

Wildcat

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INSIDE - FRENCH REVOLUTION, HALABJA, POLL TAX, INTIFADA, RUSHDIE,



HILLSBOROUGH POLICE KILLED 95 FANS



CAPITALISM IS A DISASTER



The cause of the Clapham Junction rail crash which killed 35 people was explained by an engineer at the enquiry. The schedule for installing new signals was "excruciatingly tight".

"It affected staff because they were getting shell-shocked. I could see they were getting very lethargic because of this constant work. It was 4 weeks out of 4 and 7 days out of 7."

When he asked for extra time, the project team refused. His superiors, and their superiors, are responsible for killing 35 people by making their staff work too hard. A signals technician testified that he had been working long hours in order to pay his mortgage. Tired staff make mistakes, and on the railways this can be fatal. There used to be a team specifically responsible for testing new signals, but it was disbanded as part of reorganisation.

Boeing aircraft are falling to bits because of speed ups and cuts in testing procedures. Inadequate test procedures caused the helicopter crash which killed 45 men in the North Sea in 1986. The responsibility for the rising toll of deaths and injuries at work and on the roads, rail and air lies with the managers who have cut staff and safety and imposed speed ups and overtime.

Smoulderings

Zeebrugge, Kings Cross, Piper Alpha, Clapham Junction, Kegworth, ... all these "accidents" have as their ultimate cause the drive for more efficiency which the profit motive imposes on all companies, state owned or private. Last year, more than 700 people were killed by accidents at work. For 20 years from 1961 to 1981 there was an unbroken decrease in accidents at work. Since 1981 there has been an unbroken annual increase. Between 1981 and 1985 there were 739 deaths in the construction industry. The Health and Safety Executive says 70% of these deaths could have been avoided by "management action". How do they explain the other 30%? Suicide?

All 50 Kings Cross machine attendants, responsible for cleaning and escalator maintenance, were removed prior to the Underground fire. During May 1988 alone, the fire brigade recorded 17 fires and 29 "false alarms with good intent" on the underground. London Regional Transport's response has been to change the definition of fire so that

most incidents are now described as "smoulderings".

Since the Kings Cross fire, LRT has spent £135 million on the underground: building steel barriers to stop fare-dodging. Anyone who has used this wonderful new system can see it will make it more difficult to evacuate in an emergency. (Incidentally, its made fare-dodging easier). However it takes less staff to operate, so it will lose 1200 jobs and 1200 salaries for LRT. Nothing could more clearly show that the bosses deliberately sacrifice our lives for their profits.

On the anniversary of the Kings Cross fire, we handed out a leaflet in London making these points, and drawing the link between disasters, routine accidents, and the class struggle. This link is obvious in the case of P&O ferries.

After the Zeebrugge disaster, P&O reduced ferry crews by 15 per ferry. Men work 72 hours with three 6 hour breaks during which they can be called on duty at any time. The new shift system is far more tiring to the crew, and hence more dangerous, than it was before the Zeebrugge disaster.

There was a bitter strike against the introduction of the new system. On three separate occasions, national strike action broke out, and threatened to spread to other workers. On each occasion, the National Union of Seamen ordered the men back to work, leaving the Dover ferry workers isolated. The union leaders are not stupid. They know that isolation is the best way to defeat a strike. They consciously sabotaged the fight against worsening conditions. They share responsibility for deaths and injuries at work.

The defeat of British Rail train drivers and guards in 1982 and 1985 increased shift times and obviously contributed to "human error" rail crashes. Train drivers need to be totally alert. After eight hours work, nobody is. In these two strikes, the NUR and ASLEF divided up the guards

and drivers. In 1982, while ASLEF were on strike against more flexible shifts, the NUR scabbed on them by distributing propaganda in favour of flexible rostering. When the NUR struck, ASLEF instructed its members to cross picket lines. In 1985, ASLEF accepted driver-only trains while NUR men struck against them. (For more details of these strikes, see Wildcat 6).

Unions Scab on Tube Strike

On the 5th April there was a one-day unofficial strike for extra payments for drivers on one-man trains on the London Underground. The strike closed down many of the tube lines, and was fairly successful.

On 20th April there was a more successful strike. Even LRT admitted that less than one in five drivers worked. According to the London Evening Standard, the strikes are organised by a secret committee called the "Shepherd's Pie Group". They use codenames and passwords to keep their identity secret to avoid both being sacked and being taken to court.

"The organisers have taken the precaution of drawing different people from a pool of activists so that no one individual becomes too closely identified with the strike. They coordinate the action at mass meetings and devolve it to different branches and depots."

If the story is true, this is a product of the illegalisation of the class struggle by the Tory

Trade union officials have said they have no idea who is organising the strikes. However it appears that some of the strike organisers are low level officials. Breaking from the trade unions is still only at an embryonic stage even among the most militant workers in Britain.

[illegible]

THERE WERE PLENTY OF
POLICE AROUND WHEN WE
DIDN'T NEED THEM.



When they want to, the police are very good at controlling crowds. Everyone in Sheffield will remember how well South Yorkshire police controlled the pickets at Orgreave. Yet when a few thousand football supporters arrived late for a match, they lost control, and were forced to open a gate ... "to avoid fatalities". The lesson is blindingly clear. The police claim to defend an abstraction called "public order". What they really defend is property. This accounts for their professionalism in some areas, and their seeming incompetence in others. They shoot bank robbers, yet rapists carry on for years without getting caught.

Police behaviour after the massacre shocked even people with some experience of the filth. The police accused fans of stealing from dead bodies. This incredible allegation and others is refuted by all other witnesses. The police won't even give the bereaved the personal belongings of those who died, as if they're going to discover the cause of the massacre by rifling through them. Only the most degenerate newspapers repeated the police lies about hooligans. The Sun was publically burnt in Liverpool. It's a shame a few of its journalists didn't get the same treatment.

Anyone who knows anything about football knows that an identity card system would have made things worse: the police would have killed even more people. Why then is Mrs Thatcher pursuing her scheme? The official line is that it is to control

As we go to press, more tube strikes, a bus strike and Southern Region train disruption are on the cards, along with numerous other industrial struggles. The NUR called an all-out tube strike to attempt to take control of the wildcat action, and then called it off when ordered to by a judge. These strikes have considerable potential if organised outside and against the unions and their divide and rule tactics. The need for a united fightback will become clearer than ever as the crisis deepens, the government organises an all-out offensive against the working class, and the funeral directors' profits mount.

Fences were put up to stop "hooliganism". Though it was obvious after the Bradford fire that fences are death traps, they weren't taken down. This gives us a clue as to the government's seemingly irrational attitude. It's a question of control. Pitch invasions don't hurt anyone, but they challenge authority.

Thatcher visited the survivors in hospital. "I don't want to speak to that bastard. Keep her away from me", said one. Another person in intensive care managed to tell her to get lost.

No amount of lies about hooligans from the gutter press, no amount of sentimental hyperbole can cover up what happened. No government enquiry nor public relations exercise can restore the image of the police. Hatred and contempt for them is steadily growing. This is our contribution to that process.

**POLL TAX : DON'T
REGISTER. DON'T PAY.**

The poll tax registration forms have gone out in England and Wales. It's crucial that as many people as possible don't return them.

For many the poll tax is an attempt to force each adult in a household to pay more than the total rates bill for the whole house. The more overcrowded, poorer houses will pay much more. The most heavily taxed will be those in the worst areas of cities. Hundreds of thousands of people simply won't be able to pay.

The first step in organising the resistance to the tax is to collectively destroy the poll tax forms. Either organise a bonfire, or simply throw the form in the bin and tell your neighbours to do the same.

There are numerous ways to resist the tax. In Scotland, council chambers have been occupied, and activists forced John Lewis Stores to withdraw sacking threats against non-paying staff by threatening to picket the store over Christmas.

Harrassment of poll tax canvassers has resulted in resignations and recruitment difficulties. 50,000 people in Strathclyde and 67,000 in Lothian haven't registered. The figure in England and Wales could be millions. Dozens of anti-poll tax groups have sprung up to organise non-registration, and when the time comes, non-payment. The coming year will see growing awareness and growing resistance to this latest attack on the working class. The state can't imprison tens of thousands of people.

Don't Delay - Throw it Away.
Don't Register - Don't Pay!

More information about how to fight the poll tax can be obtained from Pigeonhole CR, c/o 11 Forth St, Edinburgh. Send a large s.a.e..

□ □

The ICG on the Poll Tax.

Tactics against the tax

This is part of a letter from the Internationalist Communist Group (ICG) about our article on the poll tax in Wildcat 12, followed by our reply. We think open debate on most issues is the only way forward to clarify revolutionary problems. Our differences should be resolved if possible, since we can't both be right. Our starting point is the class struggle. We believe the ICG's approach is useless in the actual struggle in which thousands of people are engaged now.

Letter from the ICG

Of course, the poll tax, as well as any other taxes, does not serve to "transferring money from the poor to the rich", but to decrease the working class wage. It is only one of the ways to increase exploitation of the whole of our class to decrease the worker part of the social product. This is a very important question. It is the way to shed light on the REAL link between the struggles against the poll tax and other working class struggles.

The other question is the method of struggle you propose. According to us none of these put forward in the text is corresponding to the interests of the working class. These methods proposed here lead to atomisation because each of us will obtain a more or less long time limit, each one will then be more or less rapidly called to trial and will even be more or less strongly sentenced, etc, etc.. We were facing a problem that touched everybody and with these methods of struggle everyone is alone, with these methods we atomise the class, our class. Everyone will wonder how to struggle alone, by himself. Everyone is alone trying to get a delay, alone trying to refuse to answer questions, alone trying to find if he has the right to avoid payment. This is the direction towards the individual and playing with the law and it already is the acceptance of the tax.

This struggle seems to be the submission to democracy, to individualism and their juridicial formalisation. For us, nothing is more the exact opposition of the struggle of our class than the fact of trying to play, to make profit, individually, of the law. This is the way to give it more and more credit.

Axes of struggle do still exist in the text and mostly at the end of it: the collective organisation against seizures, against the

canvassers of the poll tax, against parties (all
parties, not only or mostly the Labour Party),
against unions, etc.. Of course, it is [not] a
matter of delaying given that this would mean that
at the end of this delay one after the other,
people would accept paying the tax.

It is a matter of refusing collectively to pay; it is a matter of occupying the streets, making strikes, paralyzing transport, refusal to pay electricity and gas bills, rent bills, and so on.....

Our Reply

One thing we've learned from the struggle against the tax in Scotland is that the tactic of sending letters to the authorities asking questions about the poll tax form doesn't work. The correct tactic is: don't return the form. 67,000 people in Lothian alone have done this and the law hasn't touched them yet; delays have been fined. Clearly, millions not returning their forms will be difficult for the authorities to deal with.

The underlying assumption in the ICG's letter is that individual resistance and collective class struggle are exclusive opposites. This is not so. Individual resistance in the form of petty crime is and always has been part of the struggle of the proletariat against its expropriators.

Individual resistance can lead to mass resistance. The Italian women who organised the "Can't Pay Won't Pay" campaign against supermarkets, the looters of Caracas, surely weren't law-abiding citizens before organising mass expropriations? All the tactics we proposed can be organised collectively, as we clearly said, and will be more effective if so done. We said "a conscious and widespread campaign of resistance". Is this "individualism"? We said "Let everyone know they can rely on a network of support". Is this "submission to democracy"? You can take advantage of loopholes in the law, and again, this can be collectively organised. It would be stupidity to refuse to do this. Opposing individual resistance is anti-working class.

Of course we agree with paralysing transport and so on, but we have to start from reality, from the level of class struggle today. The ICG do come up with some practical suggestions: refusal to pay rent, gas and electric bills. If we can do this, why can't we refuse to pay the poll tax?

A BLASPHEMOUS ARROW OF RETRIBUTION

And it shall come to pass that I will put thee in the cleft of the rock, and I shall take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts.

(God, Exodus XXXIII).

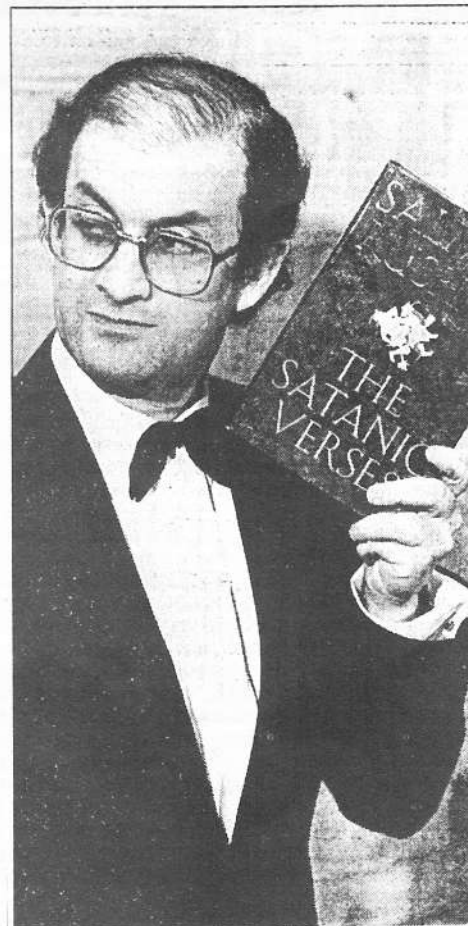
Left Wing Reaction in Britain.

The anti-racist theme of the Satanic Verses gives the lie to those who say that Muslim reaction to the book in Britain is a reaction against racism. It goes without saying that people who call for the banning of an anti-religious and anti-racist novel are as reactionary and dangerous as right-wing Christian scum who prosecute gay newspapers. This includes Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz and other Labour MPs. These people are the allies of the Islamic leaders, who defend a reactionary set of social relations which oppress women, divide the working class, and imprison children who happen to be born of Asian parents in a cultural ghetto, when their interests are in breaking out and becoming integrated into the rest of the working class. Multiculturalism is just another racist ideology.

The lefties who use anti-racism to apologise for Muslim reaction forget that Islamic fundamentalism is itself a racist ideology. Witness the history of the oppression of Jews, Armenians and Baha'is in Khomeini's Iran and the racist persecution of Kurds. The "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion", an anti-semitic forgery, is distributed by the Islamic Republic.

Islam, though a minority religion in Europe, is a dangerous enemy of the working class everywhere. The left has tried to divert people from this obvious conclusion by talking about a "racist backlash" over the Rushdie affair. There hasn't been one: racists are no more racist because of Rushdie. The Socialist Workers Party even condemned people who left a blood stained typewriter in a Bradford mosque as racists!

The role of the left in supporting Islamic fundamentalism is already clear from the example of Iran, where the support of the left enabled one of the most barbaric fascist regimes in the world to seize power and suppress the class struggle.



Alliances of the left with Muslims who are fighting oppression (and replacing it with even worse oppression) go back a long way. In 1920 the Communist International organised a "Congress of Peoples of the East" in Baku, Azerbaijan. Muslim beliefs and institutions were treated with respect, and Muslim participants were urged to join a holy war against English imperialism. Some of the speeches were written by communists, like the American John Reed. Comintern translators did a magnificent job with Azerbaijani/Turkish and Persian. However they made a few mistakes, for example translating "class war" as "jihad". This was very effective at getting Muslim support for the Comintern and the Bolshevik government.

People who ally themselves with something they know is reactionary against the supposedly greater evil are not communists. We do not defend the right of people to practice their religion, like the left do. Exactly how to attack religion is a tactical question. But there can be no fudging of our total opposition to it. Blasphemy is an important part of this opposition. Blasphemy originally meant publishing any matter which contradicted the teaching of the church. As late as 1922, people were imprisoned in Britain for publishing jokes about Christianity. Taking the piss out of religion is an important part of the struggle to abolish it. Its not surprising that the Vatican has joined the holy alliance against the Satanic Verses, and that Britain's leaders have grovelled on about Islam being a great religion and how they "understand" the offence the book has caused Muslims. Of course its caused offence. Anyone who believes in Allah and archangels deserves to be offended! Since the demise of Humanism, anti clericalism has gone out of fashion. Atheists are far too polite to religious nutters, who are not entitled to their ridiculous beliefs. Still less are they entitled to spread them.

Rushdie says "the true conservatives in Britain are now the Labour Party" and "its very sad to see this alliance of the left and the mullahs for heaven's sake". (Sunday Times 22.1.89). It may be sad, but its not surprising. By lining up with the mullahs, the left have once again shown their true colours.



The International Dimension.

In the past there have been numerous books published which take a critical look at some of the more absurd inconsistencies of Islam. For example, Mahfouz's Children of Gebelawi, which is banned in his native Egypt. But at least he has the comforting knowledge that his head is not worth the £3 million at which Salman Rushdie's has been evaluated. Then there is a whole host of Iranian writers, both before and after the revolution, whose scholarly critique of Islam is only matched by their contemptuous disrespect for the mullahs.

The creation of doubt in the divinity of the Koranic verses and Mohammed's all-too-human weaknesses are indeed the most challenging aspects of Rushdie's bitter polemic against religion. But there have been numerous other modernist critiques of Islam. In the past they have all been dealt with locally, diplomatically and quietly. So what's the big deal this time?

A first clue can be discerned from the timing of Khomeini's decree. The book was published on 26 September 1988. On 5 November 1988 India banned it. Pakistan followed suit. At the beginning of 1989 the ritual book burning ceremony took place in Bradford. And then on the 6 February six were killed and 100 injured in riots over the book in Pakistan. It was only at this juncture, five months after publication, that Khomeini decided to jump on the bandwagon of Islamic public opinion by sending Rushdie a one-way Iran Air ticket to hell. His motivations were manifold. Firstly the affair would be portrayed as an external imperialist threat against the "honour" of Islam that would lead to the unification of the country. Rafsanjani rapidly abandoned pragmatism and declared:

"Imperialism's recent conspiracy to insult the honour of Islam is more dangerous than an official war." (Ettela't 15.2.89).

Iranian black humour got to work. There was no shortage of volunteers who would put on a gas mask and dive for cover at the mention of Rushdie's name, as they once did during Hussein's bombing raids.

Secondly the faction fight inside Iran has reached a critical stage. A new and bloody purge of anti-Khomeini mullahs is on the cards.

Thirdly the decree was intended to give Khomeini a last opportunity to become the spiritual leader of the Islamic world. The contradictory elements of nationalism and internationalism have been mixed in his ideology since the beginning. The Muslims of

Pakistan, India and Afghanistan who demonstrated against Rushdie have found their xenophobic champion. A xenophobia that is routinely mistaken for anti-imperialism.

Iran and the Rest of the World.

One of the most interesting aspects of the affair has been the way the EC acted with one voice in denouncing Tehran. West Germany, the European country with the highest stake in Iran, led the attack by postponing a \$2 billion loan. Subsequently, some of the EC governments have broken ranks. Japan, under pressure from the EC, has ordered Japanese companies to reduce their oil imports from Iran by two thirds.

In response Iran has moved its trading offices from Britain and West Germany to China, whilst the Soviet bloc will probably be offered the chance to rearm the army. Russia has, not for the first time, shown more understanding of Islamic sentiments than the West. For this, she will receive from Iran not only cheap gas but a guarantee to bring the recalcitrant Iran-based Afghans to heel. It is hard to see, though, how this shift of policy towards the East can be maintained. The Iranian economy is too heavily integrated into the West. Khomeini's balancing act is reminiscent of the tactics used by both Mossadeq and the Shah, and smells of desperation.

We do not want to give the impression that we "defend" Rushdie's freedom to publish. We do not believe in freedom of speech, because we are against such freedom for reactionaries.

However we like Rushdie's book because it is a well written anti-religious novel. Religion of course will finally disappear when its material conditions, the misery which drives people to need an opiate, have given way to communism. Yet the Middle Eastern working class would do well to learn from the actions of the Spanish proletariat in the 1930's. There the church was rightly viewed as an inseparable part of the system and attacked accordingly. Workers and poor peasants massacred priests and burned churches. As Red Menace put it :

"Humanity will never be free until the last priest (and mullah) is hanged with the guts of the last capitalist."

BASIC PRINCIPLES

We are for the abolition of capitalism by communist revolution on a world scale. We are for the destruction of the money/market/wages system which exists in every country in the world, and its replacement by a classless society, in which goods are distributed according to needs and desires. We will abolish the division between work and leisure. The role of revolutionaries is to actively participate in escalating the class war toward this end.

We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.

We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion.

We are actively opposed to all divisions in the working class whereby one section oppresses another, such as sexism and racism.

We are against all expressions of nationalism, including national liberation movements such as the IRA.

The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.), is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.

We are against trade unions because they are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses, and sabotaging our struggles.

We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.

We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.

We are against sectarianism, and support principled cooperation among revolutionaries.

FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS

Wildcat's pamphlets on the Labour Party and the SWP are no longer available. We have withdrawn them because we think they're too liberal. We have also withdrawn "Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction" and are involved in discussions on producing a more comprehensive platform. The pamphlet on the APCF is still available for £1.50 inc. p&p, and we are currently working on the first English edition of Herman Gorter's "Open Letter to Comrade Lenin" (sic). This will cost a lot of money to produce; anyone who sends a donation of over £2 now will get a free copy when it comes out.

DON'T SEND CHEQUES. SEND BLANK POSTAL ORDERS.

A subscription for four issues costs £3. £5 buys four issues plus pamphlets. For £10 you get bundles of each issue to sell, plus pamphlets.

Wildcat can be contacted by writing as follows :

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WC1N 3XX, UK.**

1789

AND ALL THAT...



In case anyone's failed to notice, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the 'French Revolution'. This is usually seen as a series of political and social events beginning with the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 and culminating in the declaration of the Republic in September 1792 ('Year I'), or perhaps Napoleon's seizure of power in 1799, depending on the political complexion of the historian involved.

The significance of (some, carefully chosen, of) these events for the bourgeoisie is quite clear - it was during this period that the French nation was created. This was an event which inspired nation-building bourgeois across the world. It is no coincidence that so many nations use some kind of tricolour as their national emblem. What the anniversary celebrators don't want us to think about is that every nation can only exist in so far as the class struggle can be suppressed. Most of the world's nations claim to have been brought into existence by some kind of 'revolution' which overthrew an evil and corrupt 'ancien régime'. Frequently the 'revolution' is just a coup d'état or institutional rearrangement, but often it is a bloody counter-revolution. Every new-born nation must be baptised in working class blood, and France was no exception.

The purpose of this article is to make clear that the proletariat has always had to fight independently for its interests against the bourgeoisie. It is not a question of whether or not communism was possible. Even if it is not possible to create communism, proletarians still have an interest in having enough to eat and not being massacred in wars. 'Progress' for the bourgeoisie has never meant improvements for the proletariat. It has simply meant a more rapid numerical growth of the proletariat and the further development of exploitation, starvation and war.

For leftie historians the working class progresses from 'apolitical' food riots to the modern labour movement and universal suffrage. For theorists of capitalist decadence, including Karl Marx, the working class had to support various fractions of the bourgeoisie in the creation of nation states while capital was in its ascendant phase. Against both of these positions we assert the 'Invariant Programme' of rioting, looting, machine-breaking, resistance to work and insurrection against all states.

Aristocrats vs. Bourgeois?

We must start off by completely rejecting the notion that the two sections of the ruling class who fought over possession of the State were two separate classes - the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. That is, we reject the notion that France between 1789 and 1793 underwent a 'bourgeois revolution'.

The bourgeoisie did not need political revolutions to establish its domination over society since it was able to establish its mode of production side by side with the old feudal system. The feudal system was not so much overthrown as 'corrupted' from within by the gradual development of trade, money-lending and the beginnings of industry in the cities. As early as the 16th century the Absolute Monarchs of Europe were no longer feudal kings but bourgeois who fought their wars and ran their State bureaucracies not on the basis of feudal service and loyalties but on the basis of money. As a result, they were either heavily in debt or themselves became money-lenders, like the Pope.

When the 'bourgeois revolutionaries' in France started flogging off the church lands and monasteries in 1789 they were only doing what Henry VIII had done in England two and a half centuries earlier.

What is also important is that on the eve of 1789 the French ruling class was NOT divided into an 'aristocratic' land-owning and church camp and a party of 'bourgeois' industrialists and merchants. The expansion of capitalist enterprise (whether overseas trading or industry) was carried on by nobles as much as by the 'bourgeois' nouveaux riches. At the same time, many non-nobles preferred to invest their capital in land, titles and government stock. So many ennobling offices were for sale that anyone with enough money could join the nobility. A particularly cushy number was the position of 'King's Secretary', a sinecure which conferred hereditary nobility on the purchaser and his family, a snip at 150,000 livres. On the ideological level, the 'Enlightenment' was as much a product of the liberal nobility as of any other bourgeois fraction.

The involvement of nobles in 'Revolutionary' politics cannot be ignored. It was the Comte de Mirabeau who emerged as the leader of the National Assembly (the parliament formed in June 1789), it was the Marquis de Lafayette who became the first commander of the Paris National Guard, it was the Vicomte de Noailles who introduced the decrees proposing the 'abolition of feudalism' on 4 August 1789, and it was Talleyrand (a bishop!) who proposed the selling off of church land.

Classes and Social Conditions

If the feudal nobility did not exist as a class, the proletariat certainly did, and may even have been a majority of the population.

In 1789, France was second only to England as an industrial country, large manufactories promoted by the State had already appeared. Real industrialisation had not yet begun, though. In 1789 Great Britain had 200 mills on the Arkwright model. France had eight. There were no factory towns and no modern industrial proletariat.

In most of the country industry was still largely carried on in cottages, or by master craftsmen and their journeymen in small medieval city workshops. But the old guilds had declined and no longer protected the journeymen who were becoming reduced to the status of wage earners with little chance of ever becoming masters. The smaller masters were also being proletarianised as their interests separated from those of the merchant manufacturers.

The fabled 'sans-culottes' of the Paris faubourgs (poor districts) were by no means exclusively proletarian, they included small shopkeepers and artisans, but it was undoubtedly the proletarian majority which gave the specific character to 'sans-culotte' struggles.

The overwhelming majority of the French population (around 85%, of 23 million) lived in the countryside. Undoubtedly many were petty bourgeois peasants - that is peasants who have an interest in high food prices. Many more, though, were either poor peasants, (that is, peasants who were well on the way to proletarianisation, such as sharecroppers) or simply rural proletarians ('landless labourers'). Many of these were destitute: in 1777 over a million people were officially declared to be beggars. Many peasants

,still relied on pre-capitalist forms of land ownership and village organisation for their survival. All this meant that the content of struggles in the countryside was very confused, with the struggle of the proletariat frequently being mixed up with 'kulak' struggles or the struggle to defend pre-capitalist conditions.

The peasants were no longer serfs, although on the royal lands serfdom had only been abolished as late as 1779. Statute labour, however, still existed and took on an enormous variety of forms: work in the Lord's fields, work in his parks and gardens... There were also a bewildering array of taxes to be paid, in addition to land-rent. The peasant paid for the right of marriage, baptism, burial; he paid on everything he bought or sold. As the position of the land-owners declined their extraction of 'feudal' dues became all the more rapacious as it was the only way they could maintain their profits.

A whole new profession of lawyers had come into being, the 'feudists', whose job was to help the land-owners revive old feudal obligations and maximise existing ones. Not surprisingly, revolts by the peasantry took the form of refusals to pay some or all of these exactions.

All sections of the proletariat were precariously dependent on the price of bread which could fluctuate wildly depending on the state of the harvest. Hardly a year passed without some part of France being plunged into famine conditions. High points in the class struggle tended to correspond to bad harvests across the whole country, e.g. 1788.

The struggle often took the form of attempts to force reductions in the price of bread and other necessities by collective force ('taxation populaire'). Typically people would invade the flour markets and besiege bakers' shops forcing dealers to sell the goods at a 'just' price.

A particularly widespread example of this was the 'flour war' of April-May 1775 which gripped Paris and its neighbouring provinces for over a fortnight and caused panic in the Court. It spread into Paris itself and resulted in the siege of every baker's shop in the city centre and the inner faubourgs. The movement was only crushed by the massive use of troops and hundreds of arrests.

Similar outbreaks of 'taxation populaire' continued during the 'Revolution' period, in 1789, 1792-3 and 1795. The target of these movements was the prosperous peasant, the grain merchant, miller or baker. Whether the bourgeois in question supported the old or the new regime was unimportant.

The State Crisis

The immediate cause of the political crisis in the State was the enormous debt created by France's participation in the American War of Independence. Half the state's revenue was being used to pay interest on loans.

On Feb 22, 1787 the Assembly of Notables was convened at Versailles. This was an obscure aristocratic body which had not met since 1626. Nothing was decided, all that happened is that it became public knowledge that the national debt had reached 1.5 thousand million livres. This was an incredible figure.

On Aug 8, 1788 Louis XVI was obliged to convene the Estates General and to fix the opening for May 1, 1789. This body had not met since 1614 but was different in that it was elected and was supposed to represent the three 'Orders' of society - the Clergy, the Nobility and the so-called Third Estate. The Third Estate was what in Britain would be called the Commons. That is, in theory, everyone else, in practice, the non-aristocratic bourgeoisie. The elections were indirect but nevertheless provided an opportunity for the radical bourgeois to propagate their program and ideology throughout the whole of society.

It was increasingly necessary to channel working class discontent into support for reforms since things had already reached the stage where any disorder on the streets of Paris risked turning

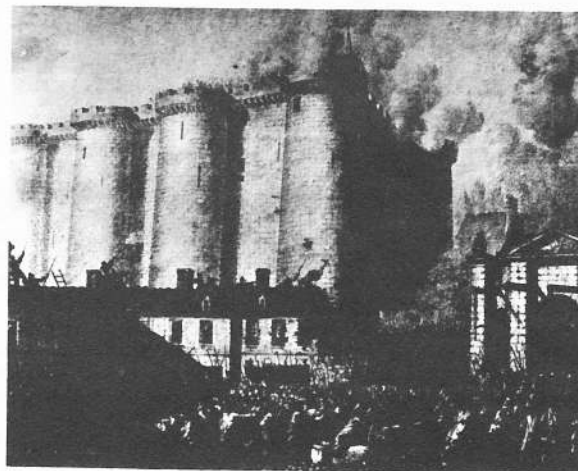
into a proletarian rising. For example, the magistrates of the 'parlement' (Courts of Justice) of Paris got themselves exiled to the provinces on two occasions (1787, 1788) for being mildly critical of the Court. Their first return resulted in a few disorderly celebrations by lawyers clerks and university students but on the second occasion they were joined by proles from the faubourgs, resulting in violent rioting in which guard posts were looted and burned.

A week before the Estates General was to meet, the famous Reveillon riots broke out when the Electoral Assembly meetings were held in Paris. At one of these meetings a paper manufacturer by the name of Reveillon (together with another called Henriot) made a particularly offensive speech to the assembled proles. He said that wages in industry were too high. The reaction was swift, an effigy of Reveillon was hung in the Place de la Greve and Henriot's house was burnt down. The next day a crowd went to Reveillon's factory and made the workers stop work. Then they plundered the warehouse. Much fighting with troops ensued and Reveillon's house was burnt down that evening. A few days later a mob tried to storm the Bicetre prison. Even during this movement, which was clearly for proletarian interests, a bourgeois political influence was emerging. Insurgents shouted 'Long live the Third Estate' and 'Liberty... No Surrender'.

The Countryside

Meanwhile the inhabitants of the countryside had not been idle. Starting in December 1788, there was a massive movement of attacks on grain boats and granaries; assaults on customs officials and merchants; 'taxation populaire' of bread and wheat; and widespread destruction of bourgeois property. This occurred in virtually every province. North of Paris the starving rural poor attacked the game laws and hunting rights of the nobility by indulging in unrestrained poaching.

In the spring of 1789, after lying dormant for almost a century, peasant anger against royal taxes and seigneurial dues began to be expressed explosively all over the country. The peasants burned the chateaux and with them the hated manorial rolls on which were inscribed the details of the dues and obligations. It was this which caused the National Assembly to issue its decrees of August 4 and 5 which abolished, or in most cases made redeemable into money, all seigneurial burdens on the peasantry. The peasants, however, carried on refusing to pay anything. Three years later the Jacobin government had to annul the peasant debt.



Mob Rule

Some six weeks after the opening of the Estates General, the Third Estate constituted themselves and all who were prepared to join them as the National Assembly with the right to recast the constitution. The response of the Court was to gather troops to invade Paris and dissolve the National Assembly (still based at Versailles). This

led to the first of many popular calls to arms. On July 12 crowds gathered in the gardens of the Palais Royal, the home of the Duc d'Orleans (whom many radical bourgeois wanted to place on the throne) to hear 'patriotic' orators. Marchers paraded along the boulevards and Besenval, the commander of the Paris garrison, withdrew to the Champ de Mars, leaving the capital in the hands of the insurgents. They proceeded to destroy the 'barrieres', or customs posts, ringing the city. These were despised because of the tolls they imposed on food and wine entering the city.

Men armed with pikes and cudgels spread themselves through every quarter, knocking at the doors of the rich to demand money and arms. Gunsmiths' shops were looted and pikes began to be forged in the faubourgs. The next day the monastery of the St. Lazare brotherhood was broken into, looted, searched for arms and grain, and its prisoners were released. Fifty two carts laden with flour were dragged to the Halles for free distribution.

In many ways the actions of the masses were similar to the glorious few days of 'mob rule' which had shaken British capitalism nine years earlier in the London 'Gordon Riots' in which half a dozen prisons

were completely destroyed and the homes of the rich pillaged and burnt on a massive scale.

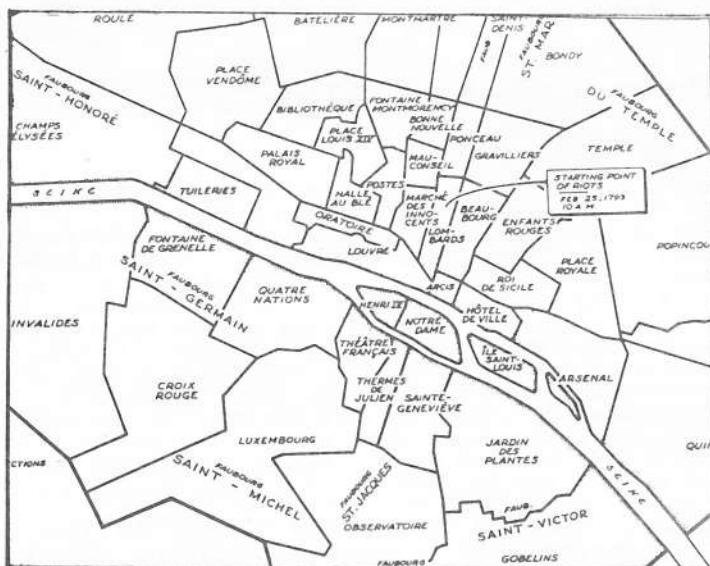
There were the same mass releases of prisoners, for example - not just 'political' ones, either. In Paris, however, the movement was nowhere near as extreme - 'Nothing was touched that day, either at the Treasury or the Bank' said the British ambassador. This was partly because the bourgeoisie were better organised, to control things. The patriotic bourgeoisie formed a provisional city government based at the Hotel de Ville (City Hall). Thoroughly alarmed by what was happening, they began to enroll a citizen's militia (the National Guard) to uphold bourgeois order. On the 13th the debtors' prison of La Force was seized and all the prisoners released, but an attempt to free prisoners from Chatelet prison on the same day was crushed by the National Guard. It is also known that around the same time the National Guard carried out several night-time summary executions of looters. They challenged passers by with the words 'Are you for the Nation?'. Shortly afterwards, similar militias were formed all over the country to fight the insurgent peasants and rural proles.

The Bastille Falls...

The insurgents continued the search for arms and ammunition and this was one of the main reasons why the Bastille fortress was attacked on 14th, this and its strategic military importance (rather than because it was a 'symbol of Absolutism'). They were short of powder and it was known that large stocks existed in the Bastille. At the same time its guns were trained ominously on the St. Antoine faubourg. So, after 30,000 muskets had been removed from the Hotel des Invalides across the river, the cry went up 'To the Bastille!'. After much fruitless negotiation between City Hall and the Bastille's governor, the impatient crowd took the place by storm at the cost of 150 lives. These the governor, the Marquis de Launay, paid for when he was dragged away from his bourgeois protectors outside City Hall and beheaded in the street.

The Bastille's surrender had remarkable political results. The National Assembly was saved and received royal blessing. Many Court supporters fled the country, or tried to. Among these was the notorious grain speculator Foulon who was dragged back to Paris and hung from a lamp post by the angry mob. In Paris, power passed into the hands of the Committee of Electors, who set up a city council (the Commune). The King himself came to Paris wearing the red, white and blue cockade of the patriots. But he continued to plot against the Assembly and in October once again tried to end the situation of bourgeois dual power by a show of force. The Flanders regiment and the dragoons were called to Versailles.

Once again the patriots called on the masses to save them, but this time things were more under



control. Leading patriots like Danton, Marat and Loustalot had been inciting a march to Versailles for some time. On Oct 5 a crowd of working class women marched to City Hall and forced open the doors demanding bread and arms. They were quickly enrolled under suitable leadership. The patriots had again managed to divert class hatred away from themselves onto the wicked aristos. Later on, men began to march as well, and, a few hours later, were followed by the National Guard to prevent any mishaps. The National Guard arrived at the Palace just in time to save the royals from the mob and the king was brought to Paris as a virtual prisoner. The constitutional monarchy was firmly established.

The bourgeoisie could now return to the problem of the proles. The Paris municipality, using the excuse of the killing of a baker on Oct 21, went to the Assembly to beg for martial law. It was voted for at once.

The new regime was not simply based on force, however. Despite the notorious division of citizens

into 'active' (propertied) and 'passive' categories and the gradual erosion of democratic rights throughout 1790, there remained a high level of participation in the State. This occurred through the local government bodies known as Communes which were composed of smaller 'districts' or 'sections' based on regular general assemblies. The districts played an important role: they appointed magistrates, organised the National Guard and armed 'the people' for patriotic purposes. It was by means of these bodies that bourgeois orators such as Danton and Marat were able to gain such an influence. In addition, numerous Clubs and 'fraternal' societies were formed which after 1790 opened their doors to wage-earners and craftsmen.

...the Class Struggle Continues

But while the bourgeoisie carried out their great program of modernising the State, the working class never completely abandoned its struggle, particularly as inflation and food shortages began to bite again in mid 1791.

In Paris there was a large scale strike movement for higher wages which began amongst journeymen carpenters and quickly spread to other cities. The City Council condemned their strike as illegal and rejected their demand for a minimum wage as contrary to liberal principles. But they dared not use too much repression in case the movement spread. Their fears were well grounded. In June the master blacksmiths, in a petition to the assembly, warned of the existence of a 'general coalition' of 30,000 workers including joiners, cobblers and locksmiths as well as their own journeymen. The Assembly responded by passing the notorious Le Chapelier Law which declared all workers' associations of any kind to be illegal. It was to remain on the statute book for almost a century.

In August 1791 food riots again convulsed the whole country, lasting until April the following year.

From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves

On 22 August 1791, the slaves of San Domingo (now Haiti) revolted. Each slave-gang killed its masters and set the plantation on fire. Within a few days, half of the North Plain - the most important sugar and coffee growing area in the French empire - was a flaming ruin. The revolt quickly spread to maroons (escaped slaves living in the hills) and poorer mulattos (people of mixed race). It was to lead to a many-sided war that eventually forced the Convention to agree to the abolition of slavery in the colony in Feb. 1794. This was done to encourage the slaves to fight for France against Britain which had declared war on France at the beginning of 1793.

As with the class struggle in France, the revolt had quickly acquired a bourgeois leadership just as steeped in the ideas of Liberty and Equality as their class brothers in Paris and Marseilles. The most famous of these was Toussaint Breda (later "L'Ouverture"), a "senior executive" amongst slaves who had organised the labour of several hundred others and had originally protected his master's property from destruction. When this stratum finally came to power they did everything they could to rebuild the sugar economy and keep the old plantation owners in place (as later Lenin would strive to keep the old factory bosses). A savage code of labour discipline was enforced against considerable resistance from the ex-slaves who said "moin pas esclave, moin pas travaye" - "I'm no slave, I won't work".

In Paris in January 1792 the shortage of sugar and other colonial products caused by the slave revolt in San Domingo caused price fixing riots to break out in various parts of the city. In February there were similar riots in which cart loads of sugar were seized even though they were under military escort. The struggle of the slaves had found an international echo!

The War

In April 1792 the government of the Girondins (moderate republicans) declared war on Austria. This was partly necessitated by the fact that the French noble emigres were plotting with Austria, Prussia, and the German Princes to invade France and re-establish the Old Regime. It was also a good way of creating national unity. Early defeats in the war brought radicalisation, in a purely bourgeois republican sense. In August and September the monarchy was finally overthrown and the republic established. The parliament underwent another metamorphosis, this time into the National

Convention. The distinction between active and passive citizens was abolished. The King got the chop.

The French army was ineffective and still staffed by royalist officers. Dumouriez, the Republic's leading general was shortly to desert to the enemy. Only unprecedented and extreme methods could win the war. The nation's resources were mobilised through conscription, rationing, a rigidly controlled war economy and the virtual abolition of the distinction between soldiers and civilians. By March 1793 France was at war with most of Europe and had begun annexations (France was entitled to her 'natural frontiers'). In June the Convention decreed the 'levee en masse', which called up three quarters of a million men. Shortly before this, the Girondins were overthrown after finding themselves increasingly out-manoeuvred by the Jacobins who alone had the popular support to win the war.

The war dramatically worsened conditions of life for the poor. In November 1792 a new and more extensive movement against food prices began spreading to eight departments, starting amongst foresters, craftsmen and glass factory workers in Sarthe who raided the local markets under arms. In

many regions prices were forced down and the National Guard were powerless to intervene. In others, the local National Guard even joined the movement (out in the styx they were less loyal and petty bourgeois than in Paris!).

In Feb. 1793 Paris was shaken by a far larger price reduction movement than the one a year earlier. It lasted only one day but affected all 48 Parisian sections, taking the form of a mass invasion of grocers' and chandlers' shops. Barere, on the Committee of Public Safety, spoke darkly of 'aristocrats in disguise' and insisted that such luxuries as sugar and coffee were unlikely objects of popular passion.

These struggles, together with the demands of the war economy, were instrumental in forcing the convention to pass the law of the General Maximum of Sept. 29, 1793. They were also encouraged by a massive demonstration of sans-culottes who, on Sept. 5, went to the convention accompanied by the left wing municipal leaders Roux and Hebert to demand price controls. This law imposed a ceiling on the prices of most commodities of prime necessity, as well as labour power. This led to an important strike movement in Paris in the summer of 1794.

The End

In many agricultural districts the law was applied far more vigorously to wages than to prices. In Paris it tended to be the other way round at first because of the strength of the class struggle. War production meant that labour was scarce so workers

frequently had to be paid higher than legal rates despite restrictions on labour mobility. But the price controls began to be relaxed in March 1794 and more and more groups of workers began to press wage demands. In June the arms workers struck and soon the movement spread to building workers, potters and government employees. On July 7, even the Committee of Public Safety's printers went on strike. In the midst of all this the Paris Commune published new wage rates strictly in line with the law, obliging many workers to take a 50% pay cut.

At the same time the bourgeoisie as a whole were dispensing with the Jacobins who had outlived their usefulness (the war was over). Robespierre and his associates were expelled from the convention and arrested. Having temporarily escaped they took refuge in the City Hall. On the same day it was besieged by angry workers. The sans-culottes could no longer be roused to support the left against the right and jeered the councillors of the Commune as they were led off to be guillotined.

At first the workers were allowed decent pay rises but these were quickly eaten up by inflation as free market conditions returned. The closure of government workshops led to a rise in unemployment.

The sans-culottes attempted to rise for the last time in May 1795 with a massive political and military demonstration marching on the convention to press their demands, which were as confused as ever. The most popular slogan was 'Bread and the Constitution of 1793'. But this time the bourgeoisie didn't have to give an inch because they were able to confront the marchers with a regular army loyal to the state. The insurgents gave in without firing a shot, so as to avoid bloodshed, and slunk back to their hovels. Savage reprisals followed. The days of mass struggle in France were over for another 35 years. The country was prepared for the massacres of the Napoleonic wars.

It was the war economy that had been the greatest achievement of the French bourgeoisie in the 'Revolutionary' years. They had laid the foundations for modern warfare, both as a means of carrying on capitalist competition and as a means of dealing with the proletariat, a class who were becoming everywhere more numerous and troublesome.

DOLOR DE CABEZA POR CAPITALISMO!



This is a brief introduction to the problems of capitalism in Latin America. We would like to give this vast region, with its high level of class struggle, a more comprehensive treatment. We would be grateful to any of our readers, especially Spanish and Portuguese speakers, for more information

In January this year about 1000 housewives looted two supermarkets in Maracay. "We are not criminals", they shouted, "but our children must eat". The Venezuelan bourgeoisie did not take the hint and went ahead with its programme of austerity measures. What happened next could happen in almost any Latin American country. Rioters, mostly from the shanty towns, took to the streets. A curfew was imposed to prevent the demonstration reaching the rest of the working class. The army murdered so many that a shortage of coffins was reported following the riots. Yet the government felt so shaky that 30% wage rises, a freeze on the price of basic foodstuffs and a transport bonus for the lowest paid were immediately granted. The unions urged striking workers to go back to work and an insurrection was avoided. In less than three weeks the US Treasury came up with a plan for "Third World" debt. Commercial banks were urged to reduce the interest charges on loans to developing countries. The proposed debt reduction (around \$30 bn.), however, is next to nothing compared to the massive total of \$1300 bn..

US Strategy

The US's main strategy in the region has been to oversee a smooth transfer of power from the military to constitutional republics. Brazil has acted as a model for this process. In 1979 the army initiated its own limited enquiries into the murders it committed during the previous decade. The generals have been preparing to transfer power to a civilian government since 1980. They even have a left wing alternative "opposition" in the shape of the Workers Party (PT) with Lula, its leader, playing the role of Brazil's Lech Walesa. A wave of demonstrations by rubber tappers demanding an end to the system of virtual chattel slavery which they live under has broken out. The murder of the tappers' leader Chico Mendes has resulted in numerous solidarity marches. Amazonian Indians have forced the government to cancel its project for the construction of hydro-electric dams. But most important of all the Brazilian workers have been

displaying their disdain for Sarney's anti-inflationary measures.

Recently 70% of the country's 60 million workforce downed tools and brought the country to a standstill for 48 hours. Over 5000 sugar cane cutters and thousands of textile workers struck for the first time. Government offices were occupied and there were skirmishes between the strikers and the police in several cities. There were armed confrontations with the state by farm labourers. And this was just a token 48 hour strike called by the unions! More recently in Sao Paulo, pickets with hoods over their heads stopped car factories working as strikes for higher pay closed banks, ports and schools.

In Chile, class struggle has been well and truly smothered by parliamentary cretinism, and economic attacks on the workers have been largely successful. Although the "no" vote in the recent plebiscite proved a shock to Pinochet, it will do nothing to improve the lot of the workers. The 16 parties that campaigned for the "no" vote (including the "Communist" Party) were financially assisted by the USA, who will be glad to see the back of the old general. When Pinochet leaves in 1990 his most probable successor will be the Christian Democrats. The inability of the workers to recognise all the parties involved in the plebiscite as their class enemies and their over-emphasis on one man is reminiscent of the mistakes of the Iranian working class who thought getting rid of the Shah was a victory in itself.

Militancy is found in abundance, however, amongst the Guatemalan proletariat. Inmates at Guatemala's largest prison overpowered guards, seized 200 carbine rifles and fought the army to a standstill. After taking over the prison they presented the government with a set of demands: the warden's removal, security for those involved in the revolt and reduced sentences. Women and children who occupied the prison were not hostages as the media claimed. They were there in solidarity with their men.

In Mexico six years of economic stagnation and falling wages have forced workers to hit back. Rural labourers have staged hunger strikes and taken over town halls in half a dozen states. Workers have clashed violently with the authorities. The arrest of an oil workers' union leader, led to a walk out by tens of thousands of oil workers. These workers have the power to paralyse the country whenever they please, but once again union leaders stepped in to avert a crisis for the bourgeoisie and ordered the workers back to their jobs.

The US is attempting to set up a North American Common Market (consisting of the US, Canada and Mexico) to compete with fortress Europe.

Nicaragua : a Socialist Paradise

The trade embargo exercised against her by the Reagan administration is beginning to hit Nicaragua hard. The hurricane that devastated the country at the end of last year has produced a chain of destruction. The Sandinista government, said to be "more IMF than the IMF", employed monetarist policies and devalued the currency. Real wages fell overnight to a sixth of their previous value. Only in Nicaragua can the ruling class get away with such a massive attack on the workers! Like Mexico, there has been a move from urban to rural areas. Thirty five thousand troops and public employees have been sacked.

From Argentina, where the army is attempting to move centre stage once again, to El Salvador, where the victory of the fascist party ARENA at the polls can only exacerbate the civil war, the working class is suffering an intense period of attacks on its livelihood. At the same time, discontent is rife throughout the subcontinents. The IMF, the US and the Russians - who have recently declared the age of revolution in the region over - will be working overtime to ensure that it is not about to begin.

THE INTIFADA SPREADS.

For more than a year now the Palestinian working class has been defying the might of the Israeli army. The bravery and courage of the Palestinian detainees at the Ansar 3 camp has become a legend in the Arab world taking on mythical proportions. Yet, for all its self-sacrifice and originality, the Intifada which began as a spontaneous act of defiance, has today found itself in the quicksand of nationalism. During the initial months of the uprising, when Nablus was under curfew, a system of ropes with baskets running from house to house was developed. Those who had food put it in and those who didn't took it out. Today the initiative has passed into the hands of the PLO bureaucrats who "co-ordinate" the resistance to the extent of beaming regular radio messages into Palestine. The PLO call one day strikes to avoid a general strike. Their aim : to lead the national liberation movement to its successful conclusion and at a later stage to fuse with the local bourgeoisie in forming the new ruling class of a "liberated" Palestinian state.

Repercussions of the Intifada

The Intifada has irretrievably altered the political landscape of the Middle East. The Israeli political parties have been forced into a coalition to defend the nation. After the Nahhalin atrocity, a few liberals complained that Israel has lost sight of its original ideals (like hell it has!), some of them even making the obvious analogy with Nazi Germany. Soldiers occasionally wring their hands and complain that the PLO is forcing them to shoot children, but carry on doing it anyway. Israeli troops are not some elite death squad, but simply the Israelis in uniform. As for the Israeli workers, they are often to the right of the bosses in their racism and support for repression.

The ban on the formation of trade unions in Gaza was lifted by the Likud government in 1980. The present semi-legal status of these unions allows them to play the same function as Solidarnosc played in Poland. They channel action into an attempt to obtain legal recognition.

The "Wretched of the Earth" Rebel

Nightly footage of the uprising inspired the Algerians in their rebellion against the ruling FLN

(National Liberation Front). The FLN has tried to carry out a damage limitation exercise by associating itself with the seemingly more militant

PLO. In return the PLO has done its utmost to prevent the spread of the Intifada to Algeria (see Palestine Post 37, p3). Nevertheless the short lived revolt of the Algerian proletariat has greater communist potential than anything we have witnessed in the "liberated" countries for a long time. Their explicit identification with the Palestinian Intifada, implicitly rejecting Arab nationalism and showing that the enemy is equally the radical Arab bourgeoisie and the Zionist state, has tremendous potential for future international class struggle in the Middle East.

The fierce rebellion which shook Algeria in early October 1988 was sparked off by the FLN's austerity measures, a response to the drop in oil prices, aggravating the already crisis-ridden economy. The Algerian petro-bourgeoisie tried to bring the situation under control by attacking the living standards of the workers. Artificially induced unemployment and devaluation of the currency led to a series of strikes in the state sector.

The riots began in the working class district near the Kasbah and spread to the western city of Oran. The rich suburbs of the Avenue Didouche-Murad shopping area were looted for goods and demonstrators set at least three ministries on fire. In Kouba, the army used tanks and jeeps to quell the price riots, leaving 60 people dead. In a symbolic gesture of anti-nationalism workers ripped down the national flag outside the Algerian Exterior Bank, and replaced it with a blood stained white one, obviously taking the words of "The Red Flag" literally. The Western media did its best to raise the bogey of Islamic fundamentalism as the source of all the trouble. The government made references to "unseen hands" manipulating the "youthful rioters" - just like they do in Britain. Yet

"Noone knows whether the Popular Movement for the Renewal of Algeria (the alleged fundamentalists) is just one malcontent with a telephone directory or a widespread secret opposition movement" (Independent 10.10.88).

So much for investigative journalism! Muslim fundamentalists have been shown for the anti working class hypocrites they are. In order to boost their meagre influence amongst the population they took on the role of the impotent Algerian unions by trying to restore order. The fundamentalists were "attempting to act as interlocutors between the demonstrators and the authorities" (Guardian 10.10.88).



RIOTS IN JORDAN

Conclusions

Today Israel is using four times as many troops to control the occupied territories as it took to occupy them in 1967. The PLO has offered to help the FBI track down the Lockerbie killers. The failure of the Palestinian proletariat to give an independent voice to its demands has made them the cannon-fodder of an organisation which is openly on the same side as the world's most powerful capitalist states.

The Algerian working class on the other hand see the parallels between their struggle against the FLN, the Intifada and the struggle waged against



the French. Algerian workers in France went on a spontaneous demonstration in favour of their comrades. The bubble of national liberation has burst and President Chadli Bin Jadid's plan for the further liberalisation of the economy ensures the continuation of the struggle.

In April, the Jordanian working class hit back against the IMF's austerity measures. Price rises of 15 to 50% on fuel, cigarettes and other goods were met with a wave of riots and demonstrations. The rioters smashed windows, looted supermarkets, destroyed a bank, set government cars on fire and engaged in a bit of "indiscriminate shooting"! (Guardian 23.4.89).

Initially the unrest was mostly confined to the southern region of Jordan which is inhabited mostly by Bedouin and "native" Jordanians. Later on it spread to areas near the capital, Amman, and Tayyiba. The Palestinian Jordanians who account for 60% of the population have not been involved as we go to press, though this does not mean they are unsympathetic to the movement's aims. The demonstrators have demanded a new government and the trial of those who are responsible for Jordan's economic problems. King Hussein has sacked his Prime Minister and will have to announce economic aid from the USA in order to appease the proletariat.

In the Intifadas we are witnessing the rebirth of the region's proletariat. Whereas in Palestine, working class self-activity has been largely submerged under nationalist aims, the Algerian and Jordanian workers have thrown away the shackles of patriotism and are fighting for their class interests.

May 1989.



THE ACF ON IRELAND

ORGANISE!
for class struggle anarchism

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Feb-April
1989
Issue 14

IRELAND
Twenty
years on

THE
MYTH OF
LABOUR'S
'SOCIALISM'

PAKISTAN
UNDER
BHUTTO

THE
POWER OF
RANK AND
FILE
ACTION

POLL TAX
FACTS

REVIEWS

We have a lot of differences with the Anarchist Communist Federation. However we cannot take an arrogant attitude, since many of the things we criticise in the ACF's publications and activities are no worse than what Wildcat has done in the past.

The cover of *Organise!* 14 shows a kid with a petrol bomb and a giant Ireland badge. We support the young rioters against the troops; we make no concessions to the nationalist ideology which most of them believe.

This struggle was not always under the thumb of nationalism; as Eamonn McCann makes clear in his book *War and an Irish Town*, there was an important wave of class struggle over discrimination in housing in Derry in the 60's. There was the beginning of links with the "Protestant" majority of the working class. However most of these workers were determined to defend sectarian discrimination against Catholic workers. Mobs of workers from Loyalist strongholds attacked Catholic ghettos, and burnt out Catholic families who were housed in the wrong area. The mobs were supported by the police.

The sectarian backlash provoked the Derry insurrection of 1969, when the Loyalist gangs and the B Specials were driven out of the Bogside. From that point on, the mass of the Loyalist working class fought any attempt by the British government to reduce sectarianism. This struggle culminated in the Loyalist mass strike of 1974 which brought down the reformist executive and returned the province to outright sectarian rule.

There have been occasional examples of united strikes across the sectarian divide in the state sector. There are currently strikes in the traditional Loyalist work places against redundancies. But these struggles are totally overshadowed by the ingrained sectarianism of the Loyalist workers. Recently there have been strikes for pay increases at Short Brothers. But management know they can walk all over the workers, most of whose struggles in recent years have been concerned with the right to display pictures of the Queen and fly the Union Jack, the butcher's apron as it's called in Ireland, over the factory, with the aim of intimidating Catholics. By far the most important struggles of the majority in Northern Ireland for many years have been sectarian.

The Free Derry uprising was by no means entirely nationalist. The IRA hardly existed at that time; the graffiti read "I Ran Away". The Catholic minority has continued to fight the majority, the RUC and the army, not because it is controlled by the IRA, but because it has to. However the uprising was not purely working class as the ACF seem to think. Like the civil rights movement before it, it involved other classes of Catholics protesting against sectarianism which affected them.

Our opposition to the IRA is not based on a libertarian critique of the "elitism" of the armed struggle, as the ACF say. How else do you fight the SAS? It is based on opposition to the IRA's anti-working class activities, and its program of a united capitalist Ireland which would in practice be dominated by the Catholic church, and would crush the working class in the same way as national movements have always done when they take power.

We do not hold out much hope for working class unity in Northern Ireland. Communism will come to Ireland only via a European and world revolution, and via confrontation with many of the Loyalist workers as well as the IRA. Solidarity with the oppressed Catholic minority of the working class in Northern Ireland is an essential part of the internationalism which this revolution will require. Calling for "Troops Out" however would only be seen as nationalist: we do not think British troops have any less right to be in Northern Ireland than anywhere else. Apart from these disagreements, we think the ACF article is a useful contribution to the discussion on Ireland.

EYE WITNESS IN HALABJA



On March 13, 1988, the city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan was almost completely destroyed by the Iraqi armed forces using chemical weapons. Around 8000 people were killed at the time and many thousands more died from their injuries over the next few weeks. Halabja was not chosen arbitrarily as the site for such a massacre. It had been a major site of proletarian struggle against the Iran-Iraq war. There was at least one deserter in every house, and sometimes four or five. The following is a summary of translations of letters and articles we have seen, written by comrades living in Halabja before and during the massacre. As the account speaks for itself, we see no need to elaborate.

Social Conditions

During 1987 the Iraqi government destroyed 45 villages around Halabja, using explosives to completely demolish all the houses. The inhabitants poured into Halabja, swelling the population to around 110,000. Almost all the young men in these villages had been deserters from the army. They were not just dropping out of the war but were always discussing ways of doing something against it.

The influx of people led to a severe housing shortage and there were no jobs for most people. Shops were selling virtually nothing apart from maybe rice and bread - fruit, vegetables and meat were far too expensive for most. All the time there was talk amongst the unemployed about what to do about the war. Only the rich wanted to fight for their country. Many people were selling their possessions because of the insecure conditions. This enabled the rich to get richer by buying people's TV sets, fridges, etc. and selling them in other cities.

Political Organisations

The only sizeable bourgeois political organisation taken seriously by the deserters was the Iraqi CP. All the other organisations and parties, in particular the Kurdish nationalists (the largest of which was the KDP), were totally discredited because of their open collaboration with the state. Both the KDP and the CP tended to tail-end everything the deserters did. The CP, however, had greater credibility because it gave more support to the deserters than anyone else and was the only organisation to say that sooner or later the government would attack Halabja and that people had to prepare for this. The CP needed to wipe out the

bad reputation it accrued by joining the Ba'athist government in 1974.

There were also dozens of small organisations, many claiming to be communist, with names like "the Marxist Leninist Workers' Party", "the Leninist Marxist Group", etc. etc.. They produced lots of leaflets and graffiti on walls.

Someone living in Halabja produced a pamphlet about the condition of the deserters which was very critical of the Kurdish nationalists. A week later he was killed. The place was in chaos. The "traitors" and "troublemakers" were all going around legitimately within the structure of pro-government organisations. "H. had a gun, as well as valid documents. Can you believe it?"

Armed Forces

Since the end of 1986/beginning of 1987, three types of army had existed in Halabja in addition to the Iraqi army proper. These were:

a) CLAN ARMIES - Around Halabja there had traditionally been five main family/tribal groupings and many more small ones. During the war the feeling of belonging to one clan or another had become much stronger amongst the population. The government set about trying to integrate deserters back into the armed forces of the state by paying clan leaders (big land owners who had become capitalists) 50,000 Dinar per month plus lots of weapons, flash cars etc. to round up deserters from their own clan and put them under military discipline.

There was very fierce competition between the clan armies as the leaders vied for more "recruits" and thus more money from the government. This led to many gun fights on the streets, and even in cafes and shops. When people spoke about "war" in Halabja they meant the wars between the clan armies, and between the latter and the deserters, not the war between Iran and Iraq.

b) THE HOME GUARD - This was by far the largest army. It was not uniformed and had very few weapons. It was the army that deserters joined purely because there was a law that everyone who had deserted had to have ID saying that they had joined an army. The Home Guard can be seen as a way of legalising desertion in the same way as the "Right to Strike" legalised the strike weapon. S. Hussein even spoke about a "Right to Desert".

c) THE BOUNTY HUNTERS - This was a small force which acted with extreme viciousness on behalf of the state. Their main function was to force deserters to join the Home Guard. They were always checking people's ID and had a legal right to kill

anyone who didn't have any. They were paid 1000 Dinar for bringing someone to a police station alive, and 500 Dinar for their head. They killed a lot of poor people just to get money. They might take someone's head to a police station claiming that they had killed him at the border and that he was a Pasdars (Iranian Revolutionary Guard).

After the massacre most of these scum went to Iran to do the same job for the Iranian state.

There were very close links between the leaders of the clan armies, the bounty hunters, Kurdish nationalist organisations and local businessmen.

The May '87 Uprising

All the talk about stopping the government from destroying Halabja turned to action on 13 May 87 when militants occupied the mosques and used the loudspeakers to call for the organisation of an uprising. Mosques were used because they were the most suitable buildings in which to hold mass meetings. This was ironic because for weeks before the priests had been giving a special talk after each Friday prayer meeting on... the evils of communist subversion! Almost the whole working class population of Halabja was awake that night, discussing and organising.

Many people had weapons; these were mostly those who had been in the clan armies (double deserters!). All ages were involved and women as well as men. Everybody was saying "The soldiers are our brothers, it is Saddam who is the enemy!". Iraqi Army troops came to Halabja. They said, 'more or less, "We've been sent to kill you but we won't do it. But please disperse". The crown refused to disperse and persuaded most of the soldiers to join the rebellion.

"...in May the governmental forces were toppled. The people had taken over and the police and army had to go into hiding, only being able to move around in tanks and in armoured divisions. Helicopters circled overhead, calling for calm and care in the face of the enemies of the nation. Battles were raging near the town, and the Iranians were getting nearer. The town was bombed by Iranian artillery and there were many casualties. Everybody was aware of the danger, but were in favour of neither the Iranians nor the Iraqis."

The helicopters were accompanied by tanks. Some of the rebels fired at the tanks, then the helicopters fired rockets into the crowd. People fled. Jordanian troops then invaded the town killing hundreds of people. A few days later 200 people were rounded up, some dragged from hospitals, and buried alive. Five days after the rebellion had started the government totally destroyed the area where it had happened. They also booby-trapped empty houses nearby leading to many more deaths.

Many people fled to Iran in small groups but the Peshmargan (Kurdish nationalist guerillas) tried to stop them from leaving, saying they would "liberate" Halabja. This didn't stop the nationalists helping rich people and mullahs to leave, in return for money. Every day helicopters came to tell people to be calm. They said Halabja would not be destroyed.

Over the next few weeks there were rebellions in 4 or 5 other Kurdish cities. The government closed the mosques and cut off their electricity to stop them being used like they were in Halabja.

The Governor's Visit

The governor of Suliamania (the nearest big city) came to Halabja and made a speech. He said:

"Halabja is one of the cities in Iraq which has made many sacrifices throughout history. President Hussein himself has a special concern for Halabja and the people who spread rumours about Halabja being destroyed are your enemies and enemies of the state."

Someone in the crowd shouted "What did you do with those 200 people, we want them back!". The governor said "Goodbye, see you next time".

The Build-Up

Shortly before the massacre, deserters took over Sirwan (a town about 20 km from Halabja) using weapons from the clan armies. No Kurdish nationalist organisations were involved but the CP was to some extent. Soon afterwards, the Iraqi Airforce totally destroyed the town with bombs and rockets.

Two weeks before the massacre clan leaders and army officers were secretly moved to Suliamania. Iraqi soldiers suspected something was up and many gave away their arms to deserters in the streets before fleeing to Suliamania.

Many poor people were trying to leave for Iran but the Peshmargan sent them back, as before they helped the rich. Shortly before the massacre Halabja was bombed for three days by Iran and then occupied by the Pasdaran. The Peshmargan helped direct the Iranian bombing (perhaps because they wanted to get rid of the Iraqi military) and after the occupation helped the Pasdaran to keep everyone in Halabja. At the same time they moved their own families to Iran.

The Massacre

On 13 March 1988 chemical bombs were dropped on

Halabja. No Pasdaran nor Peshmargan were killed. The Iranian soldiers had left on the day before or on the morning of the massacre. The Peshmargan continued to surround the city. Some had gas masks.

"We ran over to the basement on the opposite side of the street to take cover. Half an hour later the planes came back from all directions - there must have been at least twenty of them, believe me - and in a few minutes Halabja was in ruins. Shortly afterwards we smelt gas. It was just like the smell of garlic. Some of us ran to get some water and we gave the others wet towels and clothes to put over their faces."

At least three different gases were used: mustard gas, nerve gas and something that made people crazy (they tore off their clothes, laughed for a while and then dropped dead). Around 8000 died immediately.

Even after the massacre the Peshmargan would not let people leave. They looted homes and raped women.

After a week or so, many people went blind or insane. Many just gave up the will to live.

After the Massacre

Life in the Refugee Camps in Iran

Many thousands of survivors ended up in refugee camps in Iran where they are not allowed any contact with the Iranian population. The CP still has some support amongst the refugees but when the Peshmargan came to the camps to try to recruit they were chased out with stones.

Camps are run like the military. Everything organised in such a way that people cannot have contact with each other. If you don't stay in your allocated place you run the risk of being locked up without food. Special passes are required for leaving the camps. These are very difficult to get. We are still conscripts. All those born between 1945 and 1970 join the army, the rest go to the reserve army.

Reprisals and Resettlement

If an Iraqi soldier is killed in a particular area, the state orders the flattening of a number of houses, and executes 5 or 6 young people in public as a warning.

Many people from Halabja with no relatives in Baghdad or Suliamania were sent to "empty zones" near the border with Saudi Arabia. Escape from these zones is impossible because you die of thirst before reaching the nearest town. The Iraqi government has

started to rebuild Halabja. They intend to bring more people from Arab villages in the South to Halabja. These were people who also fought the state during the war.

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THE HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE Thatcherism in Crisis

Historians may use another word to describe the world wide capitalist restructuring based on the unleashing of market discipline from Chile to China to attempt to solve the world economic crisis of the 1970's. Clearly, Thatcherism is one expression of a global turn to various right wing economic and political strategies. Whatever we want to call it, it has failed, like the Keynesian and state ownership economic policies which preceded it. It has not softened the basic contradictions of the British economy - quite the reverse - and it won't help the rulers of Russia in the long term either.

The effects of the restructuring which has taken place in the last ten years in Britain can be schematically summarised as follows: Dividing and defeating the working class. Creating a large stratum of unemployed and semi employed workers. The announcement of massive layoffs, followed by strikes, which are defeated by state support for large scale police action and the recruitment of scabs. Trade union legislation makes it harder for trade unions to even pretend to support strikes. The unions, trying to prove they are still as useful to the state as ever, sabotage strikes with increasing blatancy. Whereas the NUM managed to make it look as though it was supporting the strike whilst ensuring its defeat by preventing its generalisation, more recent disputes such as the seamen's have simply been called off by the unions concerned.

As Socialist Worker reported after the AEU had sabotaged a strike at CASE in Doncaster in February

"After the return to work one AEU steward said, 'There's lots of people saying 'I'm done with unions.' That's not the right attitude, but people are fed up with the messing about.'"

By picking off the working class section by section, the Thatcher government has, up till now, managed to avoid all-out confrontations.

Democracy

When Thatcher claims to have "rolled back the frontiers of the state", this is obviously a lie. To take just one example, she is abolishing rates and introducing a poll tax instead. This will increase bureaucracy and state control, and give more power to the central state at the expense of the local state. Far from rolling it back, her government has centralised it. Different parts of the state have lost power to Downing Street. But only an idiot would say this is undemocratic.

On the level of the economy, the Thatcher epoch has resulted in significant sectors of the economy becoming formally owned by private investors rather than the state corporations. But these private investors are large institutions such as ICI or the Prudential. The main institutions of the bourgeoisie in the major capitalist countries are so closely linked together as to make the concept of "state capitalism" as opposed to "private capitalism" less valid than it at first appears. Given the fusion of big capital, finance and the state - for example, the gentlemen's agreement whereby the Bank of England, the state bank, could not let another bank go out of business under any circumstances - we cannot see privatisation as the victory of one faction of capitalism over another.



Rather, we should see it as part of a restructuring process organised by the bourgeoisie as a whole which includes privatisation, deregulation and increasing state repression. It hardly needs saying that the central part of this restructuring is an attack on the working class, with the aim of getting more surplus value out of it, with which to solve the crisis. What is specific to this restructuring, as opposed to the nationalisations of the post war period for example, is the mechanism which is being used to discipline, first management, then the workers: the discipline of the market.

The government has encouraged managers to work harder. Cushy jobs in the legal profession are still being restructured, but in manufacturing, the bosses were forced to abandon the golf courses years ago. The more advanced manufacturing firms imitated the Japanese in forcing managers to get into overalls and actually lead the troops into battle, exploiting by example. Open plan offices where managers and workers work side by side, allowing not even the most rudimentary independent working class organisation, is another modern development along these lines. The idea is to get managers to do their job: getting workers to do their jobs.

The mass unemployment created by the restructuring of industry was used to create a large body of

temporary and low-paid workers, aided by government "training" schemes which dilute labour by getting badly paid young people to do jobs, lowering the rate which workers can demand. Better paid workers were led to believe that they had a stake in capitalism by being allowed to buy their houses, shares, etc..

Spanking

Thatcher has been in power for ten years. The bourgeoisie have kept the Tories in. This is not because they want to avoid Labour being "exposed" in front of the working class. This idea is derived from Lenin, who argued that putting Labour in power would put its leaders on the spot. The reason is that the Tories are more capable than the other parties of reorganising British capitalism, and ensuring a leading role for it in the emerging European superpower. If Labour did get elected they would carry out the same policies as the Tories.

This is shown by their record in local government, where Labour and SLD councils have often exceeded instructions in their zeal to impose Thatcherism on the working class. To give just three examples: Labour controlled Camden repatriated black and Irish immigrants, SLD Tower Hamlets had an overtly racist housing policy against Bangladeshis, and Labour Strathclyde ensures the "utmost diligence" among its poll tax snoopers by threatening them with the sack. But the bosses have tended to think that the Thatcher team can do the job. Now they're beginning to doubt it.

There is every sign that the crisis is deepening. In spite of an unprecedented rise in interest rates which took away all the gains made by better off workers and petty bourgeois in the 1988 budget in less than a year, Britain's balance of payments deficit continues to break records. The oil money will run out, and even at present is in short supply as the ageing North Sea superstructure crumbles, and so will the proceeds of privatisation. The state is being forced into more blatant attacks on the whole working class.