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Adopted by the national conference of the British section
of the Fourth International, December 1982

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Theses on the Nature of Bennism and the Tasks of the IMG

Adopted by the national conference of the British section of the Fourth International, December, 1982.

1. The political line for a revolutionary organisation must start with the objective needs of the class struggle and the working class as a whole. Through identifying the fundamental needs of the working class and oppressed, both historically and immediately, it should indicate the central tasks in the struggle for socialism and how revolutionary Marxists fight for the leadership of this struggle. It should indicate the forms and means through which the working class are objectively moving forward to confront these tasks and therefore what are the correct tactics for revolutionaries to participate in and seek to lead these developments.

This is the sole way both of confronting the needs of the class struggle and building a revolutionary party. This latter process is *not* simply or primarily a question of voluntarism or subjective decisions. Building the revolutionary party cannot be approached outside the framework of an analysis of the objective situation between and within all classes of society and the strategic line of march for the working class and oppressed as a whole. It can only develop out of a profound process of differentiation and struggle within the working class. In a country such as Britain this means only out of a process of differentiation and struggle within the labour movement.

There are of course specific tactics and organisational questions of party building but these can only be posed and resolved within the framework of the line of march of the working class itself.

2. The fundamental centre around which the development of politics in the British working class will be fought out is the politics of the Labour Party. The Labour Party is the totally dominant mass party of the British working class. It monopolises political support for a working class party among the masses and dominates the political concerns of the overwhelming majority of working class activists. It is *only* through a tremendous process of internal differentiations and crisis of the Labour Party that a mass revolutionary party can be built in Britain. That crisis in the Labour Party in turn is totally bound up with, and can only be created by, the entire dynamic of the class struggle in Britain.

3. The decisive fact for the present dynamics of working class politics in Britain is that this crisis in the Labour Party has entered its first phases. At first combined with other developments but increasingly clearly this fact will dominate politics in the working class in the 1980s. Increasingly other mass struggles in society will feed into and interrelate with crises in the Labour Party.

The crisis of British imperialism and the decline of the basis of classical Labourist social democracy

4. The decline of British imperialism from its position as the greatest imperialist world power is the root cause of the developing instability of the British political system and of its economic and social crisis. However, the tremendous historical political and social reserves built up by British imperialism inevitably mean that the crisis will be a prolonged and complex one.

This decline of British imperialism for a prolonged period developed far more rapidly on the economic field than the political. The two party structure, based on the existence of a stable and completely reformist Labour bureaucracy, contained the

framework of politics. The Labour movement remained firmly under the grip of social democratic reformism. A chief feature of the present situation, however, is the speed with which the political crisis is now catching up with the depth of the economic decline.

5. The embryonic beginnings of this process of political crisis may be traced back to 1964. In that year, faced with the first serious slowdown in the post-war boom, major sections of the British ruling class helped to bring to office the Labour government under Wilson. Through a direct alliance with the Labour bureaucracy they aimed to rationalise the economy and discipline the working class.

This government however was both economically and politically a total failure for the bourgeoisie. It culminated in an unsuccessful attempt, defeated by a combination of working class struggle and intra-bureaucratic opposition, to impose anti-trade union laws ('In Place of Strife'). The government fell amid ruling class hostility and a wave of strikes which started to develop from 1968.

This government was an historic turning point for British politics because it demonstrated the exhaustion of the historic reserves of social democracy to buy off the working class and control it through the ability to make limited but real concessions. The long historic process whereby the Labour Party had been able to form governments with the acquiescence of the bourgeoisie was brought to an end. The bourgeoisie concluded under the new economic and social conditions created by the decline of British imperialism a Labour government would no longer be a reliable instrument for controlling the masses over any significant period of time.

This has only been confirmed by events since then. While the Labour bureaucracy did succeed in imposing a significant temporary defeat on the working class in 1975-77 it could not maintain this nor maintain its internal stability. At best Labour was a temporary, and increasingly unstable, stop gap. Furthermore the proven inability of the Labour bureaucracy to control the situation of the working class, combined with the deepening economic crisis, made the very existence of the strength of the labour movement less and less acceptable for the bourgeoisie. Since 1968 the ruling class has carried out an increasingly serious series of attacks to break the strength of the Labour movement.

The ruling class offensive

6. The first of these series of assaults was that carried out by Heath. This did achieve some success on the political field. Labour's vote which had stood at 48 percent at the General Election of 1966 was reduced to 43 percent in 1970 and then to 37 percent in 1974 — a fall of ten percent of the total electorate in two elections. On the economic and mass struggle fields however the Heath government was disastrously defeated — falling amid the second miners' strike of 1974 and following four years of major trade union struggles. The Tory vote was temporarily shattered by these defeats and despite the sharp fall in Labour's vote Britain's first 'past the post'-electoral system allowed it to form a government in February 1974.

The 1974 Labour government duly attempted to carry out its role of serving the interests of the capitalist class and convincing

them that it provided a strategic solution for their needs. However, the 1974-79 Labour government proved no more capable than its predecessor of controlling the working class. Despite imposing sharp defeats on the working class in 1975-77 it was confronted in winter 1978-79 with a major series of trade union struggles. The bourgeoisie then organized its removal from office. This experience, and developments within the Labour Party itself redoubled the ruling class in its determination that, outside a situation of last ditch defence of its rule, it would attempt to prevent the Labour Party ever again forming a government by itself.

7. The Thatcher government represented the third, and qualitatively most severe, bourgeois offensive. Its economic policy consisted of crashing the economy to a point even beyond that dictated by the world recession.

At the core of this economic policy however was a political calculation. Thatcherism believed that it could shatter the resistance of the working class and labour movement. Therefore, after a short term problem, all sections of the ruling class would benefit from Thatcherism. Over the corpse of the labour movement the full unity of the ruling class would be achieved and the fortunes of the Tory Party, which prior to 1979 had only been in office for three and a half years out of the preceding 15, would be restored. If on the other hand the working class fought back and broke the bourgeois offensive then a tremendous crisis in ruling class politics, of which the SDP/Liberal Alliance and the Tory wets would be only the precursors, would set in.

This offensive undoubtedly imposed serious political setbacks on the working class. The vote for the Labour Party, already reduced in 1979 to a level lower than at any time since 1931, was pushed down to 30 percent or even lower in partial elections. Serious setbacks were suffered in trade union disputes such as the ASLEF strike.

Confronted with this bourgeois assault the majority leadership of the Labour Party under successively Callaghan and Foot, and the TUC led by Murray, inevitably capitulated totally. To have mobilised the Labour movement to fight back would have been to unleash a tremendous political crisis threatening the stability not merely of the existing bourgeois political order but also of the labour bureaucracy itself.

Despite various concessions forced on them, struggles periodically imposed by their membership, and occasional demagoguery the dominant Labour Party/TUC leadership were and are totally opposed to any mobilisation of the labour movement on the scale that would defeat Thatcher.

It is the struggle of the working class and the as yet not qualitatively broken organisational strength of the working class movement, not the line of Labour and TUC leadership, which still provides the obstacle to the victory of the bourgeois offensive. It is the collision of this resistance with the policy of class collaboration of the bureaucracy which provides the motor of the deepening crisis of the Labour movement and Labour Party in all its many different forms.

The crisis of the Labour Party

8. The break up of British bourgeois politics necessarily meant the break up of the stability of the Labour Party itself. The failure and defeat of the 1964-70 Wilson government ensured that this instability and crisis would spread into the Labour bureaucracy itself.

The conclusion drawn from the failure of the Wilson government by those sections of the Labour leadership most closely tied to and in the ruling class was of the necessity to go even further to the right. The error was not to have carried through the assault of 'In Place of Strife' even to the point of a total break with the trade union bureaucracy. Only by a preparedness to do this could

the interests of the ruling class be served. This orientation culminated in Jenkinsism and the SDP split. Such an orientation however was only open to peripheral sections of the Labour Party not tied into the central core of the labour bureaucracy itself.

An important minority of the working class however drew the conclusion that it was necessary to break with the previous right-wing course and construct a left Labour alternative. This was reflected in the bureaucracy after 1968 in the emergence of the Bennite trend. This went through its first phase of development during the 1970-74 struggles against the Heath government and up to the 1975 EEC referendum. It was checked and setback, but did not disappear, with the assault on the working class of the Labour government of 1975-79. It therefore broke out with renewed force after the electoral defeat of 1979.

9. The rise of Bennism necessarily profoundly modifies the pattern of working class politicisation in Britain.

The election of the Labour government in 1964 occurred in conditions of a labour movement in which there had been a gigantic growth of the trade unions and a qualitative decline of the number of activists in the Constituency Labour Parties. Under these conditions the absence of any left-wing alternative inside the Labour Party in 1964-70 meant that the first eruption of opposition to the line of Wilson took the form of an elemental trade union upsurge and rise of mass movements whose centre of gravity was outside the Labour Party. This continued into the wave of opposition to the Heath government.

A clear distinction must be made however between the organisational arena in which oppositional movements emerge and their political focus — as well as understanding that over the longer or intermediate term there will be a relation between the two. Forces resolutely opposed to Heath, and later Thatcher, and to the policies of Wilson, Callaghan, and Foot in collaborating with them, were and still are capable of waging a mass struggle against them through the trade unions and mass campaigns. *But they were and are incapable of providing any political alternative that is recognised as such by any layer of the masses or the overwhelming majority of working class activists.* In the existing structure and relation of forces in Britain such an alternative can only come from inside the Labour Party.

10. This therefore is the significance of 'Bennism.' This cannot be reduced to the movements for constitutional changes in the Labour Party in 1979-81 — although these were one expression of it. Nor is it simply a question of the CLPs. It is a current with a bureaucratic leadership which rests upon a whole series of oppositional forces and movements in the trade unions, in the mass campaigns such as CND, in the CLPs, and certain parts of the movements of the oppressed which are seeking a political solution to their crises through the working class organisations. It is this which gives Bennism its force and dynamics. It also means that such currents are not a temporary phenomenon but, with inevitable periodic rises and falls, will continue throughout the whole next period.

The relation of forces in the workers movement

11. The relationship of forces between the different sections of the Labour Party was dictated not just by the offensive of the bourgeoisie. It was affected also by the character of the British working class movement as shaped by its imperialist past which is only just at the beginning of the process of breaking up.

The distinctive features of the British labour movement compared to that of other countries were shaped by the historical strength of British imperialism. This imperialism allowed the British labour movement to build up on a reformist basis an unmatched organisational strength. This was above all reflected in the strongest trade union movement of any major imperialist country and the attachment of the working class to it. This or-

ganisational strength was and is an immense obstacle for the bourgeoisie to rationalise the economy on a capitalist basis.

Politically, however, this imperialist strength produced one of the weakest working classes in Europe. This political weakness has been shown again recently in the Malvinas war and the fact that a far lower proportion of the working class in Britain now takes even the elementary step of voting for a party of the working class than in any other major country in Europe.

12. This political situation of the working class means that Bennism is not a majority in the working class — which on the contrary still is dominated by the politics of the Labour and TUC leadership. Bennism commands the majority support of labour movement activists but not of the masses. It is also a minority current within the bureaucracy and will remain so in the next period. For this reason the oppositional forces in the various diverse movements will continue to look to Bennism, and its accompaniments in the trade unions such as Scargill, as the leading figures of their left political current. No serious organised force in the working class to its left will emerge.

Under these conditions, and with periodic rises and falls and changes of immediate central issues, 'Bennism' as a current with the major political weight among Labour Party and trade union activists will continue in the next period. It is the framework of the next phase of politicisation of the working class movement in Britain.

The line of advance of the working class movement and the building of the IMG

13. From this objective situation flows the line of advance of the working class movement and the tasks of revolutionaries.

The working class movement finds itself on the defensive against the offensive of the ruling class. The majority leadership of the Labour Party and TUC capitulates before this offensive. It is leading the Labour Party to disaster at the next general election. The forces which oppose this line, from sections of left social democracy through to the revolutionaries, find themselves a minority within the working class movement — although a section of this force, the Bennites, has a major weight among working class activists and a base even among a minority of the masses.

In this situation the decisive task is that of organising, politically clarifying, and centralising all those minority forces prepared to fight back against the bourgeois offensive and the collaboration of the Labour Party and TUC leadership in this.

This line is that of the creation of a class-struggle left wing — a united front of all those in the labour movement, and outside it, prepared to fight against the immediate attacks of the ruling class and Tory government.

14. While there is no guarantee that such a class-struggle left wing will come into existence important elements leading in that direction exist in the present crisis of the working class movement. They include those forces who campaigned in favour of ASLEF, who opposed the Malvinas war, in the impact of CND in the labour movement, in the forces that ensured the election of Scargill in the NUM, who supported Laurence Scott and other disputes, who put through the left wing resolutions at the Labour Party Women's Conference, who oppose the witch hunt in the Labour Party, who involve themselves in the struggles of youth, who participate in the new oppositional reform movements in the trade unions, who engage in the fight of black people against racism, who actively backed the Benn campaign for Deputy Leadership of the Labour Party.

These forces are as yet disparate, they do not all participate in the different movements, they are not unified, and they look in overwhelming majority to leadership from Benn and Scargill. But they constitute, in uneven ways, the beginning of a fight

back against the Tory government and its supporters. They are in opposition to the line of subordination to the Tory government in reality pursued by the Labour and TUC leadership. While of course not endorsing every move and every formation of these developments we want to be part of them, attempt to clarify their base politically, and seek to centralise them. In particular it is through taking mass campaigns and struggles into the Labour Party, and the Labour Party into the mass campaigns and struggles, that we both advance the class struggle and build the IMG. This is in line with the orientation to joint trade union and Labour Party action to bring down the Tories.

In this framework we must give particular attention and priority in party-building tasks to the LPYS. This will be particularly at the centre of the fight around the witch-hunt in the next period and, as always, it will be youth who will be particularly open in the LP to the perspective of mass campaigning.

15. These developments and divisions in the Labour movement, with inevitable periodic rises and falls, will penetrate deeper and deeper into the working class and the Labour movement in the whole coming period. The crisis of the Labour Party which started in 1979 is only the first wave of such developments which will more and more dominate politics in the working class.

Whether or not such a class-struggle left wing comes into existence because it is objectively required by the situation the IMG will gain from fighting for it. Partial developments leading in the direction of a class struggle left wing will take place and the IMG will be able to show the correctness of its line not merely in propaganda but also through real initiatives.

The line of fighting for such a class struggle left wing includes both support of immediate struggles of the working class and putting forward the perspective of fighting for 'A Labour government committed to socialist policies'.

16. This process of differentiation and division within the Labour movement, which is only just beginning, provides also the framework of the building of the revolutionary party. It shows in a small embryonic form the great process of splits and fusions, produced by great class convulsions, out of which alone a mass revolutionary party will be built. The individual recruits which the IMG can make today must be educated in that fundamental perspective of the building of the revolutionary party as a real process of development and differentiation in the workers movement.

Such education means understanding that the building of a revolutionary nucleus into a mass revolutionary party will take many different organisational forms in different periods — open organisation, fraction work in another organisation, full entryism, fusion with other revolutionary or leftward moving centrist forces. It means understanding that such a revolutionary party will not be homogeneous on questions of ideology or tactics but its unity is based on a common position of the defence of the interests of the working class in the great class struggles which take place internationally and nationally. The sole tactical rule for building such a party is that we must use the means that will take revolutionaries into the best and closest possible contact with those forces waging the class struggle and capable of being won to revolutionary politics.

In the current situation of class struggle and state of development of the working class vanguard in Britain the correct tactic for building a class-struggle left wing and revolutionary party is for the supporters of the Fourth International today to have as their norm membership of the Labour Party, working to increase their weight in the industrial unions through sending cdes into industry, and building a revolutionary youth organisation. It is out of this that the individual recruits will be made that, with a correct political line, will provide the force to intervene in the dif-

ferentiations, splits and fusions of tomorrow.

The tactical watchwords of revolutionaries in Britain today should be 'Deeper into the Labour Party: Deeper into the unions: Turn towards youth.' Within this framework, of course, periodic adjustments must be made, in the light of concrete circumstances, regarding the amount of time and resources allocated to work in the CLPs, particular unions, particular campaigns, etc.

The choice for the IMG

17. The political line presented above is in counterposition to the others presented to the organisation on two decisive issues.

(1) Neither Clynes, et al nor cde Klein present a line of advance for the British working class. The sole point on which they agree is that the conference should allegedly be polarised around the choice of a line of a 'turn to industry' or a line of 'entryism'.

In reality neither of these is a line. Cde Klein rightly ridicules the idea that the 'turn to industry' is a political line but he fails to note that 'entryism' is not one either. Telling the industrial working class to make a turn to itself, or for the forces in the mass parties to enter themselves, does not take the working class one step further forward in the actual question of the political line it needs for the class struggle. Both are simply possible tactics for building the IMG.

But tactics for a small revolutionary group are not a line for the class struggle. The idea that the conference must start by polarising on 'entryism' or 'the turn to industry' should be thrown out of the window. The conference should start by deciding its view of the objective situation of the class struggle and the tasks of the working class, and political line for revolutionaries, which flow from this. Then it should decide its tactics.

Both cde Clynes, et al, in a theorised way, and cde Klein, not in a theorised fashion but in the actual documents presented, have a wrong starting point for the construction of a political line.

(2) As regards the dynamics of the working class struggle cdes Clynes, et al have a totally wrong strategic framework both as regards the imperialist countries in general and Britain. They totally fail to understand the nature of the development of *politics* — that as the working class moves into struggle it will be increasingly forced to confront politics. To do that it will increasingly turn, first in influence and then increasingly in organisation, to the only mass political instrument it knows — the mass reformist working class parties. The dynamic of the working class over a long period is therefore precisely into these parties around overtly political issues. This is also why the only perspective of the building of mass revolutionary parties is out of splits and fusions with forces of the mass workers parties. The entire perspective of Clynes, et al, of the revolutionary party basing itself on a radicalisation by-passing from below the mass working class parties and growing by individual recruitment is totally wrong. It has nothing to do with the real dynamic of working class radicalisation and would make the IMG an economic sect.

(3) Cde Klein has an understanding, linked to a grasp of the strength of the imperialist ruling classes, to the importance of the question of the mass parties. But he has a wrong view of the actual situation of the mass working class organisations in Europe and Britain. He greatly underestimates the weight of the trade unions, and also of the mass campaign organisations, and greatly overestimates the weight of individual membership organisations such as the Constituency Labour Parties. For this reason he proposes incorrect tactics far too narrowly centred on the CLPs, makes an illegitimate generalisation regarding the mass parties from Britain to the whole of Europe, and does not direct the IMG towards the forces, in particular young people, from which it can grow.

18. Finally these overall differences concentrate themselves at the conference in the decisive tactical question on British perspectives — the political attitude to the Benn current and of the attitude to formations such as the CND, the new reform movements in the trade unions, the opposition to the Malvinas war, Scargillism in the trade unions etc. In short what attitude to take to the various opposition and mass united front movements which have developed.

The position of this document is that Bennism, Scargillism, and a whole series of other trends are and will remain in the next phase a *minority* within the workers movement. They will be in opposition to a majority Labour/TUC bureaucracy around Foot, Murray, etc.

These minorities are, however, ones with a base in the masses and support among labour movement activists which is tremendously strong compared to the IMG. Because they are in opposition to this right wing leadership there will not be any serious current moving and organising itself to the left of Benn/Scargill. On the contrary the Benn/Scargill current, which itself rests on a whole series of uneven and different oppositional currents will be the framework of the next major phase of politicisation of the working class and oppressed.

The part of the Bennite development which most fundamentally interests the IMG is of course its base. However precisely because these developments in the base see themselves as part of a current in the Labour Party, trade unions, and mass movements whose expression is Benn and Scargill we also want to try to be a part, the revolutionary Marxist part, of the leadership of these movements.

From this flows our fundamental attitude to the organised opposition developments which in general look for political leadership to the Labour left and Benn/Scargill. We do not of course endorse every single one of these developments, its tactics etc. But our fundamental attitude is *positive*. We welcome these developments, seek to politically clarify them, seek to centralise them.

This means getting right, as the fundamental task on British perspectives at this conference, our attitude to Bennism. It is entirely possible to be in the Labour Party and pursuing a thoroughly sectarian and hopeless course — as can be seen clearly, together with political opportunism, with the Militant group. *The key issue is what political attitude to take to the Benn current and to the Benn/Scargill/Broad Left and other groupings in the trade unions, Labour Party, and mass campaigns.*

We propose as a general tactic to participate in these developments as a major part of the overall work of the IMG and to take the organisational measures (work in the Labour Party, sending forces into the industrial unions, orienting to young people) that will allow us to do so. Cde Clynes et al present a totally demagogic line of going essentially over the heads of these movements to work 'in the masses' or among supposed 'revolutionaries of action' (in reality left Labourites and centrists), through a false conception of a turn to industry and 'talking socialism on the job'. This is based on a thoroughly wrong view of the class relation of forces and the relation of forces inside the working class movement.

Cde Klein fails to see the way in which the crisis of Labour is a crisis of the whole Labour *movement*, involving far wider forces than the CLPs, and fails to project correct tactics for intervening in and linking up with these forces.

In conclusion

The class struggle in Britain is going to be hard, long, and difficult. It faces a powerful and utterly ruthless enemy. The British Labour movement is led by reformist forces who are rotten to the core and who will cling to British imperialism in its decline just

as tightly as they did in its rise. The majority of the British working class will *not* rapidly be won from the leadership of these forces and the power of capital which supports them. The defeats of the Malvinas war and the ASLEF strike will unfortunately be very far from the last that will be imposed on the workers movement.

But something exciting *is* happening in British politics. The very decline of British imperialism which is propelling the bourgeois offensive and the decline of Labour reformism is also pushing forces into opposition to these policies in a way, and with a perspective, not seen before.

The working class movement in Britain is not smashed. Despite the defeats, throughout the 1980s there will continue to be crises and mass struggles that will increasingly shake British politics. Those who stood out against the Malvinas war, who supported ASLEF, who actively fight back against the attacks of Thatcher and the line of the Labour Party and TUC leadership are very much a minority. But they are no longer simply a minority of students or 'intellectuals'. They are a minority increasingly working class in composition and increasingly based in the labour movement. Their most dynamic part is above all based

among young people. These forces are only going to grow in the next period.

It is in these real processes of development of the working class and oppressed that the IMG must base itself so it becomes increasingly not only an organisation with an international programme and affiliation but a growing integral part of the British labour movement.

To do this means defending, not abandoning, our international political programme. It means the centrality of *politics*. But it does mean abandoning empty rhetoric about the relation of forces in Britain, about the real weight of different forces in the labour movement, and the goals which the IMG must set itself. It must cease regarding its tactics as in any way a line or the central concerns for the working class in Britain.

At this conference this means concretely

(i) Asserting, defending and developing the politics of Trotskyism and the Fourth International against the attacks made on it inside our organisation.

(ii) Having a correct political attitude towards, and breaking with sectarianism towards, the Bennite current in the Labour Party and trade unions.

Page 3, right column, paragraph 2:

The three last sentences should be replaced with:
The initial feedback, which involves aspects of the black and white working class and unemployed masses of minority groups, will continue to develop. Such struggles could lead to the raising of the question of working class political independence, a break with the two-party system and emergence of a class party, especially because the next Democratic presidential campaign will on the level of *concrete commitment* have nothing qualitatively different from Reagan austerity to offer. The struggle for the emergence of a mass multiracial labor party, independent of the bourgeoisie, is becoming more and more relevant.

Page 10, right column, paragraphs 5-5:

Replace all three paragraphs with:
In Iran the original mass movement that toppled the Shah's regime consisted of both reactionary and progressive opponents of the monarchy, but the capitulation of the left in front of Khomeiny and its inability to understand what he represented which helped him to consolidate his position as the unquestionable leader of the "Islamic revolution". With the help of the newly won state power and his organized mass base among the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the marginalized unemployed masses he could start beating down every progressive movement and layer with a fierce repression just a few months after the uprising. Elementary democratic rights were flouted. The organizations of the workers and progressive movement were declared illegal. The labor law denies the workers any possibility to organize. Women are deprived of their most elementary human rights. A bloody war is being waged against the Kurds. Even the extremely limited gains that the peasants made during the Shah's land reform are partially lost. The political and social roots of the Khomeiny movement lay essentially in the pre-capitalist past and this is the basic reason why it shows such uncompromising hostility to every progressive class and tendency in the Iranian society. While it is unable to effectively run and stabilize the capitalist system in Iran or to win social support among any other social class, it can only rule with the help of bloody and arbitrary repression and by permanent mobilization of its supporters to take campaigns against external enemies (embassy bombings 1979-81 and the war against Iraq since 1980).

Parallel with its anti-imperialist demagoguery the regime has

Proposed Amendments to the Draft Theses on the International Situation

By Pekka Haapakoski

Central Committee member of the Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth International

[The "Theses on the International Situation", adopted by a majority of the United Secretariat in October 1983, were published in *IIDB*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, December 1983.]

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Page 3, left column, paragraph 9:

Replace the entire paragraph with:

The emerging revolutionary process in Central America, which can come to extend the socialist revolution to this area, is a crucial challenge to imperialism. It demonstrates in practice the possibility of revolutionary victories at the very moment when the social and political crisis in southern Latin America is opening quantitatively still more important revolutionary possibilities in this part of the continent.

* * *

Page 4, right column, paragraph 2:

The sentence beginning "Soviet intervention . . ." should be cut.

* * *

Page 5, right column, paragraph 5:

The two first sentences should be replaced by the following:

This aggravation of inter-imperialist competition is taking place when the supremacy of American imperialism has seriously declined. The productivity advantages it enjoyed for several decades over its main European or Japanese competitors have been eroded (cars, steel, machine tools, electrical equipment, robots). Today American imperialists have been widely bypassed by leading European powers in African markets and by Japanese capital in important parts of Asia. Moreover, both Japanese and European imperialists are increasingly beginning to challenge the hegemony of American capital in parts of Middle East and Latin America and indeed in American home markets. In the markets of the European bureaucratized workers' states the European imperialists have gained important bridgeheads and are aggressively interested in keeping these, which increases their economic and political contradictions with the U.S.

* * *

Page 6, left column, paragraph 4:

Add to the end of the paragraph:

Further factors weakening the position of Japanese imperialism in the inter-imperialist competition are its extreme dependence on imported raw materials and its obvious lack of means to defend its positions by political/military methods in the style of U.S. or even European imperialists. That is why it may well be that the Japanese exports will be the main victim of the next wave of protectionism in the emerging inter-imperialist economic warfare.

* * *

Page 6, right column, paragraph 7:

Replace entire paragraph with:

On the other hand the reformist electoral victories in France, Greece, and Spain, and to a lesser degree even Sweden, express in a deformed way the basic social relationship of forces and the

opposition of the working masses to the growing unemployment and continuous eroding of their living conditions, which in absence of any class-struggle alternative is channelled to the electoral level. But the dynamic of these reformist "victories" is even in most favorable cases limited by the fact that they take place after a period of setbacks and division of the workers' movement and not as a result of mighty workers' mobilizations demanding immediate anticapitalist actions. Under these conditions the reformist governments are still acceptable — even though not preferable — alternatives for the bourgeoisies, and revolutionaries have few if any short term possibilities to bypass the reformists by mobilizing the masses around their broken promises.

* * *

Page 7, right column, paragraph 2:

The three last sentences should be replaced with:

The initial fightback, which involves sectors of the black and white working class and unemployed masses of minority ghettos, will continue to develop. Such struggles could go as far as raising the question of working class political independence, a break with the two-party system and emergence of a labor party, especially because the next Democratic presidential campaign will on the level of *concrete commitments* have nothing qualitatively different from Reagan austerity to offer. The struggle for the emergence of a mass multiracial labor party, independent of the bourgeoisie, is becoming more and more relevant.

* * *

Page 10, right column, paragraphs 3-5:

Replace all three paragraphs with:

In Iran the original mass movement that toppled the Shah's regime consisted of both reactionary and progressive opponents of the monarchy, but the capitulation of the left in front of Khomeiny and its inability to understand what he represented soon helped him to consolidate his position as the unquestionable leader of the "Iranian revolution". With the help of the newly won state power and his organized mass base among the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the marginalized unemployed masses he could start beating down every progressive movement and layer with a fierce repression just a few months after the uprising. Elementary democratic rights were flouted. The organizations of the workers and progressive movement were declared illegal. The labor law denies the workers any possibility to organize. Women are deprived of their most elementary human rights. A bloody war is being waged against the Kurds. Even the extremely limited gains that the peasants made during the Shah's land reform are partially lost. The political and social roots of the Khomeiny movement lay essentially in the pre-capitalist past and this is the basic reason why it shows such uncompromising hostility to every progressive class and tendency in the Iranian society. While it is unable to effectively run and stabilize the modern capitalist system in Iran or to win social support among any modern social class, it can only rule with the help of bloody, indiscriminate repression and by permanent mobilization of its supporters to false campaigns against external enemies (embassy occupation 1979-81 and the war against Iraq since 1980).

Parallel with its anti-imperialist demagoguery the regime has all

the time kept open its channels to various imperialist forces, first secretly through countries like Israel and Pakistan, but lately even directly. After gaining the upper hand in its war against Iraq the regime has been in the position to again increase its oil income and to use it to boost its wavering position. The Shiite hierarchy has used the oil revenues to build a vast patronage network, based on a multitude of organizations and institutions controlled by the IRP. The pasdarans (guardians of the revolution) and the army left by the old regime, slowly came to fuse in 1983, in the course of the war against Iraq.

The Iranian uprising, which mobilized millions of workers, peasants, and plebeian masses, confirms once again that there is no mechanical continuity automatically leading even the most massive mobilization to the road of permanent revolution. Even in cases where the quantitative weight of the proletariat and of workers organizations in the mass movement is great the result of the process is in no way given. In absence of workers organizational and political independence from the very first stages of the struggle and in absence of a clear revolutionary socialist alternative confronting all bourgeois, petty bourgeois or even pre-bourgeois projects inside the mass movements the danger is still great that workers fall behind these misleaders of the movement, which can only lead to inevitable defeats.

* * *

Page 11, left column, paragraphs 2-4:

Replace all three paragraphs with:

By contrast, in the present phase, the revolutionary process in Central America — especially in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala — opens obvious possibilities to advance in the direction of socialist revolution despite the many hesitations and grave political shortcomings of the present leaderships of the masses in these countries. Imperialists have grasped the full significance of this situation and are using all available means to stop further revolutionary advances — on one hand by escalating counterrevolutionary military offensives (occupation of Grenada and growing support for “contras” in Nicaragua), on the other hand by trying to pressure the leaderships to maximum concessions at the negotiating table (the Contadora plan, etc.).

At the same time class struggles in the southern cone of Latin America are entering a new phase and opening perspectives for making qualitatively higher revolutionary advances than in Central America. In Bolivia the organizations of workers and peasants have forced the bourgeois reformist government of Siles Suazo to make concession after concession to their demands and extended their struggle ever more consciously to the terrain of the control of the basic aspects of the economy. In Argentina the new civilian regime of Alfonsín is trying to temporarily satisfy the demands of the masses by prosecuting some of the military butchers of the previous regime, but without any base in the trade unions his regime has few means to force his version of austerity policy to the working class at medium term. In Chile the mass mobilizations against the isolated and totally discredited Pinochet-regime are growing month by month and drawing new support from practically all social classes at the same time as it is getting obvious that the Christian Democratic attempts to limit the protest movement to a tool of pressure politics under its leadership has failed. The time when the masses will definitively settle accounts with the dictatorship and its butchers is not far away. In Uruguay a similar mass movement against the military dictatorship is growing month by month and in Brazil the growing misery of the masses and mass unemployment are creating ever more militant forms of mass protest.

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Page 12, left column, paragraph 1:

Replace the entire paragraph with:

The bureaucratically deformed and degenerated workers states in Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Indochina, and Cuba have during the last decades in various degrees been experiencing a growing crisis of bureaucratic rule. Its main expressions, especially in the Soviet Union, some Eastern European countries, and China, have been a direct stagnation of the economic growth and growing discontent among the masses. In the case of Poland this rapidly grew into dimensions of a potentially revolutionary mass movement 1980-81. This crisis has been enhanced by the crisis of the imperialist system, but it is not the mere extension of the latter. It has its own specific causes and roots in the dual character of these states as deformed/degenerated workers states and in the contradictions inherent in bureaucratic management of a planned economy.

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Page 14, left column, paragraph 1:

Strike out the entire paragraph.

* * *

Page 14, left column, last paragraph (continuing on the top of the right column):

Replace entire paragraph with:

The fatal main weakness of Solidarnosc as the existing leadership of Polish working class can be analyzed on two levels, which of course have logical connection with each other. On political-ideological level it was born as a kind of negative mirror image of the rotten bureaucratic ruling caste and the kind of ‘real socialism’ this represented. The politics and ideology of Solidarnosc was in a high degree developed by putting a minus where the bureaucracy put a plus. That is why the developing opposition, despite its overwhelmingly proletarian composition sought many elements of its ideology from bourgeois sources in the pre-Stalinist Polish past and in the capitalist West: the Catholic ideology of the Polish church, the pervading Polish nationalism, the idealization of the Pilsudski-era and even deep illusions in the ‘democratic and human rights traditions’ of the capitalist West combined with blindness for the few but real gains that exist even in the deformed framework of ‘real socialism’.

These elements of non-proletarian ideologies and a spontaneous rejection of everything connected with the only form of ‘socialism’ that the Polish workers knew led the Solidarnosc leadership to many gravely wrong political positions, dangerous concessions to hostile social forces and to a failure of developing alternative model for a socialist development — based on democratic planning and workers democracy on bases of collectivized property relations. The repeated appeals to bourgeois forces in the West, the readiness to allow the IMF a say in running the Polish economy, the uncritical support to privatization demands of Polish peasants and the projected abolishing of central planning as the guideline of the economy are the gravest examples of these political mistakes of the 1980-1981 period.

None of these weaknesses of course in any way motivates a hesitation in unconditional support for the organizations and struggles of the Polish proletariat, either before or after the Jaruzelski coup. Despite its political weaknesses the leadership of the Polish proletariat during its struggle developed a long series of demands that belong to any antibureaucratic political revolution in workers’ states: abolishing of bureaucratic privileges and censorship, dissolving of the repressive organs, free trade unions and full rights to strike, workers’ self management and even workers’ militia. If the Polish workers had succeeded in taking the power with this program, it would have been a tremendous step forward, not only for them, but for all the workers of the world. Because of the political weaknesses of the leadership it

would not have guaranteed the necessary economic policies for the advancement towards a classless socialist society and it would probably even have created new problems on this road. But it would have created a totally new framework for a political struggle for a revolutionary marxist alternative and a staging point for spreading the political revolution to all Eastern Europe and to the USSR itself.

But the Solidarnosc leadership had another fatal weakness, on the level of its political strategy: its inability to see the necessity of fighting for the overthrowing of the bureaucracy and conquering the power. After more than a year of vulgar reformist illusions of 'coexistence of state and civil society' and/or gradual gaining of the power bit by bit, the most advanced elements of Solidarnosc began to see the necessity to overthrow the bureaucracy by 'active strikes', workers' militias and a revolutionary general strike, but the Jaruzelski coup came between.

Even after the coup, under the traumatic experiences of the military dictatorship important parts of Solidarnosc leadership have been slow in drawing the necessary conclusions of the defeat and starting to prepare for an insurrectionary general strike. Before a sufficiently authoritative underground leadership, united around this kind of perspective, emerges from the present disputes, the resistance cannot hope to win any decisive gains in the struggle against the bureaucratic military dictatorship.

Revolutionary Marxists reject however any defeatism which consists in subordinating the possibility of political revolution in Eastern Europe to the breaking out of a vast mass opposition in the USSR. What the Polish events have demonstrated, confirms in practice one of the basic lessons of Marxism — the proletariat's immense potential for mobilization, self-organization, creativity and capacity to reorganize the society on historically and objectively socialist bases, once it represents the majority of the working people. In the future, in the USSR, China, and all other present workers states there will be similar explosions. The Polish events verify two theoretical bases of revolutionary marxism: the actuality of proletarian revolution and the necessity of a revolutionary leadership, equal to the tasks of the period and thus able to correctly lead it.

The Polish proletariat suffered a real defeat on December 13, 1981. But it did not come away emptyhanded. The bureaucracy has tactically succeeded, but it is far from having restabilized its dictatorship. The workers maintain elements of organization which are more limited and less effective than the legal possibilities they had 1980-81. A capacity and will of resistance still exists, even though only sporadically and not on a continual basis. Above all they have acquired an enormous experience, the consequences of which in terms of vanguard consciousness and organization will be fertile — including for stimulating the rebirth of Marxism among the Polish proletariat itself and in all Eastern Europe. Revolutionary Marxists will take part in all efforts to organize a broader antibureaucratic and anticapitalist vanguard. They will do all they can to reanimate any initiatives of mass self-organization.

At the same time they will comradely but firmly criticize all the political and ideological weaknesses of the emerging leaderships and to raise the full program for political revolution, democratic centralist planning, workers democracy and uncompromising internationalism in their work in these states. They will continue and extend their efforts to build specifically revolutionary Marxist parties, linked to the Fourth International, and to create the necessary cadres and publications for winning the workers to a program that corresponds to their objective interests and aspirations as a class.

Replace points 30 and 31 with:

30) The present crisis of world capitalism is steadily strengthening its *political* and *economic* tendencies to stake on massive *rearmament* and thus increasing the *danger of war*. Since the late seventies there has been a gradual shift in the imperialist strategy from the short-lived 'detente' towards a new cold war, which has come to full bloom during the present Reagan regime in the USA. This change corresponds to several parallel needs and objectives:

- The growing arms race is helping to provide a new 'replacement market' that will allow the profit rates to increase, that is for production to expand, without increasing the standard of living of the masses. During the present crisis the arms industries remain one of the few branches increasing their profits from year to year, and their markets are steadily growing inside the imperialist countries as well as in the 'third world'.

- After the humiliating defeats in Indochina, Angola, Iran, and Nicaragua imperialism has a burning need to rebuild a strong, mobile, and effective strike force to stop any further advances of revolutionary movements and national liberation forces in the semicolonial and dependent countries, or as a last resort even in imperialist countries themselves.

- The ultimate objective of imperialism's massive arms race and new cold war is however not limited to stopping *new advances* of world revolution. Starting to 'roll back' the *previous revolutions* is one of the goals of the present massive rearmament cycle. By steadily increasing its military pressure against smaller workers states like Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba or even states like Sandinista Nicaragua, imperialism is trying to weaken and destabilize them both directly and indirectly (indirectly by forcing them to channel ever growing parts of their resources to military purposes), and to prepare ground for eliminating their revolutionary gains and reconquering their markets.

- In the case of the strongest workers states, the Soviet Union and China, which possess nuclear strike forces, the ultimate aims of imperialism are the same: eliminating their objective effects on the international class struggle and reconquering their lost territories. Especially in the case of the Soviet Union American imperialism has lost its detente illusions of Soviet bureaucrats as *effective* tools in stopping revolutionary upheavals and is now hectically preparing to confront Soviet by military force wherever it tries to help forces fighting against imperialism. This is the significance of the massive American buildup of an entire new generation of strategic nuclear weapons and of the speeches of winning a nuclear war. The American ruling class is trying to develop a nuclear 'first strike capacity' because it is coolly calculating that somewhere on the road of its present counterrevolutionary offensive it may have to confront the Soviet Union by nuclear force and in such a situation be able to wipe it out with one mighty 'first strike'. Without planning to start a nuclear war against the Soviet Union the U.S. ruling class is counting on a probable future 'necessity' of it and preparing for this purpose. In this sense the destruction of the Soviet Union is the ultimate logic of the present nuclear arms race. The utter irrationality of this kind of logic is just one more proof of the thoroughly irrational character of capitalism itself.

31) The arms race is not confined to the escalation of nuclear weapons, far from it. It should be noted in particular that 10 percent of the U.S. military budget are allocated to these weapons, while 25 percent go towards interventions in so-called third world countries. The remainder goes to conventional weapons, chemical weapons, and research. Nevertheless, the specter of the nuclear holocaust is not the product of some great irrational fear. It corresponds to the qualitative transformation of the means of destruction since World War II. Their murderous potential has advanced more in the last 30 years than in the period stretching

from the age of the sling to World War I.

The nuclear destruction capacity which already exists at the threshold of the eighties represents more than one million Hiroshimas and the possibility of annihilating the entire population of the planet 20 times over. The French nuclear arsenal alone — although it may appear dwarfish — represents 1,000 potential Hiroshimas. A nuclear world war would signal humanity's collapse into barbarism and perhaps the destruction of all human life from the face of the Earth.

As it is, the risks of accidents and the outbreak of localized nuclear conflicts are increasing for political as well as military reasons as a result of the development of a whole gamut of sophisticated weaponry, including chemical weapons, which are beginning to bridge the gap which had existed between conventional and nuclear weapons. The possession of nuclear arms by a growing number of relatively independent reactionary regimes (Israel, South Africa, Pakistan?, Argentina?, Brazil?) and the growing temptation to use them in regional wars (Middle East, southern Africa) is also rapidly increasing the danger of nuclear war, as well as the ever bolder counterrevolutionary interventions of U.S. and other main imperialist powers on areas where the Soviet Union and its allies have important interests at stake.

It would be as irresponsible to deny the possibility of nuclear war as it is to declare its inevitability. Arguments like 'war is not possible before capitalists have defeated the working class' or 'capitalists are rational beings and do not want to destroy their own base of wealth' are not valid in the age of nuclear weapons. Nuclear wars are not started by armed workers in uniforms nor stopped by popular demonstrations once started. And capitalism is *not* a rational system, but a system full of contradictions and often forced to situations that are far from wanted or rationally calculated.

A thermonuclear war would signal humanity's collapse into barbarism or its total annihilation. This implies a qualitative difference with the First and Second World Wars in relation to the possible consequences of the war for the perspective of building a socialist world. But it does not necessarily change the strategic tasks or the methods of work of revolutionary Marxists either before a war or during it. Now, as before, the strategy of revolutionaries is to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of war in advance — with the means of mass mobilizations with revolutionary perspectives. And if a war breaks out anyway, the task now as before is to try to turn the energy and hatred of the masses from the 'external' enemies to the real enemies at home — the guilty ruling classes. The difference between now and before is not in strategy but in the fact that the preventing of war is now more than ever a question of life and death for all humanity, because after an eventual nuclear war there would probably be few survivors to fight for socialism and still fewer material means to build it.

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Page 17, right column, paragraph 2, sentence 4:

Eliminate the following phrase:

... or against the self-determination of peoples (Afghanistan).

* * *

Page 17, right column, paragraph 5:

Eliminate the entire paragraph.

* * *

Pages 17-18, Point 36:

Replace the entire Point 36 with:

36) Mass pacifism in capitalist Europe, North America, and Japan is a highly contradictory factor in the antiwar movements and demands a carefully selective approach from the side of revolutionary Marxists. On one hand the pacifism of common work-

ing people in these movements often is their first instinctive reaction against the war preparations of their own ruling classes. Insofar as it is channeled to demands to stop their armament projects and to disarm unilaterally, it gets a highly progressive concrete content. On the other hand the pacifism of the established social democratic, petty bourgeois, and bourgeois leaders of the present peace movements in most cases serves no progressive purposes, but on the contrary functions as a camouflage for *particular* imperialist interests or as an alibi for loading the responsibility for the arms race to *certain* imperialist powers (or still worse: to the 'two superpowers'). *This kind* of pacifism must be mercilessly revealed for what it is: '... With all its good intentions petty bourgeois pacifism becomes a drug with the help of which the imperialists overcome the masses at the proper moment and make cannon fodder out of them.' (Leon Trotsky).

The concrete content and character of the 'peace movements' also varies sharply from country to country. In many West European-NATO countries these movements have a real anti-imperialist thrust, being mainly directed against concrete and actual imperialist armaments projects. In Japan the peace movements have been growing out of the traumatic experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and even here they often raise concrete demands against the presence of American imperialism and the Japanese rearmament. On the other hand in small 'neutral' imperialist countries like Sweden or Austria the movements mainly do not raise any clear demands either against the specific NATO-plans or against the armaments of their *own* bourgeoisies. On the contrary their main function often is to make advertising for various illusory negotiation solutions or for the diplomatic initiatives of their own bourgeoisies. In the United States itself the peace movement is very heterogeneous and weak, but its mainstream current — the so called nuclear freezers — represent nothing else than an alternative imperialist armaments project, where more and better conventional arms will replace Reagan's new strategic missiles.

Revolutionary Marxists must decide from case to case the forms and the depth of their intervention to this uneven and multi-faceted movement. Everywhere where the 'peace actions' raise politically important concrete demands and/or mobilize wide layers of workers and radicalized youth, revolutionary Marxists must be in the front lines of these mobilizations, raising banners like 'No Pershing and cruise missiles', 'No neutron bomb', 'Out with NATO-bases, break with NATO', 'Down with the nuclear weapons and military budgets of our own bourgeoisie' and 'Jobs, not bombs'.

* * *

Page 18, Point 37:

Replace all of Point 37 with:

37) In Eastern Europe the peace movements and individual peace activists are in most cases persecuted and repressed by the security organs of the ruling bureaucracies. We condemn unconditionally this kind of repression and support wholeheartedly the right of peace activists to express their opinions freely and to organize support for them among the population. This is not only because we are for political freedom for all dissident tendencies in the bureaucratic workers states as part of our democratic program. Many of the actions and demands of Eastern European peace activists have also great political importance and can contribute to the development towards growing antibureaucratic mass struggles and political revolutions in these countries. This is the case e.g. with the demands of abolishing the caste privileges of the military, eliminating the dangers of nuclear industries against the workers and the populations as a whole, putting the armaments industries under workers control and preventing the using of military troops as organs of repression. On the

other hand revolutionary Marxists cannot give the Eastern European peace movements any kind of 'blank check' of unconditional political support independently of what kinds of demands these movements raise in each concrete case. For example, we do not support demands of unilateral Eastern disarmament in face of the escalating imperialist war preparations and still less do we support groups that solidarize with the imperialist regimes and call these to build strong defences against the 'communist threat'.

* * *

Pages 18-19, Point 38:

Replace all of Point 38 with:

38) The Argentine military's reactionary adventure on the Falklands was erroneously described as some kind of justified 'anti-imperialist' action by even many leftists. The real case was radically different. To boost their wavering dictatorship at home the butchers of Casa Rosada launched, in the spring of 1982, a desperate military action to annex the Falkland Islands from the hands of the British imperialists (after first having considered the alternative of war against Chile). The ruling military junta surrounded its adventure with a lot of ultranationalist and 'anti-imperialist' noise, without it having any concrete anti-imperialist content. The population of the islands were bitterly opposed to their forced 'liberation' and hundreds of Argentine workers were sent to die for nothing else but the blood stained 'national glory' of Galtieri and his fellow butchers. In this situation most of the Argentine and international left capitulated to the false 'anti-imperialism' of the Junta, supported its war and even demanded more arms to its bloody hands. The only correct approach — as many Argentine workers have come to recognize afterwards — would have been to mobilize British and Argentine workers against their own rulers and armies under concrete slogans like 'The war is at home — we will not die for Galtieri', 'Free all political prisoners', 'Full political and trade union rights now', 'Money to jobs and wages, not to the war'. These could have been combined with *real* anti-imperialist demands like 'Nationalize all imperialist property without compensation', 'Renounce the foreign debts' and 'Break all military ties to US and other imperialisms'.

The crisis racking the dependent capitalist countries and the changes in the relationship of forces in the imperialist world as a whole are also reflected in the spreading of military conflicts in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. On one hand these conflicts are a direct product of the kind of 'Balkanization' that imperialism left as a heritage for entire regions of the world. On the other hand they also represent more conjuncturally attempts of ruling bourgeoisies of more or less dependent countries to use the weakened grip of main imperialist centers (or some of them) on entire regions to strengthen their own positions in their regions — at the cost of their neighbors. The existence of the Soviet bloc and the continuous shifts in the relationships of forces and 'zones of influence' between different imperialist powers have greatly increased the maneuvering room of the strongest dependent bourgeoisies to try to 'balance' between different blocks and to play them against each other to promote their own particular 'national' interests. Wars between India and Pakistan, Somalia and Ethiopia, and Iran and Iraq belong to this

category, as well as even the 'internationalized' civil wars in Chad and Lebanon.

In relation to these conflicts revolutionary Marxists cannot develop any universal 'code of conduct', valid to all cases. They have to make in each particular case a concrete analysis, on one hand of the class forces involved, on the other hand of the eventual role of imperialism in the military conflicts. Of these criteria the internal class nature of the fighting forces and/or states is the most important factor defining which attitude to take to the adversaries on both sides. In cases where direct imperialist military intervention to the conflict on one side gives the struggle of the other side character of national liberation struggle even under bourgeois leadership (as in the struggle of 'frontline states' against South Africa and its puppet forces or in the struggle of Palestinians, Lebanese leftists or even Arab states against the Zionist state and its clients) revolutionary Marxists give such struggles military support to help the masses to strike blows against their momentarily strongest enemies. But in most cases of wars between dependent bourgeois *states* the conflict is between the specific class interests of the contesting ruling classes and the workers and peasants of these countries have no interest whatsoever to take sides between these. For revolutionary Marxists it is also clear that such superficial criteria as conjuncturally more or less anti-imperialist image or even close relations to some workers states of dependent bourgeois governments in no way gives progressive class content to the warfare of such governments against neighboring, equally bourgeois governments. Objective class criteria — not demagogic declarations or diplomatic balancing acts — must be the basis of taking stands in inter-state wars in the 'third world'. In most cases — as in wars between India and Pakistan, Somalia and Ethiopia, and Iran and Iraq — this means revolutionary opposition to the wars in both countries.

In general the bourgeoisies of the dependent countries have developed relatively large military machines to counter the rising social explosiveness and to consolidate their rule through repression, often with the backing of imperialism. These ruling classes have learned to revive ancient territorial claims or to launch nationalist campaigns in order to sidetrack the social and democratic aspirations of the masses.

In conflicts of this type revolutionary Marxists put forward an internationalist line of class independence. They point to the road of the struggle of the popular masses both against imperialism and their own oppressors. During armed conflicts between their governments they advocate fraternization of uniformed soldiers of both sides over the heads of the brass and strive to use the conditions of war to turn the anger of the masses against their governments to hasten their downfall.

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Page 20, right column, paragraph 4:

Replace all of paragraph 4 with:

Such solidarity campaigns around correct minimum platforms must always be combined with specifically revolutionary marxist propaganda, raising the full program of permanent revolution/antibureaucratic political revolution and fraternally but firmly criticizing all the political weaknesses and mistakes of the present leaderships.

Report on the British Political Situation

By Joseph

[This report was presented by Joseph, on behalf of the Faction in the British section of the Fourth International, at the section's central committee meeting February 18 and 19, 1984. It has been slightly abridged to conform to the limit on length of submissions to the IIDB decided by the United Secretariat.]

Introduction

Today, the British working class is on the defensive. The attack by the Tories — starting in 1979 — is more unrelenting and more severe than anything experienced by our class since the 1930s. Under the leadership of Thatcher, the Tories have broken sharply with the consensus politics of the post-war years. The working class has found that the methods of struggle perfected in the boom years are inadequate to deal with the character and intensity of the assault, especially in the context of the deep recession.

Thatcher's attacks are part of an imperialist counter-offensive on a world scale. The ruling class is trying to maintain its rate of profit as revolutionary advances are being made in the colonial world and as the years of the long boom have been replaced by frequent periods of recession and a perspective of long-term capitalist stagnation.

Workers have fought back against the bosses ferocious offensive. Some victories have been scored, sometimes stalemates have ensued, other times the struggles launched have prevented the bosses achieving everything they intended. But overall, there have been more setbacks and sectoral defeats than outright victories.

In looking at the setbacks which the working class has suffered, the majority leadership makes the judgment that our class has shifted organically to the right, mirroring the right-wing shift of capitalist politics. From this erroneous judgment — and from its incapacity to lead the turn to industry, the majority leadership has successfully carried through a counter-revolution *against* the turn. It has publicly dissolved the organisation to carry out a political operation aimed at white-collar and educated layers in the wards of the Co-op. Comrades have been blocked from taking industrial jobs, and the majority leadership has re-evaluated the white-collar and public sector fractions as priority areas. Similarly, student work has been prioritised, outside of a framework which centres our concerns on the industrial working class.

As a result of its pessimistic judgment on the class struggle, and its adaptation to the forces in the wards, the majority leadership has de-prioritised solidarity work with industrial struggles. Instead, local government and parliamentary issues are now at the forefront of our organisation's concerns. In the peace movement the majority leadership is promoting an adaptationist line and it rejects the burning need to build an anti-imperialist current in the industrial unions.

So where do we stand? Our Faction rejects the twin view that the working class has made an organic turn to the right, or that we are in a period of 'downturn'. We have therefore refused to endorse the counter-revolution on the turn. Instead (within the limits imposed on us as a faction) we are trying to deepen the turn — both numerically and politically.

Today I want to take a longer view of the struggles of the last decade. This will help get to the root of the errors made by the majority, and by other forces including the petty bourgeois and

stalinist leftists. And it will allow us to deepen our understanding of the stage which our class has reached, and therefore our understanding of the turn and our tasks.

Our view is not some mirror image of the majority leadership. We don't place a plus where it places a minus — despite some over-optimistic formulations that we have sometimes advanced. We recognise that the class has suffered setbacks. However, we are convinced that workers still consider it's possible to meet the offensive of the Tories and the bosses. That is, we judge that the working class has not suffered any *qualitative* reversal in the relationship of class forces. We have seen that in the very thick of the ruling class attacks a section of workers has been able to draw lessons of their defeats and apply them to future rounds of the struggle.

In other words, there has been a deepening *polarisation* in society, but also in the working class itself. A layer of workers — in the face of mis-leadership by the bureaucracy — has moved to the right. But another significant layer has moved further to the left. This polarisation is a *social* polarisation. As industrial workers and industrial unions move increasingly to the centre of British politics, class divisions are more openly understood. Furthermore, there is a polarisation at the level of ideology. The cold war language and antisovietism that are more and more evident today are crucial elements of the ruling class offensive. For instance, the attack on the right of workers at the Government Communications Headquarters to belong to a trade union has been carried out on the basis of this type of ideological offensive by the Tories.

As this process of polarisation deepens we begin to see some sections of the class — those relatively better off — who identify with individual solutions to the crisis, with class collaboration and with nationalist solutions. These workers are the ones who talk about 'my home', 'my job', 'my factory', 'my boss' and 'my country'. But this isn't the end of the story. There is also another layer of workers emerging who reject the 'my' in favour of 'our'. That is, they see their interests tied up not with those of the boss or the country, but with the common interests they share with other workers and their allies. There is something else we should note in this process. That this cleavage between workers is less frequently seen as differences between those workers with good ideas and those with bad ideas. The differences are posed *increasingly clearly as fundamentally different class perspectives*.

Now, of course to date, no large layer of these workers has drawn revolutionary conclusions. The revolutionaries of action which we have identified have not yet crystallised into a *layer*. But the growth of the British SWP and Militant shows it is possible to recruit such workers. And our own experience in industry confirms similar possibilities for our own organisation. Moreover, again because we are in industry, we have first-hand knowledge of the openness of a much broader layer of rank and file workers to class struggle solutions to their problems; to the

demands and aspirations of oppressed women and blacks; and to the struggles of our brothers and sisters facing imperialist aggression.

Our experience leads us to conclude that the situation today is *more* favourable to the intervention of revolutionaries than at any time since the Second World War. This estimate of the opportunities open to our party is fundamentally contested by the majority leadership.

The period opened by 1968

When we say that there has been no fundamental shift in the relation of class forces, we are insisting that we still remain in the period opened by 1968. What does this judgment entail, and how do we see this period? What changed with 1968?

First of all, the struggle in the colonial and semi-colonial world continued to unfold as revolutionary breakthroughs were achieved. There was nothing qualitatively new in this from the previous pattern. What was new was the projected growth in the weight and impact of the class struggle in the imperialist countries upon the world revolution.

Events like May 1968 in France and Portugal in 1974–75 showed that pre-revolutionary crises were possible in advanced imperialist countries. This was the new element which informed the judgment that a new period had opened. That is, the rise of colonial struggles which marked the post-war period as a whole — with China in 1949, Korea in 1952 and a whole series of confrontations in Latin America in the fifties culminating in the Cuban revolution in 1959 — would, after 1968, take place in a context where the perspective for revolutionary advance in the imperialist countries themselves was on the agenda.

In 1979, the World Congress re-affirmed this view. We were still in the period opened by 1968. Furthermore, the World Political Resolution registered the continued shift in the international relation of class forces to the detriment of imperialism. The defeat of American imperialism in Indochina, the revolutionary process in Iran, and the US-backed oligarchy in Nicaragua were evidence of this shift. Today, despite the overthrow of the workers and farmers government by the Coard-Austin clique in Grenada and the subsequent US invasion, we maintain that we remain in the period opened by 1968. There has been no qualitative change in the relation of class forces on a world scale in favour of imperialism.

The World Congress also pointed to the trend towards proletarian predominance in the class struggle — in both the imperialist countries and the deformed and degenerated workers' states, as well as in the semi-colonial and colonial world. This increasingly central role of the working class, especially the industrial workers, has been evident in struggles from Poland to Brazil to Britain.

However, the continuing rise in world revolution has been met by a strident counter-offensive on every level by imperialism. Economically, the imperialist powers have unleashed a severe austerity drive against their own working class. The imperialist drive towards war has been accompanied by an unrelenting political offensive against the workers states and against any revolutionary advances made by the exploited and oppressed. On a military level imperialism is ready to intervene openly if that is required. In the case of the Malvinas British troops in combat were used by the ruling class to shift public opinion away from any anti-war sentiment in the working class. However, we shouldn't confuse open military intervention by imperialist forces as a sign of strength. For example, if the US is forced to invade Nicaragua this will be a sign of its political weakness. The Kissinger Report makes clear that the American rulers see this as a likely option. However, this need to resort to military might has an enormous political price tag attached.

Today, imperialism cannot go on in the old way. Its room for manoeuvre is limited. That's why it openly intervenes across the globe. Yet no sooner has it patched up one area than it is forced to deal with explosions in another country.

We reject any idea that today there has been a shift towards the predominance of struggles in the colonial world which rules out revolutionary advances in the imperialist countries. Any view which identifies the colonial world as a weak link in the imperialist chain (correctly), but then concludes that we should adopt a 'Third Worldist' perspective completely misunderstands Lenin's analysis of imperialism. This kind of structuralist view misses the essential point: that is, a defeat for US imperialism in Central America, for instance, would rock the social fabric of the US itself from top to bottom. This is equally the case for Britain in the event of a defeat for British imperialism in Ireland. That is why we insist Ireland and the Irish revolution is a key starting point for any strategy for the British revolution itself.

There is a weakening of imperialism on a global scale today. Just compare the defeats in Spain in the 30s with that of what is happening in Chile today. It took decades for the Spanish working class to recover after the defeat of the Civil War. Yet in Chile, despite the military dictatorship, mass mobilisations and a re-organisation of the working class and oppressed is underway, after little more than ten years.

When we talk of still being in the period opened by 1968, it's important to understand what preceded it. This will help us situate the present setbacks of the class and help us to respond to the majority leadership's claim that this period has ended. The retreat of the working class today bears no relation to what occurred in the post-1945 years. After the war, the working class retreated in a period of rising prosperity, when capitalism had the capacity to grant major concessions. The bureaucracy was therefore able to rule the roost virtually unchallenged. This was a key feature of the post-war years — not just that there were few struggles of the working class. Let's look at this pre-1968 period in a bit more detail. (. . .)

The rise of the Scanlon-Jones leadership

It is often remarked that the period in Britain opened by 1968 was symbolised with the election of Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones to the leadership of the Engineering union and the Transport workers union respectively, as well as the mass student and youth explosion centred on protesting the US's war in Vietnam.

The rise of these two leaders reflected the growing strength of the rank and file in the unions, primarily organised in the shop stewards movement.

During the 1960's this movement had grown stronger and organised a series of strikes which led to a rapid rise in wages and living standards. The ability of these bodies to win reforms through short term unofficial action, often through struggles of a single department, let alone in a single factory or on a combine-wide level, led to a battle in the unions for the recognition of this new rank and file leadership.

Scanlon, elected in 1967, and Jones (the successor to Frank Cousins) were the end products of this gradual shift in the relation of forces towards the rank and file leaders in the shop stewards organisation. Although they were seen as left leaders, they didn't represent a fundamental challenge to the system. Rather they represented a willingness to give more scope and initiative to the rank and file. The policies they advocated were dependent on the post-war boom which allowed the bosses to make some concessions. These policies were thrown into complete crisis with the onset of the recession.

Their election didn't in any way mark the beginning of a class struggle left wing in the unions. However what it did open up

was a process where militants started to recapture class struggle methods, the striving for class solidarity, and class independence. Yet no broad layer of revolutionary workers was created in this period.

This is not to say that it was impossible to recruit workers during this period. Indeed, the IS (today the SWP) were able to recruit and to get a layer of workers around them. But because the IS was unable to confront the syndicalist consciousness of these workers and educate them as communists, it kept very few of the recruits from this period.

Strike figures are decisive indicators for marxists to gauge the state of the class struggle and they can help us appreciate more deeply the period opened by 1968. Unlike elections, strike figures do not merely *refract* the class struggle, but they more accurately *reflect* it. And these figures tell us above anything else that a new period opened up in British politics around 1968. The strike waves of 1972, 1974 and 1979 have each been qualitatively bigger than those of the 1950s and 1960s — the period of the post-war boom. Indeed, in terms of the number of working days lost through strikes, the strike wave of 1979 was bigger than in 1972.

The struggles of this period have defined and formed the political consciousness in the working class. The working class engaged in political strikes, in strikes over immediate economic demands, and in solidarity strikes. It developed tactics like flying pickets and occupations and it brought into struggle sections of workers hitherto not central to the struggles of the class — including women workers, black workers and public sector workers.

The majority of political strikes in this period were of course against Government legislation. In December 1970 the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (led by the Communist Party) organised a half a million strong strike against the Industrial Relations Bill. It forced the TUC to call a day of action the following February. In March, the AUEW organised one and a half million workers to strike against the Industrial Relations Act. In the summer of 1971, the Upper Clyde Shipyard workers started their work-in, eventually bringing a near general strike in Scotland. Benn marched arm in arm with shop stewards and headed up the left developments inside the Labour Party.

This set the scene for widespread occupations not seen since the 1920s in Britain. A whole spate of occupations became the focus for solidarity in the labour movement: Plessey, Fisher-Bendix, ITT-Maclarens, and in the spring of 1972, the Manchester Engineering Occupations.

The early 1970s also saw the take off of women's struggles for equal pay following the example set by the women Ford workers in 1968. Women struck and occupied from the nightcleaners who demanded union rights and decent pay, to workers at Yardleys, SEI, and Trico. The material basis for the women's liberation movement was laid by the massive influx of women into the workforce with changed expectations and aspirations. Educated young women rebelling against such discrimination organised the first British women's liberation conference in 1970. As part of the student radicalisation, this movement deepened the awareness and politicisation in the working class for women's rights. The high-point of this development was the TUC demonstration in defence of women's abortion rights.

Spring 1972 saw the strike wave which lasted until 1974. It was spearheaded by the miners who organised against Phase One of the Incomes policy of the government. Today everyone has heard of the battle of Saltley Gates, when flying pickets of miners were joined by 10,000 solidarity strikers from Birmingham East AUEW. This enormous demonstration of solidarity successfully closed the Saltley Coke Depot.

This tactic of flying pickets was also used by striking building

workers in their national strike that summer.

In July, a second major solidarity strike occurred. Print workers came out to support five dockers who were jailed for illegal picketing. Widespread solidarity developed. The TUC was forced to call for a one day general strike. As the stakes grew higher, the ruling class discovered their fairy godmother — the Official Solicitor — who suddenly had the power to release the Pentonville Five.

Political strikes continued against the Industrial Relations Act and the AUEW was fined. The union responded with a one day strike in May 1973. A year later, the National Industrial Relations Court was the target of another one day strike when that body ruled that the union's funds were to be seized. This time, an unknown benefactor — probably the Engineering Employers Federation — stepped in to pay the fine.

These strikes were by and large in the core sections of the class — engineering workers, cars, docks, building workers and printworkers. It was this same group of workers that dominated the next surge of working class struggle during the winter of discontent.

This militancy also spread to other sectors. Teachers took their first unofficial action during the years 1969-72, as did the CPSA, the civil servants union. These struggles took place as more and more workers joined unions, which they saw as bodies that would fight for their rights and to protect their living standards. A rapid increase in trade union membership was registered in this period. Between 1968 and 1980 union figures increased by 3 million. This was an increase from 42.5% to 53% of potential union members. Women accounted for the bulk of this increase, reflecting not only the struggles they were leading but also their self-activity inside the unions.

In February 1974, after the second miners strike, the Tories were in direct confrontation with the working class. The non-unionised, and the weaker and less-well organised workers were caught in the government-imposed three day work week and the black-outs of the miners strike.

A deep polarisation had begun. But it didn't affect the class uniformly. Large sections of workers saw the necessity to prepare for confrontation and political strikes. Many did not. This polarisation reflected itself politically. Labour, as an opposition party, was identified with the unions and industrial unrest. The 1974 manifesto was seen as a radical policy which promised changes of a scope similar to 1945, rather than their 1964/66 policies. Heath had taken on the working class frontally and was losing. So those workers who were looking for a return to post-war consensus turned to the Liberals or the nationalist parties.

The election reflected this process. The Tories lost more votes than Labour, so a Labour Government was elected. It had the smallest vote since the war — its vote dropped from the 43.1% it won in 1970, to 37.2%. And this took place despite the rise in working class struggle.

The experience of this entire period suggested to workers that rank and file industrial militancy was sufficient to defend the interests of the working class. The first months of the Wilson government tended to reinforce this conclusion. Thus, in the first 18 months after the 1974 election of the Labour Government, workers had claimed back everything they had lost under Heath.

But the shock of the onset of the first major generalised recession since 1937-38, allowed the bureaucracy to call on the loyalties of the working class, as well as on its anti-Heath sentiments. With promises of gains in social legislation (the Equal Pay Act, the closed shop, expansion in welfare spending, and so on), the TUC tops were able to win acceptance of wage concessions. The recession played its role in creating more unfavourable conditions for struggle.

As it became clear that the Social Contract was little more than

a wage restraint policy, a process of opposition began to rise. This culminated in the massive strike wave of 1979 of the Winter of Discontent.

The 1974-79 Labour Government was the first major lesson that simple militant trade unionism was not enough. A section of the class — headed up predominantly by skilled workers — rejected the basic class lessons that the earlier period had held. Once again, class solidarity was rejected by these workers in favour of an identification with 'my job', 'my firm' or 'my country'. Individual, not class solutions to the crisis were sought by these workers. This factor, plus the relative losses these workers suffered under the wage restraint policies of Labour's Social Contract years, encouraged a shift towards Toryism.

But another layer drew opposite conclusions. This layer raised the slogan 'No more Social Contracts'. But its solution was to move from the unions into the Labour Party, to attempt to bring the Party under its control and ensure that no similar Labour governments would be elected. This movement became known as Bennism.

Thatcher breaks the mould

Thatcher fought the 1979 election with decisive policies putting an end to the post-war consensus which involved government intervention aimed at maintaining full employment and services. In the face of long-term capitalist stagnation and increased inter-imperialist competition, her strategy has centred on deliberately pushing up mass unemployment so as to create the conditions for confrontation and the defeat of the organisations of the working class.

Her political priority and resources have been to arm Britain for its role in imperialism's war drive. The recession has been used to force British industry's weaker sections to the wall, leaving it 'leaner but fitter'. It's not that her policies favour finance capital above industrial capital. By opening Britain up to the full effects of the recession, the economy is being re-structured and rationalised in order to allow it to compete on the international market. Therefore the removal of controls on the free movement of capital isn't just to ensure that a quick buck can be made abroad.

Thatcher's 1979 election victory therefore signalled a decisive change in British politics. While the Labour vote didn't significantly decline — it polled 36.9% of the vote — the Liberals and nationalist parties were squeezed by the Tories.

It would be incorrect to judge that her policies have had no success at the level of the economy. Productivity has improved massively. However, this has been primarily through a liquidation of unproductive sectors and through changes in work practices and speed-ups. It has not come through significant investment. Nevertheless according to the latest CBI report, even this seems to be changing.

Productivity and business confidence leading to investment are quite different questions than competitiveness or terms of trade. Because of the artificially high value of the pound based upon favourable overall terms of trade due primarily to oil exports, *competitiveness* has not increased as much as productivity. Exports have therefore suffered. But here again, according to the CBI report, even export prospects are changing. The majority deliberately confuses competitiveness and productivity. (See, for instance, the back page of the 25 January issue of the paper). This confusion is used to back up their erroneous view that Thatcher is out of line with the needs of the British capitalist class.

In this regard, we reject totally the majority leadership's view that the Tories are based on different sections of the capitalist class. The comrades have offered several explanations for this judgment. They argue a fundamental division exists between in-

dustrial and finance capital, and the SDP-Liberals represent industrial capital. That's the view expressed in the new Education for Socialism pamphlet, for instance.

In the current issue of our theoretical journal there is a new twist. Now we have the notion that Thatcher represents backward, British-based, small-scale industry. The SDP-Liberals supposedly represent dynamic, large-scale, so-called European capital. This view, borrowed wholesale from Eric Hobsbawm who draws popular frontist conclusions, is equally incorrect. The fact is that Thatcher's policies are needed by the British ruling class as a whole if it is to tackle the declining rate of profit and solve the crisis in its interests.

Whether the SDP will receive the backing of British capital depends upon how far Thatcher succeeds in breaking the mould. If Thatcher's strategy is undermined by working class resistance naturally the bourgeoisie may opt for an SDP-Liberal government. Rich Palser in his June '82 article in our journal explained how the future of the SDP was related to the resistance of the working class. Far from seeing a stable base of support in the working class, Palser argued: '... if the labour bureaucracy continues to succeed in obstructing any unified fightback against the Tories on the part of the organised labour movement, then it is quite likely that despite the unpopularity of the Thatcher government, the SDP-Liberal Alliance will win a sufficient vote to ensure Labour is kept out of office.'

The SDP is a product of the polarisation in society which was reflected in the 1983 general election. In Scotland and Wales Labour candidates were returned, with the Tories badly defeated. The Northwest and the West Midlands similarly still remained solidly Labour. The same is true of industrial areas in the London region. Seventy per cent of black people voted Labour.

The fact is that the SDP is not firmly rooted in any stable social layer. It is a party of the rural areas and the suburbs. The Alliance polled 6.5 million votes or 26%, but it won only 22 seats. In contrast, Labour got 28%, but maintained its support in the industrial heart lands and won 206 seats.

Contrast this to 1931 after the defeat of the general strike. Then there were splits in Labour's ranks with MacDonald forming the National Coalition. Labour got a 31% poll then but achieved only 52 seats. It lost its ground amongst industrial workers.

Finally, despite Thatcher's 144 seat majority, the Tories experienced a two per cent fall in their vote compared to 1979. The Tories actually got the smallest vote this century of any majority government returned. The majority of British people were opposed to a Thatcher government.

But, as we have already said, just as Thatcher is intent on breaking the mould of post-war consensus, a substantial section of the working class was also intent on breaking the mould of the Wilson and Callaghan governments. During 1979 and 1980, the Labour Party became the centre of a political fight for democracy and accountability in the labour movement. After a Commission of Inquiry involving the unions met to draw up proposals on the Party's structures and finance, the Wembley conference in January 1981 endorsed the proposals of the left-wing. These included new policies for the re-election of MPs and for union participation in the election of the leadership through the newly formed electoral college.

In the next regular conference, where the new rules came into force, Tony Benn came within a whisker of winning the deputy leadership election. The campaign around his election polarised the unions from top to bottom. And this occurred as a whole series of left-wing policies were endorsed. However, these policies, and Benn's whole stance, were never linked with the direct struggles of the working class. Accordingly, many workers did not see these policies as a serious solution to the problems they

faced. For instance, many remained unconvinced that it was possible to borrow the way out of the crisis. Indeed, massive borrowing could even lead to a worsening of workers' conditions — capitalist confidence would be undermined, they reasoned, and the bite of the recession would be that much deeper. The sabotaging role of the bureaucracy reinforced these fears.

This ideology of national unity — of tightening the belt and waiting for better times — was enormously boosted by Thatcher's aggression against Argentina through the dispatch of the task force to re-take the Malvinas. The bulk of the Labour bureaucracy backed this aggression, undermining support for left policies further.

It is the bankrupt record of the bureaucracy which is responsible for any successes Thatcher has had. It is a travesty to suggest that it's because of workers supposed unwillingness to struggle because of some shift to the right of the entire working class — its 'backwardness' — as the majority variously suggests.

The state of the class struggle

As we have already stated the offensive of the Thatcher government has been the most ferocious since the 1930's. This attack is scheduled to get more intense. The NGA dispute showed Thatcher's determination to make the new draconian trade union laws stick. The objective is to qualitatively lower the living standards of the working class. The continuation of the present level of mass unemployment is vital for such an objective to have any chance of success. The social wage has to go. This entails massive attacks on welfare spending and services provided by local groups. Thatcher has shown her determination to remove every obstacle in path — like the GLC and the metropolitan councils.

Part of this offensive, and central to the next stage of the class struggle is the attack on the Labour Party and particularly the union dues paid to the Party.

As well, we can anticipate the enactment of the Police Bill — the most repressive piece of legislation ever drawn up by a peacetime British government. This too is aimed at fundamentally weakening the democratic rights and civil liberties of the labour movement. On that road, Black, Irish and other communities will come under fire.

The Youth Training Schemes are part of the attack on the union movement, as well as aimed at keeping youth in slave labour. For the undermining of union conditions for the job which such schemes entail will push down the wages and conditions of all workers.

There will be attacks on abortion rights, as with the present proposals to lower the time limit, and against women's rights in general.

New initiatives will be launched against the nationalist community in the six counties, probably in collaboration with the southern Irish government. And Thatcher will be called upon to repay her debt to the US over the Malvinas with forthright backing to Reagan's invasion of Central America.

We are confident that workers will fight back against this offensive. The biggest *offensive* for 50 years, is not at all the same thing as the biggest *defeat*, as the majority leadership thinks. On the contrary, we can anticipate some signal victories. Yet the level of leadership of the class is still such that there are likely to be many more setbacks than advances. But there is no short term possibilities for the Tories to *qualitatively* reverse the relationship of forces. We do not think that the Tories can in the short term 'translate their political victory at the election into qualitative organisational victories' as the majority confusingly poses the matter.

It's important to look at where and how we judge the exact state of the class struggle today. There are many criteria we can

use to reach our assessment, and I want to look at four: strike figures, union membership, shop-floor organisation, and living standards. If we can reach an objective assessment of these factors we'll be in a better situation to draw our political conclusions and the tasks we must set.

So, with respect to strike figures. In a recent issue of the paper — dated 6 January 1984 — comrade Pat H. wrote (speaking of the strike struggles since 1968): 'This trend of rising strike struggle has now been put into reverse.' So we want to ask, has this period come to an end? Is this a correct judgment?

It is undeniable that the strike figures from January to November 1983 are well down on the average for the early 70's. But does this signal some sort of prostration of the working class, as the majority tries to insinuate? To get an accurate judgment of their significance, we should put these figures into some historical perspective.

First off, in the period opened by 1968 we have already seen similar troughs — both in 1968 itself, and in 1976. Secondly, the idea that there has been a 10-year retreat is not born out by the huge strike wave of 1979. Furthermore, since 1979, we should note that the figures suggest workers are involved in longer strikes with larger numbers of workers. There have been more national strikes, particularly in the public sector and nationalised industries.

This fall in strike figures is not surprising given the massive increase in unemployment and the recession. Conditions are unfavourable for winning such struggles, and workers recognise this fact. But as the stakes become higher, strikes are larger and longer. The steel strike in January 1980 lasted 13 weeks, and although workers ended up with far more than the two per cent increase management first offered, they were sold on jobs.

There have been a number of subsequent occasions since Thatcher first came to office when workers have been prepared to struggle — and as the water workers showed, they have not all ended in defeat. The water workers took on the Government in spring of 1982 over the four per cent limit on wage increases for public sector workers, and they won after a national strike. However, the bureaucracy has obstructed any unified fightback against the Tories to date. The words of the Second Congress of the Communist International ring true today:

'To sum up, the union bureaucracy breaks down the powerful river of the workers' movement into small streams, substituting partial, reformist demands for the general revolutionary aims of the movement, and generally hindering the transformation of proletarian struggle into a revolutionary struggle for the destruction of capitalism.' (*Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Ink Links, p. 108.)

For instance, the unemployment marches of Liverpool, Glasgow, Cardiff and the peoples' marches which gave the working class an expression for their hatred of the Thatcher government were never organised to back industrial actions like the steel strike. Solidarity backing in the ports or transport was left to the rank and file. Time and again the right wing has sabotaged and sold out struggles that have occurred. The train drivers' strike in January 1982 was one of the most crass sell-outs with threats made by the TUC to dis-affiliate ASLEF if the strike continued.

The Leyland workers have also been victims of the bureaucrats' class collaboration. Despite several setbacks in their industry, including the sacking of Robinson, the imposition of the Slaves Charter by Michael Edwardes, and so on, the Leyland workers came close to strike action over pay in November 1981. Once again, the union leadership moved in and recommended acceptance. Nevertheless, no sooner had this been done, when a four-week dispute broke out over productivity and speed-ups at Longbridge. At that same time, Fords workers came near to a

struggle but the bureaucracy recommended acceptance despite the votes of several Ford plants against this line of inaction.

Pay strikes are more difficult to launch — as the miners have found out in a couple of national ballots. But workers are wily, plunged into battles, especially over redundancies and closures. Workers at Lee Jeans, Lawrence Scotts, Gardners, and more recently Greenings, have led determined fights even though given minimal assistance or even being stabbed in the back by the bureaucracy.

The most biting action was the miners walk-out in February 1981 against the threatened closure of 23 pits. As the action gathered strength, Thatcher was forced to make a spectacular U-turn. Then, in the 1982 ballot, despite this victory, miners voted against striking over pay in a pit head ballot. Yet this year miners have been involved in a sixteen week overtime ban in the fight to improve the measly 5 per cent pay rise that's been offered.

The most striking fact with which the bosses and the Tories have got to deal is that no central group of workers — let alone the whole class — have been taken on and decisively thrashed in struggle. In the case of the miners, the refusal to strike over pay has to be conditioned by the knowledge that the wage rises they have received to date have been well in excess of the rate of inflation.

Indeed, despite mass unemployment, workers in work generally have continued to increase their earnings beyond the level of inflation. Thus, in the months up to October 1983, average earnings rose by 8.7 per cent. This increase is primarily a product of bonuses and productivity deals and higher levels of overtime working, not of big increases in basic earnings. It has to be understood in the framework of the level of the rate of inflation which stands approximately at five per cent.

This rise in real wages helps to explain why the Tories had an easier ride in the general election (and why significant numbers of skilled workers voted Tories). Contrast this wage level to the record of the last Labour government. The real fall in wages between late 1974 and 1977 was at least 10% — the sharpest fall since the Industrial Revolution!

The fact that the working class has been able to maintain its living standards should tell us that class battles are on the agenda. But this is bad news for British capital. *The Economist* argues that the British ruling class needs a cut of 19% in living standards if it is going to restore its rate of profitability.

All this points to the general relationship of forces in the present situation. Workers struggles have a defensive character as they fight against the employers attempts to use the economic downturn to impose speed-ups and increase productivity. In this situation, workers fighting to defend basic conditions and jobs often don't feel themselves able to break through the sabotage of the bureaucracy. But any one of these struggles, as the NGA dispute shows whilst starting off defensively can very quickly turn into the offensive. This is how we must approach the class struggle not from the point of view of 'the biggest defeat for fifty years' of the demoralised leaders of the majority.

This is the period we are in today — one leading up to class confrontation, not one similar to the post-general strike years. In the twenties and thirties there was a decline in union membership after a series of setbacks and sell-outs — including Black Friday in 1921, the engineers lock-out in 1922, the smashing of the building workers in 1924, and the crushing of the general strike itself in 1926. By the early 1930s, unemployment was rocketing under MacDonald. Labour's vote collapsed with the formation of the National Government in 1931. In 1933 the unions were left with only 4.4 million members. Furthermore, even workers who managed to keep their jobs started to tear up their union cards! The strikes under the Tories have not been the last defensive actions taken by workers in a defeated mood. Instead there

are contradictory elements in the current situation and the period ahead will see massive ups and downs in the struggles. But struggles will take place!

Another area which we must consider in light of union membership levels is the state of organisation of workers in employment. We should note, for instance, that the number of shop stewards in manufacturing has been almost halved from 130,000 to 80,000. The number of full-time stewards in the same industrial group has fallen from 4,000 to 2,000. The check-off system in union dues payment has undoubtedly weakened the links between the stewards and the membership. In manufacturing, for example, 73% of members now pay by check-off. The decline in full-time stewards also weakens this link.

It is evident that as plant by plant struggles are curtailed with the economic recession and the employers' offensive, that the stewards movement has undergone a crisis. The transition from factory answers to governmental solutions to workers immediate problems is part of a process. The role of the shop stewards is changing. For instance, at British Leyland in Cowley, the fall in the number of shop stewards is also a product of changed negotiating procedures. The replacement of piecework by productivity bargaining means that stewards no longer negotiate the rate for the job.

In 1979, one aspect of the motivation for the turn to industry was the recomposition of the shop stewards movement. Comrades moving into industry commented on the new layers of workers coming forward as leaders. These workers are not as hampered by Stalinist traditions, and their consciousness is being formed by broader political questions. The war drive of imperialism, the nuclear threat, unemployment, women's rights are all issues which these workers are interested in. The young age of these workers — and the role of especially the women and black workers amongst them — led us to conclude how these workers would continue to be in the forefront of the struggles in this period.

So the decline in shop steward numbers is not an organisational problem. It can't be put down simply to demoralisation in the working class either. It stems from a political problem which will only be resolved as revolutionaries play their role in putting forward solutions and methods of struggle as they fight shoulder to shoulder with their co workers.

A second factor we should look at is the state of union membership. Contrary to the majority leadership's views — presented in the Pat H. article quoted above — there is no serious exodus from the unions as there would be with a serious defeat. It's true that union figures started to come down again after reaching their highest ever level that year. But is this a demoralised shift out of the unions, or a weakening of trade union consciousness in a qualitative manner? Or does it reflect a changed relationship of class forces? We reject all these views.

The fall in union membership and the downturn in strike activity are both consequences of the same problem: the mass unemployment which exists today. For instance, in the manufacturing industry, one worker in six lost their jobs during the rise in unemployment in the middle 1980s. Today membership declined from 13½ million to 10 million. This serious drop once again has to be placed in a historical framework. Compare this situation with that of the strike wave of 1919-1921. The rise of mass unemployment of over 14% by 1921 brought strike figures down to a trough in 1923-25. Union membership fell from a peak in 1920 of over 8 million down to just over five million in 1923. With unemployment declining in 1924 and 1925, union membership continued to rise until the 1926 general strike. So even in a developing pre-revolutionary situation in the early 1920s, the unions were losing over 30 per cent of their members in three years — only to recover again two years later.

This survey is not an academic point about figures. It's an aid to judging the perspectives for struggle. It helps us understand why, at this stage of the struggle, it is ruled out that Thatcher could actually crush a union — as Reagan was able to do with the airline pilots union, PATCO. Workers across the board, not just those immediately affected, will fight tooth and nail to preserve their trade union rights.

In sum, all of these objective factors we should consider when judging the state of the class struggle, can't be ripped out of their historical and political context. They help us come to the conclusion that while workers are suffering under the impact of the recession through job loss, increased productivity and so on, big class confrontations lie ahead of us. There has been no such qualitative defeat as that inflicted on the working class when the general strike was crushed.

Has there been a shift to the right?

It is undoubtedly the case that decisions taken by the last TUC Congress marked a shift to the right. Furthermore changes made to the rules will make it harder for the left to reverse this. The Congress was an attempt to reverse the gains of the rank and file in the unions. Its ultimate success will depend upon the extent to which the class is defeated, and the rank and file leadership isolated. The shop stewards organisation is weakened, but as the rash of disputes in cars and light engineering shows, there has been no defeat.

In the POEU telecommunication engineers defeated the right wing when the Broad Left took over from an executive that had controlled the union for 35 years. This defeat was a consequence of the membership's desire to fight privatisation and of the abysmal leadership of the union's campaign.

Furthermore, the rightward shift at the TUC is not part of an easy ride for the bureaucrats. Already in several unions, the right wing is under pressure. In the steelworkers union, the ISTC, the aftermath of their strike led to a shift leftwards. In the NUR, rank and file activity ousted Sidney Weighall after he cast the union's vote for the right wing in the NEC elections in 1982.

Scargill was elected president of the miners' union by an overwhelming majority. And despite the corrosive effects of productivity-related earnings amongst miners, the massive media intervention, and so on, Peter Heathfield — a leader at least as far to the left as Scargill — has been elected general secretary by a majority vote.

Any judgment about shifts in the working class must also take into account the level of consciousness about broader political questions. Today, there is a greater reception to support for anti-imperialist struggles and the demands of women and black people than at any time in the past decade. (. . .)

The youth rebellions in the summer of 1981 showed the volatility of young people as they take the brunt of the recession, and as black youth in particular respond to this racist society, and their double oppression. (. . .)

So we reject with contempt the idea that there is a uniform shift to the right in the working class. Everyday experience in the

workers movement confirms that instead there is a sharpening polarisation. Yes, a section of the class has moved to the right and has accepted individualist solutions to the crisis — and they have even made gains apparently on that basis, reinforcing such a false consciousness. But another section has moved to the left, and are drawing political conclusions.

The working class is not defeated today. Each new attack poses the possibility of a major confrontation. The latest possibility is the threatened all-out national Fords strike which the bureaucrats are manoeuvring like crazy to call off.

The definitive move to the right amongst the TUC tops is part of the conclusions they have drawn to make increasing concessions to Thatcher and to defend their privileges gained in the past 25 years through arbitrating concessions. Some bureaucrats are even talking of cutting loose from the Labour Party. This movement is a response to the same pressure that led to the SDP split, the right wing sabotage of the elections and every major struggle which has loomed to date. But this process has by no means scored a definitive victory in the ranks. Indeed, the major factor in undermining the strength of those willing to struggle has been the mis-leadership of the bureaucracy.

In sum, the election of Scanlon and Jones which opened the post-1968 period was the end result of a process of strengthening the rank and file leaders which emerged at the base of the unions. The election recently of the right-wing dominated Council of the TUC is the beginning of a process to attempt to crack down on developments at the base. The shift to the left starts with the ranks and is reflected in the bureaucracy. The shift to the right starts in the bureaucracy, finds its base in sections of the class, and moves on to assault the left at the rank and file level.

Prospects

(. . .)

An organisation rooted in these experiences, part of these struggles and discussions, is a gain for the working class. That's because a revolutionary party enables the class to make permanent gains and learn from its partial struggles. In this sense, building an open organisation is a necessity today.

In sum, we are in a preparatory period today where small steps in reconstructing a powerful leadership are being taken across the unions and the Labour Party. We can identify sections of the class who are open and prepared to listen to revolutionary solutions to their problems. We have an audience especially amongst youth, women and black workers. Out of the class confrontations which are on the agenda — and alongside these forces — we have to provide solutions and forms of struggles which can resolve the crisis of perspectives evident in the labour movement. The framework for all of our tasks — from defence of the Labour Party's links with the unions to the fight against the Tory anti-union laws to our anti-war work — is the need to promote class independence, class solidarity and class unity. A clear understanding of where our class is at, and the stakes involved in each struggle, will put us on the best footing to help take the struggle forward and in the process to win to our organisation the most resolute fighters.

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