

THE PRESENT SITUATION - OUR TASKS

FROM CT & RB LONDON

Introduction

In presenting this summary of the present situation and our tasks, we are not attempting to put forward a 'general line', but to stimulate discussion on those problems both practical and theoretical which we feel the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain must tackle. Obviously such questions can only be tackled in a really meaningful way once some kind of organised unity has been forged within the Marxist-Leninist movement. However, we are highly confident that this unity will be achieved. The response to the conference organised by the CWM shows not only the genuine sincerity of many groups and individuals to achieve unity, but also that some unity has already come about. We firmly believe that the conference will cement this base of unity, not merely by resting on the lowest common denominator but the very highest. Although we have written this draft, it was only possible for us to do so because of the many discussions we have had already with many sincere comrades over the last two years and more. An earlier draft was discussed with JAC members in a meeting in the north earlier this year, and has currently received the general support of many JAC members in the London area.

The industrial proletariat is rising from its sleep and all around there are signs of its new activity. The car workers of British Leyland and Ford's are in the process of throwing away the social contract and are being followed by other sections of the working class. The false promises of 'worker participation in management' are being recognised by the proletariat as yet another stage in the capitalist 'con-trick'. It is becoming clearer to them that the subordination of labour by capital never changes under capitalism - it merely assumes different forms, and so must the struggle against capitalism.

For years the trade union bureaucrats have been carefully groomed by the bourgeois state to aid the aims of capitalism by controlling the working class. (This is in conjunction with the more direct methods of political control used by the state). But this trade union manipulation of the working class movement is breaking down. Under pressure from the proletariat, more industrial union leaders are being forced to oppose the present government's economic policies. Even 'die-hard' reactionaries like Jack Jones, panic stricken by the resurgence of militancy are urging the government to freeze prices in a bid to regain face with the working class.

But the meaning of such political jiggery-pokery is becoming better understood by the proletariat. It was voiced by the tool room workers at Leyland; it bellowed out in the mass defection of thousands of industrial workers from the traditional May Day rally organised by the TUC.

What are the objective and subjective conditions of the new phase; the social and world foundations of this new activity?

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From the mid 1960.s the rates of inflation in capitalist economies began to outstrip the rate of economic expansion, and the Keynesian notion of 'full employment' was discarded by the capitalist class as a 'luxury' that the falling rate of profit could no longer afford. While exploitation of the Third World was stepped up, it was met with increasing resistance. At home, capitalists demanded control of wages not to stop inflation, but to maintain their profits in the face of inflation. So successive governments embarked on prices and incomes policies, devaluation, pay freezes and finally the social contract.

Capitalism has now switched to using monetarist policies, - trying to control inflation by controlling the money supply, which has only resulted in increasing unemployment. The social contract and these monetary policies in effect represent a two pronged political and economic attack on the working class.

Under capitalism, workers never receive the full value of their labour power, just what it costs to keep them alive and reproduce a new generation of workers to be exploited. But what they do receive comes in two forms: the post war welfare state social services and the pay packet. As supplementary benefits increased, the pay packet formed a decreasing portion of the price paid for labour power. This is good for the capitalists as it is easier to enforce public expenditure cuts than it is to enforce pay restraint. So now, the working class is receiving less for its labour power in terms of welfare because of public expenditure cuts, while at the same time, the social contract forced on the working class by the union leaders, has reduced the rest of the value of labour power in the pay packet.

But the working class has not just been bashed economically. These monetarist policies coupled with the social contract have effectively handcuffed class struggle in recent years. Economically the working class has to struggle on two fronts: to win an increase in the real value of their wages while campaigning against public expenditure cuts. Politically the situation is even more confusing with the lack of any genuine working class party to give leadership.

However, workers are resisting the onslaught in force. They are organising in the workplace in spite of those union leaders who try to carry out capitalist state policies. One of the most important aspects of the struggle of certain groups of workers like Leyland's tool room men for independent negotiating rights is that they are trying to escape from the limitations imposed by the bureaucracy of large unions such as the AUEW.

The situation is calling for new forms of struggle to supplement the old and these are in evidence: the bread drivers strike in support of small shops to forestall future control of bread prices by supermarket monopolies; the recent shop stewards conference in the West Midlands; mobilisation of workers, students and squatters working together to stop Lambeth Council wrecking good accommodation because they had no funds for repairs. (this resulted in 200 people before the High Court); and occupation of hospitals. All over Britain workers are mobilising against the cuts and to smash the social contract, but where are Marxist-Leninists?

These struggles demonstrate the basic contradiction of capitalism getting sharper before our eyes. It is becoming more evident that production is socialised while all the benefits go into a few hands. The crisis didn't come out of the blue, we don't have to pull together to weather the storm - capitalism is the storm. Workers are forced by the system to work over and above the value of their labour power to create surplus value for the capitalist. The harder or more efficient they are forced to work the more they are being exploited. Obviously these capitalist relations of production are holding up the development of society.

To exploit labour further, capitalism mechanises and automates the production process. Thus each worker operating a sophisticated machine produces more surplus value. Since the value of goods depends on the amount of labour involved in producing them, this means more goods for the same labour, which means they are cheaper and more competitive on the market. Thus the most competitive firms are those that invest an ever increasing proportion of capital in machinery and materials and less in labour. This gives rise to unemployment. Those firms that cannot keep pace with these monopolies are forced to close, causing even more unemployment.

Furthermore, since only the exploitation of labour is a source of profit for the capitalist, his rate of profit eventually reaches a ceiling and then declines. Capital tends to flow to where its rate of return is the highest. So, not only large areas of Britain are neglected and run down, but through the City of London capital also flees abroad. Capital is geared to profit and not to what is of value to society. All over Europe agriculture is in a mess and there is a sharp contradiction between town and country. In general, capitalist firms produce as much as they can in order to make more profit, but workers are too poor to buy all the things produced. This leads to over production and the capitalist system is bound to move from one crisis to another.

All these economic contradictions give rise to struggle between social classes. The capitalist system which creates these antagonisms needs its own form of state in its attempts to control classes economically, administratively and militarily and experience shows that class struggle does not die. Both capitalists and workers are still class conscious. To understand anything worth knowing about society we must understand classes and everything boils down to one central thing - the state.

Much of the economy is nationalised and under state control, but this is not socialism because state power belongs to the bourgeoisie. In fact state capitalism is a demonstration of the extent to which capital is concentrated and monopolised in the present era of imperialism. Through nationalisation and building up its repressive apparatus, the state becomes more bureaucratised and parasitic. We really need to smash this state - a workers state will be something quite different.

Under capitalism there will always be a struggle of opposites - between bourgeoisie and proletariat. However, showing the existence of class struggle is only part of the story and not the most important part. We only move a step nearer to the resolution of the contradiction when the proletariat is organised to take state power. In setting up its own state power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, workers will become the principle aspect of the contradiction and history will move along at a tremendous pace.

This class struggle which we are right in the thick of is the most important thing in world history today. But in the era of imperialism the internal conflict in a country like ours is an aspect of the world wide class struggle. Apart from the contradiction we have just described there are three other important ones: between imperialism and the oppressed nations and peoples; between rival imperialist powers in the struggle for world domination; and between imperialist and socialist countries.

The victorious national liberation war of the Indo-chinese people was an immense encouragement and benefit for all working people in the capitalist countries because it weakened the capitalist system under which they too suffer. In rebelling against the present international economic order, the people of the Third World (Asia, Africa and Latin America) are shaking the foundations of imperialism and this is good for us too. The main international tyrants are the two superpowers; the USA and the Soviet Union. Other industrialised countries like Britain also oppress the developing countries, but they themselves are also oppressed by the superpowers.

Britain has long been dominated by the USA; very many branches of industry are controlled by the so-called 'trans-nationals' which are in fact organs of American domination. The British capitalist class as a whole has long had quite a slavish attitude. After the war, along with other European capitalists, they were delighted to mortgage the economy to the USA in return for help in controlling the working class. This shows that instead of yielding to their own workers, many capitalists will prefer to capitulate to imperialism.

Recently the British government handed out a huge sum of money to the US Chrysler car monopoly to help maintain its control over the British market. In general, state policy in a country like Britain does not run counter to the interests of foreign imperialism. In the Third World some governments are heroically nationalising the property of the US trans-nationals, but nationalisation in Britain has hardly ever touched a whisker of American capital.

By attempting to control Third World countries, the superpowers are trying to control Europe. The current struggle between them over the Middle East is indirectly a conflict over the control of Europe. We certainly do not support our 'own' capitalists if they should try to rival the US by means of imperialist power politics. In the Suez War in 1956 they got a defeat they deserved. But since the early 60.s a group among the West European bourgeoisie has realised that if the

Third World is controlled by the superpowers, then Europe will also be controlled by them because of its dependence on imported raw materials, therefore for this section of capitalists the Third World is seen as an ally. Various European institutions were set up to serve American interests, but later a trend developed to use them against the superpowers.

The struggle between rival imperialist powers for domination over the world is an inevitable, abiding feature of the imperialist era which will only disappear along with imperialism itself. After the last War the US was so strong that no other imperialist state could challenge it, but since the start of the 70.s it has been in decline. This might have meant that European imperialists would try for world domination on their own account but they already had their fingers burned in colonial wars in the past. To be a superpower would mean controlling the Third World, but the Third World has shown impressive strength - this is precisely the reason for America's decline. After the result of the Vietnam War only soviet social imperialism dares to try its hand at world domination because of its tactics of posing as a socialist country and pretending to back national liberation and anti-imperialist movements.. Just as the United States after the last war pretended to support the liberation movements in the colonies with a view to breaking up and taking over the empires of the European colonial powers, so the USSR today is following a similar tactic in trying to disintegrate and absorb the American sphere of influence.

So, we should oppose the US attempts to force other industrialised countries to join in a rearguard action against the Third World. We should support the policy of some British and European bourgeois leaders to treat the Third World countries as fellow oppressed nations and ally with them against the superpowers, while opposing the counter-trend of trying to exploit them while posing as friends.

In general, because the situation is so complex, there are real policy differences between different sectors of the bourgeoisie. This is even more striking when we look at the significance of soviet social imperialism.

The contradiction between the USSR and the USA used to be one between a socialist and an imperialist country and now is one between two rival imperialisms. During the decade or so after the war, the US, British and other imperialists created a myth about a 'Soviet threat'. Though there were some incorrect aspects to Soviet policy, it was at that time essentially a socialist country and did not really threaten others. Whenever the US wanted to establish its influence in a certain area it always pretended there was a Soviet threat.

From the middle of the 1950.s when capitalism was restored, the Soviet Union at once followed an imperialist policy. But for more than another decade it was not strong enough to challenge the Americans and spent most of its time colluding with them, and selling out the revolutionary movements.

Since the mid 1960.s Russia has gone onto the offensive. It is the main force opposing the genuine socialist countries China and Albania. It is oppressing or would like to oppress the working people everywhere and is certainly moving on a course which will lead towards world war.

How does all this influence our own country? The capitalist system is torn by internal contradictions which are impossible to solve. It is like a man stuck in quick-sand - if it does nothing it will sink but if the state takes some initiatives, every move it makes will only prepare conditions which will get it more deeply into the mud. Fascism is one response to the 'crisis'. The British ruling class is one of the most fascistic, having built an enormous apparatus of terrorism in pursuing its war against Ireland. On behalf of the whole ruling class in all western countries, British imperialism is using Ireland to rehearse for the suppression of workers everywhere. All sectors of the bourgeoisie are united in using this as an example to scare people with what could happen if they step out of line.

The proletariat is the only class which can take a correct attitude to the relation between social imperialism and revolution. We say, we will fight to the last man against social imperialism and we are for communism; the stronger working class organisation is, the more effectively we will resist social imperialist aggression; the more complete our victory the sooner will be revolution. This not to deny the possibility of socialist revolution in this country before Soviet aggression leads to another European war. But the situation is developing fast and such a war may well outstrip the development of a genuine working class revolutionary movement.

All sections of the bourgeoisie oppose working-class revolution and some also oppose social imperialism. The bourgeoisie therefore follow one of two alternatives: either they try to combine suppressing the working class with resisting social imperialism, or they capitulate to social imperialism hoping that this will make it easier for them to suppress the people at home.

The more traditionally right-wing bourgeoisie correctly warn about the danger from the Soviet Union, but fallaciously describe this as 'communist', trying to oppose both social imperialism and their own workers. These people may align with the racists and reactionary army chiefs to move in the direction of fascism. In essence this would be a capitulation to social imperialism making things much easier for it, because when the Soviet Union does try to invade and occupy Europe, they will do so in the name of liberating the European people from right-wing governments. (They are already preparing for this by accusing the genuine revolutionary left of allying with the most reactionary forces).

Another group of the anti-Soviet bourgeoisie are the 'pre-Europeans'. They also want to combine suppression of the workers with resistance to social imperialism, but see that traditional type fascism would give the Russians an excuse to intervene.

Instability anywhere in Europe would cause factors both for war and revolution to increase. So they try to kill two birds with one stone.

Instability is caused by uneven development characteristic of the imperialist era, so the European Economic Community is designed to even out this unevenness and stop any of the weaker national economies collapsing. They are opposed by the narrow nationalists, who are both in the traditional right-wing and among the so-called 'left', including modern revisionists. Obviously the EEC is anti-working class; it seeks to pass downward the effects of the 'crisis' in an orderly way. Yet it is made up of liberal-democratic countries which are collectively anti-social imperialist. Should it break up under the force of its internal contradictions, we ought to get ready for a pretty complicated situation.

The sections of the bourgeoisie attached to state monopolies like British Leyland, Rolls Royce, the steel industry and shipyards, look to Soviet style capitalism as a more modern form which favours the bureaucrat capitalists. They support various phoney schemes for 'worker participation' such as the Meriden motorcycle co-operative, all designed to bring about a system like the USSR today, where workers are told there is no reason to rebel because the state has declared itself communist, and to rebel against it would therefore be an insane act! In the USSR, the working class cannot even use Trade Unions and other means of struggle to defend themselves when the bourgeoisie pushes the effects of the capitalist crisis on to them. On the contrary unions are used to hold down the workers, in the similar way that Jack Jones and his cronies moved with the state to smash the toolroom workers' struggle for independent negotiation rights and their attempts to throw off state bureaucratic unionism.

We oppose Soviet social imperialism because it is a terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary state-monopoly capital. The main form of organised fascism in Europe today is found in the USSR and the pro-Soviet clique which run those countries under direct Soviet control (e.g. Poland, East Germany etc.). Nowhere in the world is it more difficult to propagate revolutionary Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung thought than in the Soviet Union today.

If we take a sober look at Soviet strategy, it is to 'neutralise' Europe, break the Atlantic connection between Europe and the USA, break the European Community, then suck up the whole of Western Europe into its sphere of influence. In trying to realise this scheme it would probably bring about a super-power war against the United States. At the same time, the people of Europe will have to wage a just war of national liberation by forming a united front against social imperialism and social fascism. Only the proletariat can lead this front; it will aim to achieve victory and then carry out the socialist revolution. Ultimately the people are bound to triumph even over the sophisticated weaponry of social imperialism. But it will not be easy. If the Soviet Union succeeds in the first steps of its scheme, we want to be damn sure we are prepared and organised to meet the dangers.

We are concerned with politics, that is with building a revolutionary great alliance.

The character of all classes is determined by the imperialist era in which we live. Monopoly comes to replace free competition, but competition still exists between monopolies. Every time there is a crisis the weaker companies go to the wall, so concentration of capital increases. State capital is even more monopolistic. In the period before imperialism is replaced by socialism, the proletariat and its party will have to manoeuvre in a pretty complicated environment of different classes.

Small property owners, shop keepers, self-employed businessmen are one sector of the petty-bourgeoisie. The big capitalists represented by the major political parties are trampling on these people all the time, while trying with false promises to win them over. These people can be our allies. As we said, our concern is political. We do not believe that free enterprise is better than monopoly: for the small bourgeoisie the bright future only lies in socialism. We point this out, but also show that we care about their living standards and support their right to continue existing as small bourgeoisie while we are still living under capitalism.

The same for office workers. Objectively, all this bureaucracy parasitic on the economy is a product of imperialism in decline. We do not approve of it, but living as we are in the era of the death throes of imperialism, we must support the people! These office workers too have a right to a roof over their heads. It is a political matter to dispose of imperialism, and we need these allies to dispose of it as soon as possible. Then there will be a good future for all.

To sum up: we must be ready to make tactical and conditional alliances with various sections of the bourgeoisie as part of an overall strategy to defeat Soviet social imperialism and US imperialism, to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist state. The proletariat must lead, and must not lose its identity, which is summed up in the most concentrated form in its party. The alliance between the industrial proletariat and other exploited wage earners within the working class as a whole (making up the large majority of people) is not conditional or tactical. It is a lasting alliance which will continue through the period of socialism, rather like the worker-peasant alliance forged by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party.

So, the social contract has been seen through. We do not have to tell the workers to smash it - they are already doing it! But we must point the way forward to genuine socialism. The disillusionment with politics and with the two established parties in Britain is evident, but fascists and revisionists can also profit from this as local election results in May have shown. Just to say "smash capitalism" doesn't mean that much: Hitler claimed to be opposed to capitalism and Brezhnev claims the same thing. We have to put forward scientific socialism and we have to build alliances. Just as we have to take up the gun in order to put an end to warfare, so we have to master politics in order to abolish the state.

We can do this. The working class is increasingly aware that the bad situation in Britain today - housing, rents, education, inflation and deteriorating health service - is the responsibility of those who own and control production and the state, while we have no say or control in anything. It is the issue of control which will galvanise a genuine revolutionary alliance between all exploited people in the country. No party has yet raised this question correctly, and indeed, only a genuine Marxist-Leninist party can.

So comrades, dare we delay any longer in forging real links with the working class through struggle; in joining forces and working for unity and the formation of a genuine revolutionary party of the working class? We must recognise this as our major task and struggle against all obstacles in its path.

Ends