divisions between the working class, will not be bridged by Christian homilies. Sectarianism will not evaporate if the trade union leaders act as if by ignoring it, it will go away by itself. The working class of Northern Ireland have demonstrated their colossal power during the May strike. They were using that power for reactionary aims and to assist their own worst enemies, the Craigs, Paisleys and co. Let them use it together with the Catholic working class — against the common enemy — the Orange, Green and Red, White and Blue capitalists — and they will be an invincible force. Irish Marxists — gathered around the *Militant—Irish Monthly* — are the only tendency in the Irish labour movement, on the basis of a Marxist programme and perspective, capable of furthering the process of re-arming the Northern Ireland workers on class lines.

BRITAIN:

BY BOB MCKEE



Trade unionists march in support of jailed building workers.

-A MINORITY LABOUR GOVERNMENT

An energy crisis, a miners' strike, a 3-day week, a snap general election and a minority Labour government — it is amazing to think of the speed of events in Britain in the last few months. But it may be slow compared to the pace to be set in the next few.

The whole process leading to the return of a Labour government must be seen in light of the crippling economic crisis that has descended not only on Britain but on the world in general. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has predicted a fall in the rate of growth for all its 24 member countries in 1974, compared to the previous year. On average Gross National Product will only increase by 2% compared to 6.3% in 1973. Inflation in the OECD area is averaging 13% in 1973 — with 29% in Japan and 12% in France; even West Germany had 7½%. The oil crisis created by the Mid-East war has still to leave its full effect, but without doubt 'stagflation' ie. inflation of prices at the same time as low growth and rising unemployment, is now dominant throughout Western capitalism.

In such an inclement world economic climate, it is not surprising that the economic experts fear the worst for the already enfeebled British economy. The London Graduate School of Business thought that 1974 was "likely to be the worst year for the UK economy since the war" and predicted a 1% fall in output, 800,000 unemployed, a 20% fall in housebuilding and a non-oil balance of payments deficit of £2000m. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research was even gloomier, talking of 18% inflation, 1m unemployed and 5½% fall in Gross Domestic Product, with a 7% fall in real incomes.

As the *Financial Times* put it on New Year's Eve, 1973: "For Britain the choice lies between a trivial rate of growth and a substantial decline in output." The balance of payments deficit will require horrendous repayments and borrowing requirements. Denis Healey, in Labour's March budget, estimated that the deficit would be 4.5% of Gross Domestic Product or three times the proportionate figure that James Callaghan had to deal with under Labour in 1964. Money supply continues to fuel inflation at 28% a year and thus the *Financial Times* prophetically concluded: "virtually nothing can be done to stop inflation ... it will not merely be material standards that are threatened but the whole fabric of freedom and decency (sic) which characterise our life in this country." There is now the

danger that capitalism will resort to surgery to remove the cancer in the economy that inflation represents, ie. "there is no quick way to eliminate inflation without a major slump." (FT).

What a contrast from the wild predictions of the Tory government in their Stage III White Paper, which had boasted of 3½% growth in 1974, to the statement of the Governor of the Bank of England in Jan.'74, who talked of austerity and stagnation of real incomes for ten years to right the economy. When only a few months before, Heath had talked of Britain's economic problems as 'the problems of success', now the Tory press called the Governor's speech a "necessary dose of realism". When the OECD came out with a further prediction that Britain would suffer a staggering 9.5% drop in GNP for 1974, it was clear how big a dose it could be. The reckless inflationary expansion under the Tories had only reaped an 11% increase in real GNP since 1970, keeping Britain still at the bottom of the growth league. However, in the same period food prices had risen 50%! The net output in manufacturing had risen 21.2% between 1970-72, but home costs per unit output rose 20.6%, so the real increase in output was a miserly 1% (Census of Production figures). Peter Walker, Tory Minister for Trade, kept telling us that exports had risen a record 66% since 1970, but he omitted to mention that imports had risen 82% and that the export figure was the lowest in the EEC! No wonder the £ fell by 20% since December 1971 on exchange markets. 1973 was the year of the lowest number of house-building completions since 1949. Nearly half the income of the average wage-earner was needed to purchase a house at 1973 prices and 11% interest rates. In fact the Cambridge Economic Policy group estimated that the real incomes of the average wage-earner fell by 2% in the eighteen months upto Jan. 1974, ie. during the period of the so-called Tory boom. For those with below average wages, the situation was worse.

The class divisions within British society remained as unaltered as ever. When some reporters returned to Salford, Manchester, where Engels had described 'The condition of the English working-class in 1844', they found little or no change in 130 years! While upto one-fifth of the population depend on incomes at or below what is considered by the government as the poverty line; while at least 50,000 old people die every year of hypothermia—over 19,000 people in Britain have personal fortunes over £200,000. Inequality of income is created by inequality of wealth and power. Only 4% of income-earners have any shares and of those, only 1% own 81% of the shares. In 1970, 87% of all net capital assets in industry was owned by only 300 companies (Board of Trade figures) and this was before the merger boom of 1971-2.

Society remains in the grip of a rich few, who jealously perpetuate their privileges. According to *General Household Survey*, the 7% of fathers who earned more than £3,000 a year in 1972, account for 48% of children in independent schools or direct-grant. University graduates are eight times more likely to get £3,000 a year than the average. Public school products are four times more likely. While those earning £1,500 or less a year, account for 63% of secondary modern children and secondary modern boys are more likely on average to earn £1,500 or less in their lifetime. The Schools Council Inquiry into Young Schoolleavers found that manual workers' children of the same 'O' level ability were twice as likely to leave school at 15 than children of professional workers. Even the mortality rate of unskilled workers was twice that of professional workers and they were three times as likely to suffer from chronic illness, but had less than average GP doctor coverage. There has been no change since the war in the percentage of working class children in universities or in the domination of public schoolboys in elite jobs.

Yet this is not because the working class are more 'stupid', for working class students tend to get better degrees than 'middle class' students. No wonder that *Social Trends*, a government publication, concluded: "a sense of being deprived of their just rewards runs through all sections of British society, but is felt most deeply by the working class and poor." Class antagonism (what sociologists call 'relative deprivation') is bred by class division in capitalist society.

There is certainly no illusion on the part of the ruling class in British society, about the class nature of the society they control: "the British disease is class conflict. Our problems will not be solved until we are governed by men who understand this... in essence — this is the way Marx saw it — and to this limited extent his analysis has something to teach today" (FT 8.1.74). In fact, it is from this very premise that the strategy of the ruling class is based: for "the task is not to abolish class divisions but to minimise class conflict — or at the very least to protect ourselves from its worst effects" (FT).

But it is increasingly difficult for the ruling class to carry out that basic objective and their vacillation and weakness have been exposed by the events of the last few months alone. The severe economic position of British capitalism forces the ruling class to advocate austerity and cuts in living standards in order to raise the share of profits, ie. the unpaid labour of the working class, going to them. For only this will provide incentive for investment and stop the decline in the rate of profit, which is the lifeblood of capitalism. And yet how to do this without provoking an already restless and well-organised working class movement in Britain into revolutionary upheaval? In their boardrooms and private clubs, the representatives of the ruling class have wrestled with the problem. They have continually vacillated and split between two poles of strategy: confrontation — or concession and conciliation.

The political strategists of capital in the *Financial Times* analysed the problem in detail (30.11.73):

"the trade unions will have to be drawn into the semi-political activity of managing the economy — particularly as regards wages and prices. The only alternative is to smash them, but since that is evidently beyond the political will of even a Conservative government and is probably impossible anyway without a revolution, it is hardly a serious option". But the alternative of conciliation and concession is fraught with danger, for the "task of deciding upon the size of the wages cake would be hard enough but far more difficult would be inducing

the trade union leaders to take part in the invidious business of dividing it up". Nevertheless, a decision must be made for the policy of confrontation or conciliation "means either breaking the power of the unions or trying far harder to harness it. Of these two, the second, though extremely difficult, is certainly more easy and desirable than the first".

Thus the long term aim of capital was to conciliate to gain time, but time is running out for British capitalism, making judgement of tactics increasingly difficult. Heath and the Tories swung from confrontation politics after the 1970 election, to conciliation after their defeat by the miners in 1972, back to confrontation when they failed to 'harness' the trade union leaders to an incomes policy. They finally foundered with their statutory policy at the feet of the miners again.

The policy of confrontation with the miners was a policy of desperation. The miners' overtime ban brought the three-day week. Ostensibly this was to save energy, but the real reason was exposed by the *Sunday Times* editorial at the time: "Nothing was done to diminish the extreme psychological shock to the public. This is clearly Mr Heath's chosen tool. Its desired effect, if not its primary purpose, is to get the miners and railmen to submit to an accumulation of pressure from fellow-workers faced with the dole". Tory ministers railed about the militants and extremists, who were throttling the country, eg. David Howell, the Energy minister: "the deeper crisis the country is facing has been caused by extremist groups who are hell-bent on overthrowing the familiar British way of life." Yet, the miners' solidarity was unwavering and the desperate gamble of the Tories was failing. They were going to have to settle with the miners. The problem was not to be seen to be defeated by the miners so that other workers would gain confidence to ask for wage demands beyond the Tories' stringent Stage III levels as had happened in 1972. The idea was to declare Stage III dead and set up Stage IV which would give the miners more under the Relativities Report of the Pay Board (which is what eventually happened under the Labour government) and apply a wage freeze to the rest of the working class. But so obvious would such a ruse be to the workers that they would be paying the price of appeasement to the miners that the Tory strategy needed "a more elaborate introduction" (FT)ie. a general election for a doctor's mandate. It was a "necessary prelude to Stage IV" (*Sunday Times*). Above all, it was the last card in the exhausted arsenal of this Tory government.

SNAP ELECTION

The Tories were unsure whether to fight an election on a 'reds under the bed' scare or on 'a new deal for the people' platform. In the end it was a bit of both. As it was, Heath hesitated to take the election step because of the immense risk involved. For "a general election will not solve the industrial relations crisis in this country... it will produce the most bitterly divided Britain since the war - a society divided on class lines... it is hard to believe that Mr Heath really prefers that course to the admittedly difficult and perilous one of achieving a greater measure of national consensus..." (*Guardian* 18.12.73). In addition, the TUC pledge not to use the miners' dispute as a case in other wage negotiations, although an empty pledge as far as the economy was concerned, it did appear to put the Tory government in a bad light if they did not consider it. As evidence seemed to show that the miners' overtime ban was not biting too hard, Heath postponed a proposed Feb. 7 election either to sit it out until summer or provoke an all-out strike which they desperately hoped would win them overwhelming public support.

The uncertainty of which direction to take was evident in Heath's tactics. He happily boasted of the interminable meetings he had with TUC and miners' leaders to show he was a conciliator. Yet, he was determined not to yield to miners without a show of a fight. In a distorted way, Heath in these few weeks mirrored the confusion in the ruling class itself about whether to confront or concede.

The strike of the miners decided Heath and the Tory Cabinet, with support of the majority of the party, to go for the election they had postponed two weeks before. It was a snap election, presumably to defeat the miners, yet the weakness of the ruling class in the face of the strength of the trade union movement was demonstrated by the way the Tories campaigned. They could not fight "a strongly anti-union campaign" for a campaign that was openly anti-union and not based on the basic acceptance that the miners would have to be paid was "foolhardy" as "it is hard to see how any genuinely constructive long-term solution to our industrial problems can be based upon a foundation of violent bitterness and recrimination such as would be laid in a campaign of this kind" (FT. 8.2.74). Heath took this into account in his opening speech of the campaign, when he said: "There will be no union-bashing of any kind as far as the Conservative Party is concerned. Our quarrel is only with the extremists"

Nevertheless the Tory press and media was now mobilised in full cry for a Tory victory. With the exception of the *Daily Mirror* (whose motives were more subtle), all the dailies were against Labour. The 'Liberal revival' was given prominent coverage to build an alternative to Labour. The left in the trade unions and Labour Party were subtly linked as 'extremists' alongside the terrorist 'extremists' of the IRA or the Middle East. On polling day, the Tory papers tried to create a 'bandwagon' effect and demoralise Labour voters. The *Daily Mail* screamed "A handsome win for Heath" - "Mr Heath will be back in No. 10 tomorrow with a heavily increased majority of 50 to 100 seats". The *Daily Express* predicted a 100 seat majority. The *Sunday Express* warned its readers: "let us be quite clear what it will mean if Ted Heath is defeated. The blackness of a jungle might well have descended over Britain. It must not happen." The *Daily Telegraph* warned of "utter disaster" if Labour won.

This hysterical reaction was not part of Tory press propaganda in the three previous elections. But now the situation was different: no longer was the working class a passive giant willing to accept any small concession handed out in thirteen years of Tory rule. It had learnt by bitter experience during the beginning of serious economic restraint after 1964 that only trade union action paid. Nearly every layer of the working class has engaged in industrial action since then, from heavy industry sections, through to lower paid local authority workers, teachers, hospital staff, firemen and even local government officers and the fingerprint men at Scotland Yard. In the process the old right-wing leaders of the unions, who wanted 'a peaceful life' had been ousted and replaced by men more attuned to the new mood and reflecting to some degree the desire to fight. This change has also been reflected in the leadership of the Labour Party (although more slowly and not in the Parliamentary Labour Party). The Labour Party was no longer so firmly under the grip of the Gaitskellites of the fifties and early sixties, who had denied the existence of a class society and class struggle and believed in the harmonious progress of a 'mixed economy' capitalism. Now that Labour leaders were increasingly under pressure to take action against capitalism in one way or another, and the rank and file of the Labour Party was much more critical of the leadership after the experience of the 1964-70 Labour government. Labour could no longer be regarded by the ruling class as just a second eleven, capable of coming in on a sticky wicket, because if it had the same batting order, it now had a very unruly supporters club! The *Financial Times* summed it up soberly: "*we saw no reason for disquiet in the prospect of a Labour victory in 1966 and that in 1970 we saw no strong reason to back one against the other BUT in the present election we see no alternative but to hope for an adequate overall Conservative majority.*"

CLASS VOTE FOR LABOUR

But despite a snap election, the Tory press, the intervention of the Liberals and the past record of the Labour leaders, short of an outright large Labour victory, the election result was the worst possible for the ruling class. It was clearly a defeat for Heath and Tory policies, but it left no clear result in a period of severe economic crisis.

The reality of the Tory defeat and the feeling in the working class, is evident from the detailed results. There was a much higher poll: an increase from 71.5% to 79%. There were much larger increases in the poll in strong working class areas: 13-18% compared to the average 7%. The great Liberal revival nowhere matched press predictions. They polled 19% of the vote compared to the predicted 23-25%. They took only 14 seats. Of these, 10 used to be Tory and only 3 Labour. Of the next 13 seats they were closest to taking, 12 were Tory and only 1 Labour. It is clear that much of the Liberal vote was anti-Tory. When voting is compared in seats where a Liberal did not stand in 1970, in Tory strongholds the Liberal vote averaged 31%, while in safe Labour seats it was only 18%. In Tory marginals, when Labour stood a better chance of winning, it fell dramatically to 20.4%, while remaining 18% in Labour marginals. This meant that on average the Liberals got 5,000 votes from Labour in attempts to get the Tories out in their safe seats. So although the Tories polled 11,928,000 to Labour's 11,661,000, another 1 million could be added to Labour from the Liberals. In all the major industrial areas, Labour polled well, getting higher than average swings away from the Tories. In these areas, the Liberal challenge was decimated, eg. Liverpool and Birmingham. In no way could these swings be explained by the 'Powell' effect, ie. Enoch Powell telling Tory supporters to vote Labour, even in the West Midlands. It was a class vote for Labour despite some sceptical feelings (for Labour's past record) on the part of industrial workers.

That was clear in the dismal showing of the sects on the periphery of the Labour movement. In a class struggle against the Tories, the working class on the industrial plane turned to their official organisations, the trade unions and now on the political plane they turned to the Labour Party — not only in votes but in active support, canvassing etc. The Communist Party polled less votes on average than in 1970 and actually less votes than its proclaimed membership! Their programme as exactly the same or even to the right of the programme of the lefts in the Labour Party. With no clear policy distinction, workers would naturally vote Labour as the mass party. Only Jimmy Reid of all the CP candidates saved his deposit. The other sects did even more poorly: their best result being 2.2% of the vote in one constituency!

On the right, the National Front did slightly better, but everywhere failed to save their deposits, which they had managed to do in a by-election. This time they could poll no higher than 7%. Because the Tories had fought the election, if only to a limited extent, on 'who runs the country' and posed problems in class terms, the working class turned as an organised force, in the industrial areas, to Labour.

Nevertheless, Labour's vote was the lowest share since the war and was a real condemnation of ability of the Labour leaders to mobilise support from the most downtrodden and unorganised sections of working people, who continued to vote Tory or Liberal. Labour's campaign throughout was controlled by the right wing Shadow Cabinet leaders, although the left is in nominal majority of the National Executive. The aim of the leadership was at all costs to avoid any stigma of 'socialist extremism'. They wished to appear as a party of moderation alongside the Tories and Liberals. The leadership was acutely sensitive to any criticism by the Tory press. At the start, Callaghan and Hayward, as Chairman and Secretary of the Party, issued a statement condemning the Communist Party for suggesting the overthrow of the Tory government, when the Tory press began a wild campaign on the remarks of Mick McGahey, the CP miners' leader (who subsequently retracted). In the first week of the campaign, Wilson did

not mention the word 'socialism' once in any of his speeches.

In the second week he used it twice. The most frequently used words were 'family', 'nation', 'moderation'. He appeared at press conferences with backdrops of the Union Jack and talked of building 'one nation' in strikingly similar terms to Tory press conferences. He was advised by Gaitskellites like John Harris and Bernard Donoghue, who were former leaders of the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, which had hounded the lefts in the party in the sixties and spawned people like Dick Taverne, Richard Marsh and other 'social democrats'.

And what was the programme of the right-wing Labour leaders? Anthony Crosland set the tone by stating that in order to pay for the economic crisis *"there must be no easy promises, glib statements or rash pledges... and during the next two or three years domestic living standards must be ruthlessly held back while we correct the gigantic non-oil balance of payments deficit. There can be little increase in private spending or government expenditure and many expectations will be sharply disappointed."* John Macintosh, Labour MP, raised the idea again of a statutory incomes policy to which the TUC would be bound by agreement, and *"for unions, strikes, overtime bans and go-slows aimed against the award could be declared unfair under the Industrial Relations Act or whatever legislation may replace it and welfare benefits withdrawn from the families of those on strike."* In fact, Macintosh's policy was indistinguishable from the Tory manifesto issued during the election! Even the limited reforms that Crosland proposed *"like the particular items in the programme, cannot all be fulfilled at once"* because of the economic problems and *"it would be wholly wrong to imagine that one wave of our magic wand will make them disappear"*.

3½ years of Tory attacks were enough for
the workers ...



The right-wing accepted the continuance of the capitalist system for all time and therefore straightforwardly posed the need to make the working class pay for righting it, before reforms could be conceded. It was an openly Tory policy! Gaitskellite reformism in the period of economic crisis in the seventies had become reformism without reforms! (It is hardly surprising that Macintosh lost his seat to the Scottish Nationalists). Such a programme was hardly likely to appeal to the unskilled, underprivileged, low-paid, unorganised working class, who had lost most under successive Tory and Labour governments pursuing 'moderate' policies, and had become bewildered and cynical about either major party. This time many voted Liberal. They voted for a party which, out of 500 candidates had only 5 manual workers, 4 students and 13 housewives and no trade unionists, but 230 lecturers and professional people, 111 managers, directors and bankers, and 55 civil servants and journalists!

The left-wing of the party ran their campaign on the basis of the manifesto, which was a watered-down version of the 1973 Conference resolutions. There was to be reversal of the Tory handouts to the rich: price controls and

food subsidies; increase in pensions; some defence cuts; a wealth tax; plus limited nationalisation of various declining industries and building land. On this programme, it was hoped to get the trade unions to agree to abide by a 'social contract' with a Labour government, in which wage demands would be curbed. The aim of the programme was to bring about "*a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families*". If it was to do this effectively, it would quickly paralyse an economy which depends on increased profits to create investment and growth. A strike of capital, a sinking pound and a slump would follow. Without a full-blooded programme of public ownership, all reforms of the left would founder within the confines of the capitalist economy. If the programme was tempered, it would then be ineffective. A 1½% wealth tax on all personal wealth above £20,000 — the barest acceptable figure to the ruling class — would bring in only £450m a year at the most. Any increase in surtax at say 10p in the £ on incomes above £3,500 p.a. would bring in another £450m. In total, taxing the rich at figures which they would barely accept would only pay for the pensions increase alone and nothing else. For anything more, the working class must pay, as the Healey budget has shown.

The fact that the Labour lefts talked about socialism and reform in their campaigns undoubtedly resulted in their better showing in the election, than the right-wing candidates. The Tribune left-wing now has a strength of one-third in the PLP, as signified by Ian Mikardo's election as Chairman.

BLOW TO RULING CLASS

The Tory defeat was a cruel blow to the ruling class. Heath made frantic efforts to build a coalition with the Liberals to stop Labour taking office and the initiative. But the Liberals could not afford to commit election suicide with so much of their vote being anti-Tory. The ruling class is now in a serious dilemma. Above all, they wish to avoid the return of a majority Labour government, but how to do it? They are uncertain if they could succeed in winning with a discredited Tory Party at the next election in a straight fight. Better to apply pressure on the Labour leaders to moderate their programme and drive them into a coalition government — a "government of national unity", ie. a Tory government in disguise. They see a real chance that such pressure could succeed despite the abortive attempt to bring Labour down in the Queen's Speech, which they withdrew at the eleventh hour. Both Callaghan and Crosland, before the election campaign, had talked of coalition government. *Socialist Commentary*, the journal which represents the viewpoint of the Gaitskellites, advocated a coalition with the Liberals, after the election results were known! It also said that the nationalisation measures should be dropped as the price of the coalition. But the success of such a policy for the ruling class depends on how the economic situation develops and how quickly Labour's policy for controlling inflation is seen to fail. That it will fail is inevitable. Price controls, if they are effective, can only squeeze profits, reduce investment and reduce production, which is what the CBI has threatened will happen, after Healey's Budget. More likely, they will be ineffective and bypassed in a host of exemptions and manoeuvres by the big firms. Subsidies on essential foodstuffs have to be paid for in taxation and the working class is to pay for those in the Healey budget, by increased prices for fuel and power and increased indirect taxation. In this sense, Heath was right when he said: "*Mr Healey had been heralded as the knight in shining armour, who was going to soak the rich. Yet what has he done -- he has increased taxation for everyone who pays tax, both directly and indirectly. He is no knight. All he came forward with is a Green Paper on a Wealth Tax and stuck it down his pants to prevent himself from getting caned*" by the Labour rank and file.

The economic crisis demands now a severe and lasting cut in the living standards of the working class, if British capitalism is to survive in the world arena, and that means a return to the thorny question of an 'incomes policy'. In Labour's manifesto, a loophole for such a policy was left, when it referred to "*an understanding with the TUC on the lines which we have already agreed, will create the right economic climate for money incomes to grow in line with production.*" That means if there is no growth in production there should be no wage increases. But what happens if there is stagnation in production but raging inflation of prices, as is certain in 1974? Tony Benn said during the election: "*There is no immutable law of economics or nature — no iron law of wages — which requires working people to be treated as a separate class allowed only to compete among themselves about who is to get most from a fixed proportion of the national income.*" He was referring to the Tory statutory wages policy, but the same idea is being applied in the terms of the social contract that the TUC and the union leaders are being asked to accept. Even the leader of the Left, Michael Foot, as Minister of Employment, has advocated it when he talked of "*the need to contain inflation and to secure the orderly growth of incomes. Without this, excessive wage increases could shatter all our policies.*" What is excessive is not defined. But in terms of the present economy, anything above zero is excessive.

Yet, Healey's Budget plus the proposal to repeal the Industrial Relations Act, has prompted the press, especially that ostensibly Labour paper, the *Daily Mirror*, to say that it is now up to Jones and Scanlon to honour their part of the bargain and moderate wage demands. The union leaders have responded accordingly. Jones has written in his union paper, *Record*, of the importance of "*the preparation of realistic wage claims*" as part of the union's response to the "*socially just measures brought in by a sympathetic government.*" Len Murray says "*we will respond in terms of wage claims, I'm sure.*"

But such a 'contract' will crumble to dust when faced with the force of major price rises and the efforts of the trade union rank and file to compensate for them, whatever their leaders may have in mind. The breakdown of the

'social contract' will quickly raise the likelihood of a split in the Labour Party between those in the government who will insist, with the support of the press and media, on a programme of austerity, and the majority of the active members of the party, under the pressure of the working class, who will demand the promised reforms of the Labour manifesto and will resist any attempt to cut their standard of living. The spectre of a National Government is therefore very likely before the end of 1974. This would come about not through an election, but by a manoeuvre using the right wing leaders of the Labour Party. The Tory press has already raised the possibility of using the monarchy, as it was used in 1924 and 1929, to call for a government of national unity to be formed rather than dissolve Parliament if the Wilson government fell. As Ronald Butt put it (*Sunday Times* 10/3/74) when he referred to the economic dangers facing the Labour government: "*it is still not wholly inconceivable that these could precipitate the Grand Coalition that many people want it would be absolutely proper constitutionally for the Queen to decline to dissolve this Parliament until she first explored the possibility of forming a government with a majority. That could still conceivably be a Grand Coalition.*" The real role is revealed for the monarchy in the manoeuvres of a ruling class desperate to avoid an outright Labour victory: "*The essential stabilising value of the neutral monarchy is that it is available for just such a time as this to see that the country, under fair conditions, is able to have a government of some sort.*" That means its use as a 'neutral monarch' is not to be neutral when it matters!

A National Government would be a setback for the working class, but it would quickly open up the Labour Party to Marxist ideas. The right-wing leaders, by throwing in their lot with the Tories for a programme of retrenchment, would no longer be able to apply the brake to the leftward movement of the Labour Party. Many members of the PLP, which is predominantly composed of lawyers, lecturers, businessmen and journalists, may go over to a National Government. But the Labour Party as a whole would not be decimated. The working class would be aroused at the betrayal; pressure for real socialist solutions to the economic crisis would be mounted in the party. The way would be open in such a left-reformist or even centrist Labour Party, for the Marxist wing to gain large and even mass support. A National Government would be unable to solve the economic crisis without dealing with the strength of the Labour and trade union movement and could not last long, certainly not as long as the pre-war thirties National Government. Within a short time, a left Labour government could be returned, pledged to carry out a full programme of socialism. An Enabling Act to take over the major monopolies and banks, would lay the basis for a plan of production to meet the minimum needs of working people and begin to lay the basis of a socialist society. The success of such a policy would then depend on the development of a Marxist leadership capable of mobilising and uniting the whole working class into action, to defend the programme of socialism. Such unity in action would sweep away any attempt at reaction that is now being prepared by the ruling class.

For behind the scenes they are preparing to exercise their first alternative in strategy: confrontation to smash the organised working class movement. They realise that this will be necessary if they are really to solve the economic and social crisis that British capitalism is trapped in. But as the *Financial Times* put it: "*A policy of confrontation with one hand tied behind your back is not particularly wise. Governments that want to take on the powerful unions, should at least prepare the ground thoroughly by bringing the nation together in advance - and if necessary by modifying the ground-rules in their own favour well before ...*" (29/1/74).

The Tory government began such a process with mobile teams to deal with pickets, with an intelligence centre at Scotland Yard to organise their distribution. The army has engaged in joint manoeuvres with the police at Heathrow to practice searching of civilians and the sealing-off of key centres of communication. In Hull, the Territorial Army has engaged in search-and-arrest practice manoeuvres in working class areas, including the smashing down of doors of empty houses in certain streets. The Monday Club, the right wing tendency in the Tory Party, has advocated vigilante groups for 'emergencies' to 'look for suspicious behaviour and help the armed forces': "*it would be a counter to the similar groups of the left which have existed for years (?) Surely a system like this would channel into respectable uniform, people who otherwise with the lack of activity by the authorities, might be tempted to join private armies.*" Picketing laws were tightened up in the Courts, where Lord Widgery said in the High Court that "*pickets had no rights whatsoever*". Recently, Nicholas Ridley, a former Tory Minister, advocated the outlawing of strikes in key services industries like gas, electricity, railways and the mines!

All the ingredients for a successful Socialist transformation of society are beginning. Even one Labour minister has recognised this: "*more is yet needed before radical political action occurs. That requires, in combination, a crisis in society (which the present state of the economy foreshadows); a crisis of self-confidence in the governing group (of which there are definite signs); a sense of self-identification in a new class (dissipated in the 1950's, now returning via UCS and work-ins) and a new elite capable of providing leadership. It is this last condition which it is the fundamental task of class politics to provide.*" (Michael Meacher in *New Statesman* 4/1/74).

While Marxists would not agree that an "elite" needs to be created, all the conditions that Meacher has outlined are the Marxist criteria for socialist change. Only one has not ripened sufficiently yet, and that is a Marxist leadership capable and prepared for the future struggles which will be necessary if the British working class is to succeed.

POPULAR FRONTISM

Mrs Bandaranaike
meets Mao Tse tung



IN SRI LANKA **BY CHRISANTHA MADAPATHA**

In May 1970, the Popular Front alliance of the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP — wrongly named the United (Left) Front — was swept into power by a landslide parliamentary majority. The overwhelming victory of the Front was made possible by the previous five years of UNP rule, which weighed heavily on all except the capitalists and landlords and the privileged upper-middle class of Colombo.

The formerly Trotskyist LSSP and the smaller Moscow-oriented CP, which are the major parties of the working class, are the junior parties in the alliance. The SLFP of Mrs Bandaranaike, which draws its electoral support from the Sinhala rural masses, is the party of the liberal bourgeoisie. Like Mrs Gandhi of India, Mrs Bandaranaike's hold over the peasantry rests on the support of the small capitalists and landlords that constitute the direct exploiters of the peasantry. The UNP, the party of the most reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie, is the representative of the interests of imperialism and of the pro-imperialist big capitalists and landlords.

Any serious analysis of the political developments which led to the formation of the Popular Front, must take as its starting point the economic and political transformations that took place under the yoke of British imperialism and in the first two decades after 'Independence'. These again, can only be understood within the context of the strategy of imperialism on the Indian sub-continent as a whole. Capitalism, in the 20th Century, has so bound the individual national economies into one vast, interconnected system, that it is futile to study national developments except in relation to global processes as a whole.

At the same time, a Marxist strategy for any given country cannot be based on just the general features of imperialism. Arguing against Stalin's mechanistic political formulations based on the 'general features' alone, Trotsky wrote : *"It is false that the specific features are merely supplementary to the general features like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process. This originality can be of decisive significance for revolutionary strategy over a span of many years."* (Introduction to the German edition of the *Permanent Revolution*). Thus the specific features of India or Sri-Lanka are the summary result of an organic fusion of the internal processes with the overall movement of imperialism. To treat the internal features as 'merely supplementary' (Stalin) or alternatively to represent them as the 'fundamental cause of development' (Mao), leads inevitably to a one-sided and un-Marxist appraisal of the problem.

THE COLONIAL BACKGROUND

BRITISH IMPERIALISM

From as far back as Greek and Roman times, Sri Lanka has been subject to a wide variety of foreign influences, the dominant streams of which had their origin in the Indian sub-continent upto colonial times. The spice trade had brought the Arabs and in their wake the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, each of whom stayed for approximately one and a half centuries. The British, who finally seized control over the whole country in 1815, were primarily motivated by the strategic advantage it gave them, controlling the trade routes to the East and in the colonial domination of India.

It is hardly necessary to say that the colonial administration was just as much an instrument of British capitalism as the state apparatus in Britain; the difference was that in the colonies, the needs of British 'enterprise' were serviced with a brutal directness that revealed this essential relationship in all its stark simplicity. Around 1840, by means of new land laws, all uncultivated land was appropriated by the State, which subsequently sold it at nominal prices, mostly to British plantation entrepreneurs. Among these were forests and grazing lands which were essential to the village economy. In addition to the great hardship caused by this, whole villages were ruthlessly uprooted when they happened to fall entirely within areas suitable for plantation crops.

Aided by the State, the plantations expanded until they covered almost the entire central highlands. Initially, coffee was grown and then supplanted by tea in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. With the transition to tea, the characteristic features of the plantation system emerged, a permanent labour force and relatively complex processing plants. The tea industry required much greater capital investment than coffee, but this became readily available in the new era of imperialism; and individually-owned estates were taken over by big tea companies. Around the turn of the century, rubber was also introduced.

The land laws also set up the landed gentry as a landlord/freed ^{class} of pre-capitalist constraints on their landowning rights. A similar change was instituted in India around the turn of the century. Formerly the British yoke had fallen on all classes and had resulted in a resurgence of armed opposition in both countries. From then on, the landlords were transformed into a pro-imperialist class and opposition died down.

ECONOMIC EXPANSION

The post-1870 imperialist boom generated a rapid expansion of economic activity in Sri-Lanka, as in India. The direct expansion of capitalism was sustained and supplemented by a parallel diversification of the activities of the colonial state, which built up an extensive system of road and rail transport and a well organised administrative apparatus to service the growing complexity of the colonial economy. Together with these, there grew a vast **network of retail and wholesale trade and service industries**, which penetrated through into the remotest peasant areas and thereby linked it to the urban-plantation system.

This economic expansion was accompanied by the emergence of a proletariat and a 'middle class' sustained on state employment and the professions. This middle-class, English-educated bureaucracy was recruited mainly from the landlord class and such employment was often the occasion for rapid advancement up the economic and social scale within the class itself.

The working class was generated in two isolated sections, one more or less urban and the other tied to the big plantations. In Colombo, the core of the urban proletariat consisted of the transport, engineering and dock workers. The plantation workers, however, were almost entirely of South Indian origin, since the local Sinhala peasantry could not be induced to work in the abysmal conditions that prevailed on the estates. Though the estate workers lived contiguous to the Sinhala villages, the two communities were separated by language and other cultural barriers, in addition to that of class. The peasantry itself continued under the semi-feudal relations, which were breaking up under the dominant capitalist system.

The expansion of the plantation economy also induced an expansion of the non-agricultural petty bourgeoisie, on the one hand shopkeepers and merchants and on the other, a whole host of artisans and craftsmen to serve the increasing demand. From out of their ranks emerged the native entrepreneurs, who in turn produced a weak national bourgeoisie. As in India, the entrepreneurs originated outside the landlord class, but soon after, in Sri-Lanka, a partial amalgamation took place with elements from both going into rubber, coconut and mining, all of which required only limited capital. Unlike in India, where the bourgeoisie could grow into a powerful economic force on account of its enormously large internal market and the strong roots of this class in pre-capitalist merchant capital, the Sri-Lankan bourgeoisie remained very weak in relation to the other classes.

STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALISM

The struggle against imperialism on the Indian sub-continent gathered great strength from the economic expansion of the second half of the nineteenth century and particularly from the rapid growth of transport, industry and trade since 1870. The real force of the anti-imperialist movement was throughout the struggle of the workers and peasants against capitalism and landlordism, but its leadership and ideological expression changed, along with the

development of the struggle itself.

The subversion of the pre-capitalist socio-economic structure and its cultural superstructure, forced through a rapid rise of consciousness, particularly within the new classes hewed out by imperialism. In its initial stages in Sri-Lanka, this found expression only as a defence and revival of national cultural values, the leadership being taken, characteristically, by monks, teachers, etc., who were the most threatened by the expansion of Western education and culture. Subsequently, the leadership passed to the new bourgeois intelligentsia, which coupled national renaissance with acceptance of the 'best' elements of Western culture, which meant essentially the ideas and values of the Enlightenment; it clearly represented the interests of this class against the colonial obstacles to its further expansion. At the same time, the nationalist form of the bourgeois-led movement served the important purpose of concealing the class contradictions within it.

The struggle of all national classes against Imperialism and its comprador allies has a bourgeois-democratic character as much as that of the anti-feudal bourgeois movements in Europe. But in the era of Imperialism, it is impossible for any national capitalist class to achieve any real independence of landlords or of the international capitalist system since it is closely linked to landlordism and dependent on imperialism. This is the enduring lesson of the theory of Permanent Revolution which takes as its starting point the international character of capitalism and which identifies the conflict between capital and labour as the dominant contradiction on a world scale. Consequently, in opposition to the superficial and schematic analyses of the Stalinists, this theory explains that it is only under the leadership of the proletariat that genuine national liberation from Imperialism can be achieved.

This dominant contradiction found its clear and concrete expression in the anti-imperialist leadership that issued forth from the October Revolution. Almost everywhere it led to the independent organisation of the working class into communist parties, which was the first step in winning leadership of the popular movement. This polarisation of the class struggle on an international scale pushed the landlord and capitalist class in Sri-Lanka decisively into the camp of imperialism; this was particularly easy as here bourgeois nationalism was very narrowly based. In India and China, however, the anti-imperialist struggle was broadly based on workers, peasants and other petty bourgeois sections and had become a powerful democratic movement with a populist ideology. Just as the urban democracy temporarily acquired a certain independence of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution, under the impact of October, the consciousness of the vanguard of Indian and Chinese populism was hurled far in advance of its class basis, so much so that the communist parties and the Comintern were recognised as allies by Gandhi and Sun Yat-sen. But soon after the communist parties were seriously handicapped by the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern. The Indian CP vacillated in its attitude to the Congress and ended up in open collaboration with the British; it thus lost the opportunity to win leadership of the national movement. In China, the bourgeoisie failed to solve either the agrarian or the colonial questions; but the strength of the agrarian movement, which had gathered immense momentum, was such that it selected out a leadership from within the Communist Party, which carried through the Revolution in spite of the Stalinist fetters. In Sri-Lanka, where the working class was organised in the LSSP only later, after the popular frontist treachery of Stalinism had been fully revealed, the LSSP reached out directly for revolutionary Trotskyism. In the already established CPs, where the leaders had already formed a deadly dependence on the Stalinist Comintern, Trotskyism entered via the younger members; but here, as in the Soviet Union and Europe, the Stalinists met the Trotskyist criticism with the 'criticism of weapons'.

THE LSSP

With the formation of the LSSP in 1935, the anti-imperialist movement assumed a genuinely popular character; the party soon won leadership of the urban and plantation workers and the radical intelligentsia. The preceding bourgeois nationalism had raised to its apex a small group of leaders drawn from the intersection of the landlord and capitalist classes. Unlike the Indian leaders, these men were distinguished only by their servile dependence on the British and it was an easy task for the LSSP to expose them before the politically conscious elements. The granting of the general franchise in 1931, however, had installed these compradors as ministers in the State Council of the colonial administration; thus they were kept in the public eye and built up by the British as the leaders of the people.

Though the LSSP held a correctly Marxist position in general, it failed to relate it concretely to the specific situation in the country; it failed in particular to win over the peasantry from the reactionary leaders by agitating on the agrarian question, which would have driven a wedge of class struggle between them. Organisationally, too, the Party was weak, as the leadership had failed to realise in time the importance of a strong Leninist organisation. With the onset of the War, the LSSP was outlawed, on account of its heroic anti-war position, and the anti-imperialist struggle was effectively defused. The ensuing decade was one of confusion, splits and defeats; even the post-war upsurge, which culminated in the general strike of 1947 and which brought the LSSP to the zenith of its popularity, was brutally suppressed. Since the LSSP-led struggle was not linked to a similar one in India, its chances of success were slim in any case; the situation was thus similar to that in the Philippines at the end of the war. The British used these defeats to install the bourgeoisie in power; in 1948 they withdrew, leaving State power in the reluctant but loyal hands of the reactionaries, newly organised in the UNP.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the LSSP, the UNP deprived the plantation workers of citizenship and the franchise, on the grounds that their ancestors were Indian; again the LSSP failed to mobilise effectively against this reactionary measure. At about the same time, a number of welfarist measures were instituted, often as direct

concessions to the LSSP-led mass agitation; these included the free education scheme, the health services, price controls, pensions, poor relief and the food subsidies. These concessions were possible on account of the substantial surpluses generated by the plantations. These measures could be sustained as long as the plantation workers were paid subsistence wages and the country continued to benefit from the general post-war boom. The end of the short-lived Korean boom alone, forced the UNP to cut the rice subsidy, which precipitated the 1953 'Hartal', a nationwide stoppage of work and direct action by workers. The Hartal revealed clearly the bankruptcy of the LSSP leaders, who refused to lead this struggle for the overthrow of the UNP, in what it later recognised as extremely favourable circumstances.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

The theory of Permanent Revolution is the theoretical summing up of the experience of revolutionary struggle in backward countries. The Russian revolution was its most outstanding realisation: it is sometimes not appreciated however, that its perspectives were vindicated in the Chinese revolution and in the failure of the Indian revolution as well.

The theory pointed out that in the era of imperialism, when the indigenous bourgeoisie is linked to landlordism and dependent on imperialism, even the democratic tasks posed, i.e. national liberation and agrarian revolution, can only be achieved in the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But this is simultaneously a struggle against capitalism, *since it is the pre-proletarian state that provides the political conditions for its survival*. In Sri-Lanka, the issue was clear: since the big capital was entirely British, national liberation must inevitably include the take-over of industry and the estates by the workers. In China, the seizure of state power by the Communist Party was de-facto anti-capitalist as well, for henceforth the 'national bourgeoisie' survived only on sufferance. What Mao later mystified as a 'non-antagonistic contradiction' between the national bourgeoisie and the workers, to fit the Stalinist schema, was in reality a contradiction that had already been resolved in alignment with the perspectives of Permanent Revolution.

In India, the objective developments were similar: from very early on, the workers struggled against the Indian capitalists as well as the British. But at the critical juncture, the CPI switched to a policy of support for the British, when even Congress leaders refused to do so; this greatly weakened the CPI in relation to the Congress. At the same time, the British, who were aware of the weakness of their own position, withdrew, leaving the Congress leaders in power, as the best hedge against revolution. But precisely on account of this, the basic tasks of the democratic revolution were not achieved, apart from the hollow 'Independence'. Sri Lanka's 'Independence' was a by-product of this sub-continental tactic of imperialism, which again left untouched the basic democratic tasks; the economy remained closely dependent on British capitalism, in the interests of the plantation owners and the urban, upper and middle class society, while the conditions of the doubly-exploited peasantry remained unchanged.

RISE OF THE SLFP

THE PEASANTRY

It is necessary to emphasise that the plantations, which were responsible for the early prosperity of the country, represent a *partial and distorted agrarian transformation* of fairly wide extent, and hence a transformation of a part of the democratic tasks into a socialist one. The plantations then occupied more land area than what was used for the cultivation of the staple food of rice; hence the greater part of food and other commodities were imported. This transformation, which benefited the indigenous privileged classes, had actually reduced the standard of living of the peasantry, since it deprived them of secondary foods from the forests and grazing lands; further, there was no room to accommodate the expanding rural population except in the inhospitable and semi-arid 'dry zone'; the high degree of land fragmentation in the 'wet zone' is a product of these factors.

Such is the specific feature of the agrarian question in Sri-Lanka. Superimposed on this were the burdens imposed by capitalism; the most important of these was the tendency of agricultural prices to stagnate in relation to manufactured goods, which rose rapidly. This 'terms of trade' effect between town and country steadily moved against the peasantry, as it did between Sri Lanka and Western capitalism. While the peasants lived near subsistence, fat surpluses were extracted by merchant middle-men; these surpluses were dissipated in conspicuous consumption of imported goods, rather than investment and, hence, generated no new employment within the country.

The other economic barrier to the peasants' progress was indebtedness. The small, independent peasant is often in need of short-term credit, until his crop is harvested. This need was met by usurers from the village landlord, trade and professional classes. Even when state help was extended at a later date, the village usurers were much more accessible to the peasants.

In addition, there were the various extra-economic constraints associated with semi-feudal remnants; these generally took the form of sharecropping and tenant cultivation and was prevalent in monastic lands and in the Tamil areas of the north and east. The paddy lands Act of 1958, which stripped semi-feudal relations of legality, attempted to regulate the landlord-tenant relationship. On account of the hostility of monks and other landlord interests, it was finally passed with its teeth drawn and, consequently, its effects were marginal.

On top of the above factors, is the effect of the second order interactions between them; for example, indebted-

ness forces the peasant to sell his produce to the usurer at a reduced price and the failure of a crop could lead to the loss of lands in redemption of debt.

THE SLFP

In the SLFP, we see the rise of a populist movement similar to that of India, but based on Sinhala, Buddhist 'nationalism'. The main content of its political programme was the struggle of a section of the Sinhala middle class to gain access to the state apparatus and offices, which was the chief dispenser of the country's share of the plantation surplus. Until then, the state departments functioned in the English language and, hence, were dominated by the English-educated bourgeois and petty bourgeois sections. This clearly represented an important part of even bourgeois national emancipation and had been completely excluded from the false Independence of 1948. The SLFP won electoral support by promising to replace English by Sinhala as the official language and to extend state patronage to Buddhism. The real needs of the impoverished peasantry were not represented within the SLFP, but their support was canvassed through the small merchants, landowners, teachers, the Buddhist clergy and other leaders of rural society, whose party it really was. The powerful emphasis on language and religion were used — as they are now — to conceal the class tensions between the populist movement and its political leadership.

The SLFP became a powerful political force during the early post-'independence' years, as a result of the stimulus to local economic expansion, provided by the war and the post-war boom. The success of SLFP populism nearly half a century after Indian populism, was directly related to the failure of the LSSP to correctly apprehend the specific post-War developments and to advance a transitional programme, embracing the national and agrarian questions. The first part of such a programme would have advanced Sinhala and Tamil as the official languages and the second would have taken the class struggle into the country, thereby undermining the peasant bases of the UNP and SLFP. It would also have avoided the murderous communalism which followed the SLFP's 'solution' of the national question.

Swept into power in 1956, the SLFP and its coalition partners, opened the state bureaucracy to the Sinhala-educated, by making Sinhala the official language. It also built up an industrial infrastructure by means of state corporations, nationalised the Colombo port and bus services and encouraged the development of national capitalism by restricting commodity imports. The government also introduced very limited reforms relating to paddy-lands alone, through the agency of its partner in coalition, the VLSSP, which had splintered away from the LSSP. Though it was possible for the SLFP to carry through these measures, it could not, naturally, establish any real independence of imperialism; even the initial economic expansion which ate into the country's external reserves, only increased the dependence on imperialist financial institutions.

Very soon the SLFP itself fell a victim to the sharp class contradictions inherent in its broad-front misalliance, which were brought to a climax by the assassination of Mr Bandaranaike.

REVISIONISM

The LSSP's present strategy of popular frontism was launched in 1964 as a reaction to the long period of confusion dating from 1939. The failure to realise the general perspectives of Marxism in the concrete situation, were interpreted by many as a failure of Marxism itself. On the one hand, it laid the basis for the rise to power of an un-Marxist, pragmatic leadership within the Party; on the other, it gave rise to a serious defection of a third of the membership, to Stalinist two stage-ism and, in consequence, to the camp of the liberal bourgeoisie. Since 1948, the Party had also abandoned its correct perspective of forging links with the Indian revolution. Neither could these mistakes be corrected from outside, on account of the failure of the Fourth International.

The rise of Bandaranaike populism drew a substantial part of the LSSP's mass support into the SLFP, especially from the more backward sections that were located in the transitional semi-urban, semi-rural areas. By 1959, however, the disintegration of the SLFP was openly manifest; but it still retained the greater part of its mass base. Misjudging the movement of consciousness in the peasantry, the LSSP contested 100 of a total 150 seats in the March 1960 elections: 10 candidates were returned. In the subsequent election of July 1960, the SLFP was returned to power with Mrs Bandaranaike as the new prime minister.

This ignominious defeat at the polls paved the way for the alliance with the SLFP. Thus popular frontism was, in reality, a capitulation to the phenomenon of populism; it was the direct result of the failure to correctly apprehend the political developments of the 'fifties within the context of the overall movement of international capitalism. They failed to understand that it was the post-war upswing in international capitalism that supplied the material basis for the long period of stalemate in the class-struggle and also made possible the temporary stability of petty bourgeois-based populist regimes all over the former colonial world. Instead, the LSSP succumbed to the empiricist thesis that it was now possible to advance to Socialism by politically strengthening these populist regimes.

By the early 'sixties, the boom had ended and the period of recession had begun; the consequence for Sri-Lanka was a steady decline of the terms of trade, which means that imports began to cost more and exports to earn less and less. In a country so closely tied to imperialist markets, the contradictions of post-colonial capitalism would inevitably have alienated the majority of the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie from both bourgeois parties. There is little doubt that in such a situation, the SLFP would have broken up — as it in fact began to do in 1959 — with its bourgeois section going over into coalition with the UNP and its mass base coming over to the LSSP.

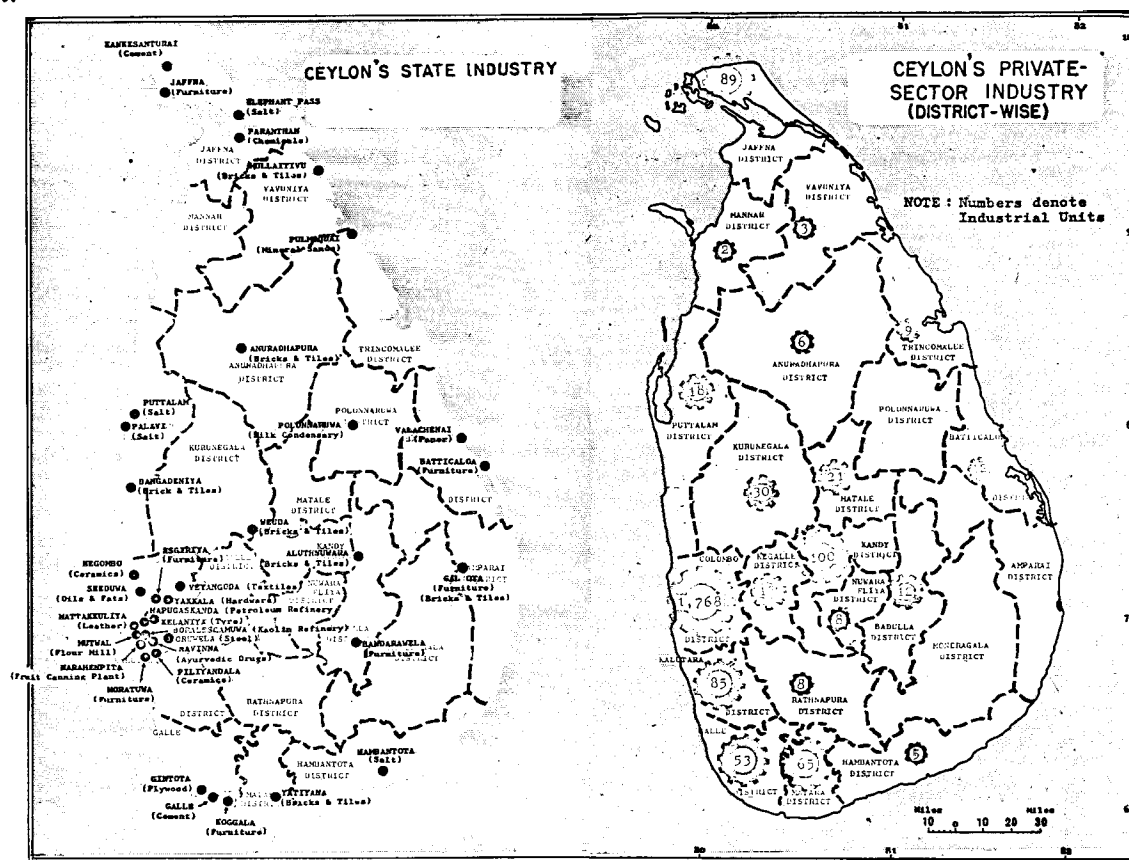
The mass enthusiasm which accompanied the formation of the short-lived United Left Front of 1963 (involving the three major working class parties) was a clear herald of this historical trend. In March 1960, the three parties which later constituted the 1963 Front, actually polled more votes than the SLFP.

POPULAR FRONT

By the early 'sixties, Mrs Bandaranaike had already begun to feel the ebb; the formation of the United Left Front was a clear danger sign. She reacted promptly by offering coalition to the LSSP alone, with three ministries in her government. This was accepted in 1964; it gave rise to splits in both parties. The most reactionary leaders of the SLFP defected to the UNP, leaving the liberal bourgeois section firmly in control of the Party. In the LSSP, the supporters of Samarakkody and Tampoe broke away in ultra-left fashion, aided by Mandel, Frank, and Healy.

The subsequent defeat of the SLFP-LSSP government in 1964 resulted in elections which led to the formation of the UNP 'National' government of 1965, which was a collection of all the assorted reactionaries in the country. This return of the UNP was facilitated by the confusion generated in this period of rapid re-alignments; in any case, the rural masses had not as yet awakened to its real class nature. By 1970, however, the deepening crisis had forced the UNP to impose a number of burdens on the masses and push through a crash programme of food production, which strengthened the class of rich peasants and which further differentiated the peasantry. This agricultural expansion itself was financed out of loans, which greatly increased the foreign debt.

In 1968, the SLFP and the LSSP together with the CP (Moscow), had formed a new and stronger alliance on the basis of a 'common programme', the so-called United (Left) Front. The Front was returned to power in 1970 in a resounding defeat for the UNP. *The victory of the Front was assisted by extravagant promises of reform and restitution of welfare cuts; on account of the crisis-laden nature of the economy, these promises could not possibly be kept.*



THE SITUATION IN 1970

THE ECONOMY

The economy in 1970 had made little progress from colonial times. Of a GDP (gross domestic product) of Rs. 11,900 million, the share of agricultural production alone was 36.3%, with the export crops of tea, rubber and coconut constituting 14.8% and domestic agriculture accounting for 21.5%. The share of industry was 13%, with nearly one-third of this being accounted for by the basic state industries such as steel; this figure compares with 14% for Venezuela, which is considered one of the most developed in its class. If construction industry is added, this figure rises to 19.5%, or nearly one-fifth of the GDP. In the previous decade, industry had grown at the comparatively poor rate of about 6% and even then, in an unhealthy manner, for nearly 75% of the total material input was imported. The remaining 44.2% of the GDP was made up of the various services, including the extensive welfare, transport and other services of the state.

The extent of land and labour used is illustrated by the following quote from the Seers Report :

"Tea covers about 570,000 acres at about 1.25 man-years (of 240 days each) per acre; coconuts 1.1 million acres at 0.1; rubber 190,000 at 0.35; rice, a gross harvested acreage of 1.7 million at 0.25 – about 1.3 million man-years in the four major crops. Other field crops provide about 180,000 man-years. Other tree crops and animal husbandry, forestry and fisheries could, at best, make up the total of man-years in 1971, to 1.7 million. Even if we accept that a man-year comprises only 240 days, this represents underutilisation of almost one-quarter of the agricultural workforce."

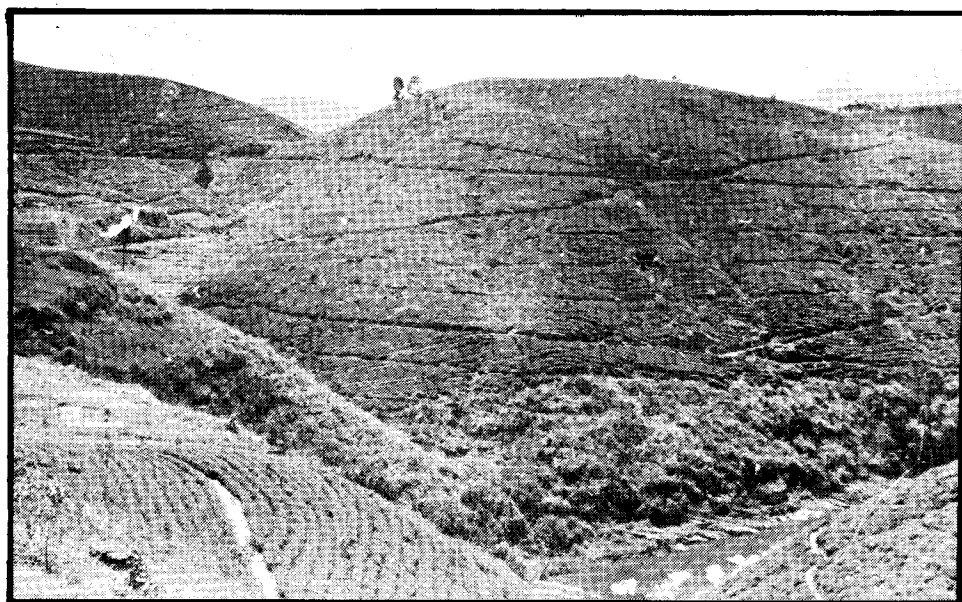
The total foreign exchange expenditure in 1970 on current account was Rs 2,502 million, which represented 21% of the GDP. Of this figure, 42.8% was spent on food imports, 27% on drugs, textiles and other essential goods, while the remaining 30.2% was taken up in debt servicing. The total foreign exchange earnings during this period amounted to only Rs 2,264 million, or just over 20% of the GDP; in the 1950's this ratio fell between 30-35%. Of this, Rs 2,033 million was obtained from export earnings; nearly 90% of this was contributed by the plantation exports of tea, rubber and coconut, which was exactly the same position as in 1948. If capital expenditure is included as well, the balance of payments gap was around Rs 1,100 million, just as in the previous year; this figure represents 50% of the total foreign exchange earnings; it is also greatly in excess of the deficit in the first half of the decade, which was between Rs 125-350 million. It was largely the result of the adverse movement of the terms of trade: while export earnings stagnated, import prices in general rose by more than 33% during the period 1964 to 1970 and the price of capital goods, by as much as 57%. The foreign exchange reserves dropped from \$379.5 million in 1945, to \$268 million in 1956, to \$73.7 million in 1964 and 67.7 million in 1970. (The exchange rate was Rs 3.32 = \$1 upto the end of 1949, Rs 4.76 = \$1 upto the end of 1967, Rs 5.95 = \$1 upto March 1972 and Rs 6.4 = \$1 thereafter).

The deficits were financed by external borrowings and increasingly by short term credit at high interest rates. The foreign debt increased from Rs 374 million in 1964 to Rs 1551 million in 1970, of which nearly half was short-term credit, which the UNP had resorted to in desperation after 1965. In 1970, 65% of the gross borrowing of Rs 1124 million were used for the repayment and servicing of debts. All this greatly increased the country's dependence on the IMF, which used it to extract harsh internal changes in favour of capital.

Around 1970, about a third of the area under tea and rubber were still foreign-owned, but these were the larger and more productive estates, since they accounted for nearly half the output. In tea and rubber, the larger units are higher yielding, more labour intensive and better managed. Foreign control of the plantation industry is exercised, not so much through ownership, but by controlling the pricing, marketing and even shipping and insurance, which is in British hands; nominal or zero profits are declared in production by the local agency houses, while fat profits are made between buying and marketing abroad.

In 1970, the total revenues of the state amounted to Rs 2,736 million, while expenditure on current account was Rs 2873 million; capital expenditure took another Rs 812 million. This entailed a budget deficit of Rs 1150 million. Of the total expenditure on current account, 14.4% was spent on the state administrative structure (inclusive of 3.2% on defence), 25.7% on education, health and other social services (education alone taking 16.6%), 6.4% on pensions and 21% on food subsidies. The remainder was taken up in economic services such as transport, communications and irrigation, interest on public debt and other miscellaneous activities. The actual value of the food subsidy was around Rs 600 million. These figures illustrate the welfare measures, which are unusually comprehensive by Asian standards and which were made possible by the large surplus generated by the plantations.

Tea
Plantation



THE CLASS STRUCTURE

The preliminary report of the Socio-economic survey of 69/70 (from which all the subsequent figures are taken), shows that of a population of 12.3 million, those aged 5 and over can be classified as follows:

Category	No. in millions	%
'Work force'	4.141	38.4
Students	3.209	29.8
Housewives, disabled, old etc	3.426	31.8
Total	10.776	100.0

A breakdown of the total 'work force' by class categories, is as follows; it is based on careful estimates made from the results of the Survey:

Category	No. in thousands	%
A. Peasant Sector (domestic agriculture)		
Self-employed peasants (inclusive of own family labour)	713.0	17.21
Landlords (inclusive of a small number of capitalist farmers)	34.5	.83
Other agricultural labour (inclusive of sharecroppers)	230.0	5.54
Fishermen	38.0	.92
Total for peasant sector	1015.5	24.51
B. Other.		
Shopkeepers, merchants, craftsmen etc. (non-agricultural petty bourgeois)	386.0	9.33
Teachers, clerks & other white-collar employees	380.0	9.18
Workers in transport, manufacturing, services etc.	916.7	22.10
Plantation workers	806.2	19.46
Employers, inclusive of top bureaucracy	91.0	2.20
Total employed population	3595.4	86.77
C. Unemployed	545.7	13.20
Total 'work force'	4141.1	99.87

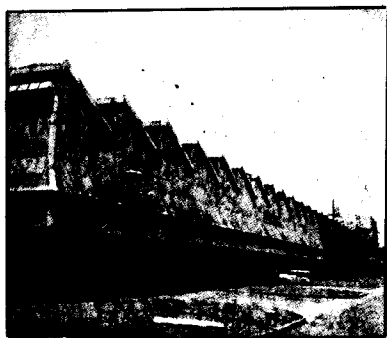
Of the 916.7 thousand non-agricultural workers, about 700 thousand constitute the hard-core of the proletariat associated with manufacturing industry, the transport services and construction. In their conditions of work and total separation from property, the plantation workers are just as essentially proletarian. Hence the proletariat as a whole is over 40% of the working population, whereas the peasantry is under 25%! Inclusive of the peasant owner-cultivators, the real petty bourgeoisie constitute 26.5% of the total. That the high proportion of proletarians is not associated with a proportionate development of capitalism, is testified to by the existence of nearly 3½m housewives and dependants, which is nearly as much as the employed population.

A comparison of the above statistics with rural surveys carried out in 1950 and 1957, reveal only marginal differences in the rural class structure. These early surveys, which were more detailed, reveal that 30% of all paddy-land holdings and 33% of area cultivated, were worked by leases and sharecroppers, whereas 61% of holdings and 55% of area cultivated were worked by owner-cultivators. The degree of separation of land and labour in the production of rice, is shown by the estimates that 64% of holdings, constituting 23% of area cultivated, were under 1 acre in extent, whereas 15% of holdings, corresponding to 56% of land, were more than 2 acres in size. These figures also testify to the high degree of fragmentation of peasant lands, which is a major problem in the wet zone. It is also important to point out that semi-feudal remnants relate to a very small portion (probably between 5-10%) of the work force; their importance is greatly exaggerated by many who mechanically try to 'fit the Sri Lankan foot into the Chinese shoe'.

The Socio-economic survey of 69/70 estimates that the average household size is 5.8 persons; of this, 1.7 are income receivers and 4.1 are dependants. Rural and urban sectors average 1.6 income receivers per household, to nearly three times as many dependents, whereas the plantation sector averages 2.6 wage earners to 2.6 dependents per household; yet the respective average monthly household incomes are Rs 453, Rs 264 and Rs 211 for urban,

rural and estate households, which shows clearly the position of the estate workers as the most exploited class. The all-island average household income was Rs 289; but while 43.6 % of households drawing Rs 200 or less received only 20.4 % of the total income, 1.8 % of households drawing over Rs 1000 received 9.7 % of the total income. In the urban and plantation sectors, the non-monetary component of the household income was of the order of 10 %, in the rural sector about 26 %.

Individual monthly incomes averaged Rs 257, 139 and 71 for the urban, rural and estate sectors respectively and men in general earned twice as much as women; the overall average income was Rs 145 per month. Between 1959 and 1970 per capita real incomes had risen by 2.1 % per year. It must also be borne in mind that average incomes in Sri Lanka are considerably higher than in India, since the former's GNP is nearly twice that of the latter. These figures do not, of course, indicate income in relation to class, except in the case of plantation workers; one could also hazard that agricultural labourers were not paid much more than the estate workers. Urban workers could earn anything from Rs 100 to Rs 350 per month, but figures of Rs 150-200 were much more representative. White collar employees such as teachers and clerks average around Rs 300 per month. The salaries of top bureaucrats, professionals and managers, by contrast, are well in excess of Rs 2000 per month.



Above— Tyre Corporation
Below — Leather Products factory.
Right — Ceramics factory



SPECIAL FEATURES OF SRI LANKA

Of the features peculiar to Sri Lanka, in relation to other post-colonial countries, the clear numerical superiority of the proletariat over the peasant and urban petty bourgeoisie, is the most significant. It is an indication of the greater relative development of capitalism than, for example, in India. Even India as a whole, is far closer to pre-Revolution Russia in this respect, than to China.

Another special feature of Sri Lanka is the age structure and literacy of its population: while 9.4 % were over 55 years of age, as much as 60.5 % fell into the 0-24 age group and 39.3 % into the 0-14 age group in 1970. Of those aged 10 years and over, 82.1 % were literate and for those in the age group 10-24, (who had benefited most from the free education system) the literacy rate was 91 %. Literacy rates in the estate sector were considerably lower at 61 %. Educational attainment was correspondingly high, especially among the youth: of those in the age group 15-34, just over 90 % have had primary schooling and 63 %, secondary education of some form.

The table of the previous section shows the rate of *open* unemployment at 13.2 %, corresponding to over ½ million people. Of this figure, 82.6 % were in the age group 15-24, 26.5 % of whom had got beyond the O-level at least; 12.7 % fell into the age group 25-35, 36.7 % of whom had O-levels at least. It has also been estimated that of *all* those between 15 and 24 *with* O-level passes alone, the rate of open unemployment was more than 70 % and higher

still in rural areas. Most of the unemployed youth were seeking 'white collar' employment, which brought higher incomes (see previous section) and was socially much more acceptable than that of a worker or peasant. Since the initial spurt of expansion begun in 1956 could not be sustained, the supply of such jobs thinned down to a trickle in the 'sixties.

A question that immediately springs to mind is, if the proletariat is 40% of the work force, why is it that the workers' parties are so weakly represented in the National Assembly? The most important reason is that the plantation workers are denied the franchise. The other reason is rooted in the geographical factors of the size and well-developed public transport system of the country. The great majority of manufacturing, construction and state service industries are located in the Colombo district in the immediate hinterland of Colombo; but since it is possible to commute to work from relatively long distances, the concentration of industry has not given rise to a corresponding concentration of the proletariat, leading to its physical isolation from rural society, as, for instance, happened in Russia with her immense spaces. Consequently the development of the consciousness of some sections of the workers has been retarded by the continued influence of obscurantist rural ideology, such as false consciousness associated with race, religion and feudal social relations.

On the other hand, the reciprocal influence of the working class has greatly advanced political consciousness in the villages. Most of the JVP insurrectionists, for example, were the products of these semi-urban, semi-rural conurbations in the Colombo, Kegalle and Kalutara districts. *It is also the key to the problem of taking the class struggle on the Agrarian question directly into the peasantry.* It opens up the perspective of making the socialist content of the revolutionary struggle more broad-based than has been the case upto now. Further, if the strongly unionized and politicised white collar workers and rural labourers are included, the working class alone forms 57% of the working population, quite apart from the unemployed 13.2%.

The bourgeois leadership of the SLFP, which is probably more acutely aware of the above potentialities than the LSSP leaders, is already attempting to redress the balance in its favour. On the one hand, it is trying to convert the large reservoir of unemployed youth into individual agricultural producers. On the other, it has already concluded agreements with India to 'repatriate' 600,000 plantation workers, while granting citizenship to 375,000. In 1968, when applications were called, only 400,000 wished to be recognized as Indians, whereas 625,000 applied for Sri Lanka citizenship; it is therefore clear that the agreement implies the use of some form of compulsion. Both measures are reactionary in economic terms as well: with their education and social experience (ie. for collective work) the youth would work more productively – and more happily – in large scale co-operative units; in the 600,000 estate workers, the government proposes to dispense with the services of the greater part of a strongly collectivised labour force, with invaluable experience in large-scale intensive agriculture, at a time when food production is of the utmost importance!

It is highly unlikely that these manoeuvres would succeed; the deepening crisis has effectively pushed the white collar workers into the ranks of the proletariat and, in the JVP, the youth have already demonstrated a strong tendency for organised political action with a high degree of consciousness. Once a clear lead is given by the working class, all these forces which are more volatile than itself, would immediately fall in step.

THE POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT

THE TASKS POSED

The above statistics show that the Popular Front inherited a post-colonial capitalist economy which was sharply in decline, and headed towards total bankruptcy. The enormous foreign debt, the high level of unemployment and sustained budget deficits – factors usually spotlighted by bourgeois economists – are only the symptoms of the decay. The fundamental reasons could be summed up as follows:

- a) The continued chronic dependence of the plantation crop dominated economy on the Western capitalist system, when that system itself is in recession.
- b) The failure to carry out thoroughgoing agrarian reform. The agrarian question, which dates from pre-capitalist times, has been severely modified by plantation colonialism; today it is posed in an entirely new way, embracing the plantations as well and uniting socialist tasks with democratic tasks of land reform.
- c) The reactionary and inefficient nature of the colonial-style state structure, which is responsible for a wide range of industrial, administrative and social welfare activity. This is inextricably linked to the other two and no real change is possible without a thorough reconstruction of the state apparatus.

The situation has not changed qualitatively since 1948; the problems have only been modified and extended – and indeed worsened – by more than two decades of neglect. The tasks posed are, in short, the resolution of the Agrarian question to the advantage of the poor peasantry and unemployed plantation labour and the take-over of the state corporations, the plantations and big private industry by the working class. The political task, which is inseparably linked to the above tasks is the seizure of state power from the bourgeoisie, which is dependent on imperialism and is intimately tied to both plantation and peasant land.

These tasks could only have been carried through to completion by a revolutionary proletariat supported by the peasantry; that is the essential lesson of the theory of Permanent Revolution. To imagine that they could be effectively tackled from a position of junior partnership in a SLFP dominated alliance, was to abandon the perspectives of Marxism for wishful thinking.

Though the electoral victory of the Front was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, including widespread mass action, it soon became clear that the government had no intention of taking any revolutionary steps; mass initiative was squashed, a few bureaucrats were changed and it settled down to implementing a few reforms through laboriously bureaucratic, but legal, methods (these are discussed in a subsequent section). Experts were set the task of drafting a new constitution and steps were taken to tide over the immediate problems of the short-term debt and the massive food bills. Constitutional reform was possible because the Front had more than a two-thirds majority in the Assembly.

THE JVP INSURRECTION

The decline of the capitalist economy manifested itself in the specifics of Sri Lanka, as an unemployment problem of enormous proportions, affecting mainly the educated youth. As a result the youth — of which Sri Lanka has many more in proportion than most countries — began separating out of the UNP or SLFP political orientations of their parents, in search of radical solutions. This process was particularly marked in the rural areas; it represented the first stage in the shift in consciousness of the peasantry. This radicalisation was given an ideological lead by a small groups which had broken away from the Stalinist CPs.

Not finding a revolutionary lead in the LSSP, which was in coalition with the SLFP, or in the Stalinist parties, they threw up radical populist-style organisations of their own. The JVP was by far the largest of these, on account of the quick solutions promised in its 'one-day revolution'. The widespread disenchantment generated by the failure of the Front to take decisive action against capitalism and landlordism, rapidly swelled the ranks of the JVP. The eclectic policies and Blanquist orientation of this Party, inevitably led them into insurrectionary action isolated from the movement of the oppressed masses.

In spite of the reactionary features in their political ideology, such as their total rejection of the urban and plantation workers and their identification of the latter with 'Indian expansionism', they had empirically arrived at important conclusions which had quite eluded the CPs, on account of their Stalinist blinkers. Thus they recognised that the struggle in Sri Lanka was against imperialism and national capitalism as a whole, that there was no 'national' bourgeoisie independent of imperialism and that feudal remnants were very few. They also realised that in the specifics of the country, it was armed insurrection and not guerilla or 'protracted' war that was appropriate; in practice, however they substituted their own organisation for the revolutionary class. It is ironical that these renegades from Maoism should have arrived at some of the basic theses of Permanent Revolution more than a decade after the LSSP itself had abandoned it, on the grounds that modern history had superseded its perspectives!

The Insurrection was undoubtedly a by-product of the sharp recoil of the mass movement from the reality of Popular Front rule. As Lenin repeated many times, adventurism or other varieties of petty bourgeois revolutionism is often the penalty paid for the opportunist sins of the working class leadership. A further by-product was the strengthening of the repressive organs of the State. The Insurrection also compelled the government to embark hesitantly on land reform.

1970—1973

Needless to say, the basic problems as described above have not been solved. But in its first three years of office, the Popular Front government has taken some definite steps which have to be considered and interpreted.

The first of these was the constitutional reform, which in transforming Sri Lanka into a republic, eliminated political interference by Britain and local reactionaries via appeals to the Privy Council and the Senate; the Senate itself was abolished. It vested all legislative, judicial and administrative power in the elected 'National Assembly', which means in effect that the Prime Minister has wide control over all these functions. *It also gave the government greater power to suppress internal opposition.*

Secondly, the Front has fashioned out legislation to enable it to take over any large company without notice. These powers have, in fact, been used to take over the most reactionary of the economic and propagandist institutions of the bourgeoisie; they have thus asserted the ascendancy of the government over all private capitalist institutions as well and brought the local agents of imperialism to heel. In addition, a number of other, less significant political steps have been taken, in the same direction.

Of the economic measures, the most important is that of land reform. It did not initially figure in the Common Programme and, even now, is only a caricature of what is necessary in the current context, all thanks to the intervention of the bourgeois leadership of the SLFP. Even this is being vitiated by the incompetence and corruption of the SLFP appointees and the reactionary attempt of the SLFP to parcel up some of the acquired plantations into individual holdings to be given to unemployed youths. As a result of retrograde fragmentation and the replacement of skilled by inexperienced personnel, some estates have reverted to a lower level of utilization. At the same time skilled labour has been thrown out of employment and communal antagonisms have been fanned between the peasant and plantation communities. The estates under the control of the LSSP-run Plantation Corporation, however, are being run efficiently.

Under the present measures, it is estimated that about 500,000 acres will become available for village expansion; this is just under one-third of the presently cultivated acreage of rice alone. Already most of this has been taken over.

Furthermore, effective steps have been taken to combat urban landlordism, to acquire monopoly control over the gem export and consumer goods import trade, to establish a state shipping line and to set up regional development organisations to assist small scale agricultural and manufacturing projects. A number of individual industrial ventures are planned in co-operation with foreign private companies and governments. Self sufficiency has been achieved in a number of subsidiary foodstuffs and gem exports have grown so fast that it is now as important an exchange earner as rubber.



Only manioc, jack seeds and maize for sale in Talawakelle

CRISIS

In spite of all this, the overall economic situation steadily worsened from 1970, leading to a precipitate maturing of the crisis in late 1973. The nominal value of the export earnings did not change appreciably from the 1970 level, which means that the real value dropped; by mid-73 they had fallen 5% from the '71-'72 levels. The foreign debt rose to Rs 2245 million by mid-72 and the food subsidy rose from Rs 600 million in 1970 to Rs 710 million in 1973. Meanwhile the world-wide shortfall in food production, coupled to the currency instability which unleashed a wave of speculation in grain, sent food prices shooting upwards. This forced the government to cut back on the subsidised food rations. In 1970 in fulfilment of their election promise, the Front had been compelled to restore the subsidised rice ration of 4 lb/person/week, which the UNP had halved in December 1966 in response to World Bank demands. In February 1973 the supply situation was so bad that the rice subsidy was cut and the sugar ration halved to 1 lb/month. The government quickly began a nationwide 'food drive'. In August, the food drive was put on a 'war footing' with all possible resources mobilized. In October, the food situation was so bad that the government imposed further cuts and offered strong incentives to producers: thus, the guaranteed purchase price of rice was raised from Rs 18 to Rs 25 per bushel; this immediately pushed up the free market price of rice. Also, the rice ration was reduced to 1 lb/week, flour prices were raised and rationed to 1 lb/week and bread was raised to Rs 0.76 per lb, which was double the 1972 price. The open market price of rice was about Rs 1.25/lb at this time and that of sugar about Rs 2/lb. 1974 brought further increases, partly on account of increased transport costs due to oil price hikes and partly as a result of speculation; the open market price of rice, in February, was around Rs 3.25/lb and that of sugar Rs 5/lb. (The nominal exchange rate is about Rs 15 to the £, but the market rate is closer to Rs 25 to the £, or Rs 1 to about 4 pence). The oil crisis has also resulted in a shortage of fertiliser, which now threatens the coconut industry.

The budget for 1974 was presented in November 1973, before the oil price rises. Even then the estimated deficit was Rs 1442 on a total estimated revenue of Rs 4115 million. Debt servicing alone was to take Rs 1161 million, about 60% more than in 1970. The food subsidy bill was expected to fall to Rs 600m from a projected Rs 1000m on account of the cuts. The oil price hike which came soon after, however, has blown a gaping hole in these estimates. The oil bill alone is expected to rise by about Rs 350m to Rs 1000m. The total food bill, which was estimated at Rs 925m, is now expected to be Rs 600m more, mainly on account of flour and sugar. The total import bill would therefore rise by Rs 1000m at least, which implies further drastic cuts unless credit is forthcoming. Rice, flour and sugar, which in 1973 cost £34, £42 and £74 per ton on the world market, now costs £160, £124 and £132 respectively. The cost of public transport has also risen: in February 1974, bus fares were raised by upto 100%, rail fares by 50% and rail freight rates by 25%.

RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

The maturing of the crisis forced the government to lean even further on imperialism and to impose more burdens on the masses. A socialist response to the crisis would have been to use it as the occasion for revolutionary political and economic change, by mobilizing the masses under working class leadership; this would have been the real solution to the bankruptcy of neo-colonial capitalism. But such a response was precluded by the dominant class nature of the Front government, which had steadily impelled it more and more to the right since the Insurrection and the passing of the land reform legislation. This shift was naturally appreciated by imperialism. In March 1973, the Aid Consortium — set up in 1965 to sustain the UNP — promised to make available \$65m (\$1 = Rs6.4), the highest commitment ever; between 1965-70 the average commitment had been \$50m a year, but since then it had fallen off; in 1972, it had been only \$27m. These funds were to be advanced by Britain, France, West Germany, Japan, USA, Canada and Australia. A fair quantity of aid has been offered by China as well, but this has been too small to alter the main trend of increasing dependence on Western capitalism.

At the same time, the government has been forced to make concessions to local and foreign capital. SLFP ministers loudly declared that there would be 'no throttling of any sector' and promised, in Ottawa and London, that Sri Lanka was firmly committed to 'democracy'. More concretely, proposals were brought forward to involve the private sector in rural development and foreign capital in tourist and industrial expansion. In the budget of November 1973, concessions were made to the middle classes as well and company tax was reduced for companies with 'broadbased capital'. The convertible currency allowance for earnings from non-traditional exports was raised from 2% to 3%; this scheme which brings hard currency into the hands of exporters, with the right to import even banned commodities, has proved to be a remarkable success. Industrial exports rose from Rs 59m in 1971 to Rs 90m in 1972 and Rs 143m in 1973. The total volume is still small compared to traditional plantation exports, but are likely to expand rapidly. Already demands are being made to extend the scheme to import saving food projects and even to plantation exports; this is likely to be done, on account of its success. It is a clear indication of the powerful tendency of local capitalism to integrate with the international capitalist system.

The world food shortage and the crash food drive has been used by the Front to keep the country in something like a war regime. It has not, however, prevented the UNP from launching a massive campaign to topple the Government, ostensibly on the issue of fresh elections in 1975 — which itself would mean certain defeat for the Front on account of the widespread discontent over food shortages and rising prices. The UNP campaign involves not only agitation, but organised political action on the streets, designed to break down civil order; its real aim is probably to prepare the way for a military government.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

THE WORKING CLASS

The sharply rising discontent of the working class could not, however, be kept down. It was first expressed in the 28 demands of the JCTUO (Joint Council of Trade Union Organisations) which represents workers in a large number of industries. These include *"a minimum wage of Rs 200 to all categories of workers, take-over of agency houses and foreign-owned banks, greater state control of the plantation sector, sterling companies and banks, the abolition of foreign monopoly by the immediate enactment of the Law of Registration of Sterling Companies, a five day working week, an allowance of Rs 2.50 for every rising point in the living index paid to workers, the immediate enactment of the Workers' Charter, a national pension scheme and a monthly wage for the estate workers."* Thus the working class is already fighting for socialist demands which it has recognised as the real solution to its misery.

In November 1973 the JCTUO intensified its campaign for the 28 demands. A few months later eleven public sector trade unions raised demands for a minimum monthly wage of Rs 250 for all categories of workers, a minimum daily wage of Rs 10 for daily-rated workers and a monthly wage for estate workers plus Rs 1 a day. That this is only the tip of the iceberg is revealed by the Prime Minister's recent appeal to the trade unions to 'co-operate in development'. Together with the food subsidy cuts, the government granted upto 10% wage increases to low paid workers; but this was miserably inadequate. Already a number of strikes have been launched in Colombo and on the plantations. It is very likely that a new wave of strikes would be launched on the above demands in the near future.

The working class has in effect demonstrated that it is not prepared to support a capitalist system at its expense. The sharp rise of food prices, which has imposed intolerable burdens on its shoulders, has broken down its popular

front illusions and is rapidly eroding its faith in the LSSP and CP leaders. Since the high prices benefit peasant producers, the SLFP is relatively less affected by them. The sharp class tensions in the Front, brought about this shift to the right, have already broken out openly, when a section of the CP split away from the government.

But the workers were not prepared to rally to just any "left" focus, whether of the Left CP or of the other left groups. Only a revolutionary leadership coming up within its own organisations, armed with clear perspectives for political action, could win the confidence of the great majority of the class. Until such a development links the political experience of the class to a revolutionary consciousness, it is unlikely that decisive action would be taken. If the present campaign of the UNP proves a serious threat to the Government, it is even likely that the working class would rally to its defence.

In the short term the UNP's campaign of "direct action", based on the hostility of the entire urban middle class, poses a political threat to the Front, since the UNP calculates that many workers would not rally to its defence, thereby leaving the Front to rely on the uncertain support of the Armed forces.

END OF POPULISM

In assessing the record of the Popular Front, it is necessary to recognise that considerable *political* power has been obtained for the liberal bourgeoisie by hammering out the state apparatus into its pliant instrument and eliminating all features inconsistent with its class rule. This was carried out in the teeth of opposition of the reactionaries, whose economic and political power has been curbed. In consequence, the *basis* has been laid for the unification of the bourgeoisie as a whole in the immediate future. This has been possible largely on account of the support of the working class and the initial impetus of the mass movement behind the Front.

But the mass movement itself had developed a clear anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist consciousness during the previous five years of UNP rule and had fully expected revolutionary changes from the Front, which presented itself in socialist terms. The subsequent actions of the Front have, now, clearly exposed the real class nature of its ruling group, particularly to the working class and the intelligentsia. The JVP Insurrection, which itself was a product of the recoil of the frustrated mass movement, was an important contributory factor in this process.

The Insurrection compelled the liberal bourgeoisie to embark hesitantly on land reform and the subsequent food crisis lent it added impetus. The agrarian question, however, has only been partially resolved; it has been complicated by measures far removed from the specific solutions demanded by historical developments. The estates under the LSSP-run Plantation Corporation could generate an expansion of production on the basis of collective labour, modern techniques of intensive agriculture and efficient management under the direction of workers' councils. Large-scale intensive agriculture could also draw in the unemployed youth as a part of a well paid labour force, on new collective schemes. But it is unlikely that all this could be realised except under a workers' government. Nevertheless, it is likely that food production would expand rapidly, mainly as a result of the strong incentives supplied to producers since 1973. The problem of short-term food shortages, however, remains.

The deepening crisis has pushed the government into even greater dependence on imperialism. In bringing all economic activity under the control of the state, *the Front itself is forced to strike a direct compromise with imperialism*. This is the relentless logic of all bourgeois-led 'anti-imperialist' struggles which must end in some new compromise with imperialism, for the other alternative of revolution must lead to the suppression of bourgeois property as well. Thus the maturing of the crisis has now forced the government back onto the path taken by the UNP before it; having expropriated the reactionary bourgeoisie, the Front leadership is compelled to assume its historical role.

PERSPECTIVES

Post-war developments in Sri Lanka bear out the general perspectives of Permanent Revolution, that an anti-imperialist struggle which is not at the same time anti-capitalist, cannot succeed. Thus the failure of the LSSP to provide revolutionary leadership in the immediate post-war years against imperialism and its client bourgeoisie, coupled with the post-war boom, generated the conditions for the rise of a bourgeois populist movement such as had begun in India and China more than a half-century before. The completion of that cycle of world capitalism has now brought about the collapse of Populism, reproducing the old pattern of class forces, but at a higher level of differentiation.

The decisive factor which precipitated the present situation was the current crisis in the international capitalist system, which was manifested as currency instabilities and sharp rises in commodity prices, culminating in the oil price hike. Whereas previously the terms of trade had moved against Sri Lanka at a steady annual rate of 4-5%, the crisis brought about a sudden sharp drop. This in turn compelled the government to shift the internal price 'balance' strongly in favour of food producers, against the working class and the urban middle class; it also imparted a more radical interpretation to land reform legislation in implementation. In addition to high prices, further incentives have been offered to food producers as well as to export-orientated industry; these are likely to be increased in the near future.

The government is now compelled to strive for rapid growth regardless of its social consequences. The expansion of agricultural production and the institution of export incentives, supply the necessary conditions for the growth of manufacturing industry as well. This will in turn further differentiate the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie, even though in the short term a large number of the unemployed would be transformed into agricultural small producers. The growth of industry in co-operation with foreign capital, as well as the expansion of exports,

would also further the dependence of the bourgeoisie on imperialism.

In addition to the differentiation of the petty bourgeoisie, the expansion of the productive forces, together with the social ferment resulting from land reform, will inevitably generate a rapid rise and polarization of class consciousness throughout society. In Trotsky's words, "...when development takes place not gradually, not 'organically' but by means of terrible shocks and abrupt shifts in the old social layers, then critical thought finds its revolutionary expression incomparably more easily and rapidly, providing there is of course the necessary theoretical prerequisites for this." As a consequence of the opportunist political alignment of the LSSP, it is likely that initially some sections of the intelligentsia and de-classed petty bourgeoisie would turn to the right. But the long term alignment of class forces will depend to a large extent on the revolutionary initiative of the working class.



Pitiful condition of tea workers' family

THE NATIONAL MINORITIES

71.7% of the population are Sinhala, 'Ceylon Tamils' constitute 12.7% and the 'Indian Tamils', who are largely plantation workers (so-called because they are of recent Indian origin) make up 9.4% of the total. The only other significant minority is the 'Ceylon Moors' who constitute 5.4%; this is a trading community which is mainly confined to the towns and which is fairly well integrated with the Sinhala population. The three main communities are socially and culturally isolated except at the upper and middle class English-speaking strata, even though a common language links the latter two. The Tamils, by which we mean only the 'Ceylon' Tamils, occupied the Northern and Eastern provinces and mainly the Jaffna peninsula, before the British Raj; even now around 85% of the population of these regions are Tamils. On account of the difficulty of working the land in these areas, much stronger property relations had emerged, with smaller and more widespread holdings, which were confirmed by the capitalist land laws. The plantation economy, however, left these areas quite untouched except for the usual effects, such as the expansion of trade and suppression of local craft as in the rest of the country. Consequently, semi-feudal relations remained much stronger; even today they are much stronger than elsewhere in the country, with such barbaric features as caste restrictions on temple entry.

On account of the relatively larger number of mission schools set up in Jaffna, the Tamils entered the national mainstream via English education and employment in the state departments. In this way the surplus of the plantation economy directly contributed to the formation of a professional and bureaucratic class which quickly forged strong links with the landlordism of its home areas, just as in the case of their Sinhala counterparts. But on account of the greater availability of education, the state bureaucracy acquired a disproportionate number of Tamils, just as the armed services did of Christians, which in turn stimulated the hostility of the Sinhala Buddhists who sought the same positions. Even today, 18.6% of the urban population is Tamil, because of this. Both these communities were the targets of Bandaranaike's Sinhala Buddhist 'nationalism', which supplied a powerful stimulus to parallel Tamil chauvinism under the landlord and capitalist leadership of the Federal Party. Feeding on each other, these two forces produced the racial conflagration of 1958, which was triggered off by the commercial rivalry between Sinhala and Tamil traders. Subsequently this conflict died down. After 1970 a new wave of militancy arose among the Tamils under the TUF (Tamil United Front) which after 1972 carried out a powerful agitation against the new Constitution; some sections even advanced the demand for a separate state. The real content of this struggle, however, is entirely different, since the base of the TUF consists largely of unemployed youth. Thus the new militancy is a product of the same factors that produced the JVP, though the political form is different; as no leadership was offered by the LSSP and because there was no significant working class element among the Tamils to supply an enduring basis for socialist ideas, the great majority of the youth — which is in essence fighting

against a moribund capitalism—was drawn to a false communal consciousness by the TUF leadership, which, being drawn from the most reactionary class interests (whose property was threatened), opposed the government from the right. Consequently the movement as a whole assumed dangerously reactionary forms. The fact that it was more difficult for Tamil youths to get jobs in the Sinhala-dominated patronage system of the UF government (based on letters of recommendation from MPs) was what fuelled the communal agitation of the TUF leaders.

It is also quite clear that if the LSSP had not abandoned its principled position on the national question, the greater part of the radical Tamil youth would already have aligned itself with the working class, bypassing the communal politics of the reactionary TUF leaders.

It is of the utmost importance for the Tamil youth and peasantry to realize that their real struggle is against a backward capitalist system which can no longer provide even the basic needs such as jobs, education etc. The real solution is to abolish landlordism, semi-feudal remnants and the capitalist system that sustains them, and to develop labour-intensive industrial and agricultural ventures throughout the country on a co-operative basis. Thus their needs are essentially the same as those of the Sinhala youth and peasantry. But state assistance is necessary for the rapid implementation of such a programme. Since such assistance can be extended only by a state power based on the working class which has no interest in sustaining landlordism and capitalism, it is first necessary to join the revolutionary struggle to establish such a state, which is the first step on the road to a Socialist society. Thus the real answer to the problems of the Tamils is to join the urban and plantation workers, the Sinhala youth and the poor peasants in all areas, in the struggle for a socialist state. Such a state would provide the freedom for the development of Tamil culture, as well as the culture of all minorities, freed from such reactionary features such as caste-ism.

The interests of the 'Indian Tamil' plantation workers is closely tied to that of other workers. Prior to the 'forties this had been so in practice. Since then the bourgeoisie and its agents took advantage of the confusion and defeats of the LSSP to deprive these workers of their citizenship rights and to inveigle them into communalist unions. In the last decade, however, the plantation workers have been breaking free of these reactionary fetters and finding a road to a unified struggle with all workers. Significantly the current demands of the JCTUO and others specifically include the plantation workers, which is an important step in the right direction; there is little doubt that in the struggle against imperialism and capitalism—of which they have more experience than other workers—they would easily shake off the communalist leaders who remain, leaders whose alliance with the reactionaries has already been revealed.

REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

A revolutionary situation, by itself, does not lead to revolution; it can do so only if the struggles of the working class and its allies are firmly guided by the perspectives of Marxism. The critical role of leadership has already been shown up, negatively, in the enormous problems created by the failure of the old working class leaders: if popular frontism had not propped up bourgeois populism in its period of decline, a revolutionary situation would have developed much sooner, under more favourable circumstances. Thus popular frontism has alienated many sec-

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tions of the petty bourgeoisie, the youth— especially Tamil youth — and the Tamil minority in general, from the struggles of the working class. At the same time it gave rise to the setbacks deriving from the abortive Insurrection and the strengthening of the state apparatus. The formidable tasks posed by all these setbacks can only be overcome by a revolutionary leadership soundly based on Marxism. Such a leadership can arise only from within the ranks of the LSSP, in a struggle against the old revisionist leaders.

The first phase of revolutionary struggle has already been launched by the working class in the present series of strikes. The general programme of such a struggle would combine the tasks of socialist revolution with the specific democratic tasks posed, including that of the national question (see '*tasks posed*' and the '*Question of the national minorities*'). These aspects of a general programme *have already been advanced by the workers' unions*. It is a task of the revolutionary leadership to present the programme in such a way as to mobilize the widest support behind it. This first phase of struggle must lead to breaking away of the working class from the Front government; it is also the necessary condition for winning mass support outside of the class.

In breaking away from the Front, it is of the utmost importance for the revolutionary vanguard to move with the class as a whole; the isolation of the vanguard from the class, especially from the rank and file of the LSSP, would be an enormously retrograde step and amount to a second ultra-left betrayal; it is particularly important to guard against this now, when the rapid mobilization of the entire class is necessary to avert military dictatorship.

In the first part of this essay, it has been shown how closely the developments in Sri Lanka were tied to those in India. In the first two decades after 1948, since the LSSP abandoned its attempt to link up with the Indian Revolution, the implicit belief has prevailed that a revolutionary strategy for Sri Lanka need not take account of India. This idea has been reinforced by the downright reactionary thesis that revolutions are the 'internal affairs' of countries and need not affect 'friendly' relations between governments. That this pious hope — for it is nothing more than that — is profoundly mistaken, has already been demonstrated in practice by the active interest that India took in the JVP Insurrection. It is therefore of great importance to forge strong links with the Indian working class, with the utmost urgency. There is little doubt that the revolution in Sri Lanka is closely linked to that of India, especially now that the sharp decline of Sri Lanka's early prosperity has evened up objective differences between the two countries; this is to the advantage of Sri Lanka, since it would make it more difficult for the Indian bourgeoisie to intervene, if revolutionary struggles were simultaneous.

It is also of the greatest importance for the proletarian vanguard to win over the Sinhala and Tamil youth. In Russia, the intelligentsia as a whole recoiled back from the proletarian revolution; but the political nature of an intelligentsia is rooted in the specific conditions of its existence. Thus it would be a serious mistake to dismiss the Sri Lankan youth as 'petty bourgeois' or even to treat them as 'peasants', for they are neither; in previous sections we have attempted to show that they are a transitional group between the intelligentsia and the proletariat with a high degree of consciousness; this is because the sharp economic decline makes it impossible for the intelligentsia to rise up into bourgeois society in the way it was possible for the relatively much smaller Russian intelligentsia. Therefore in the specifics of the Sri Lankan revolution, *the intelligentsia is likely to be a more important ally of the proletariat than the peasantry*, on account of their numerical strength, high level of consciousness and capacity for collective political action. The concrete realization of this *potentiality* is, perhaps the most important task of the revolutionary proletariat.



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