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RACISM AND BUSING IN BOSTON

IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN EUROPE

# RADICAL AMERICA

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*Cover: Black students boarding a bus after school at South Boston High School. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX*

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# Racism and Busing in Boston

## *An Editorial Statement*

"Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts" was a bumper sticker that appeared in the only state that voted for McGovern in 1972. That slogan has an ironic ring now, because some of the people who voted against Nixon are engaging in organized and sustained racist attacks on Boston's black people. Since the opening day of school on September 12, racist attacks have come in several forms, including the stoning of buses carrying black students and the beating of two blacks by mobs in South Boston. In the large black housing project at Columbia Point, tenants responded to violent white attacks by arming and organizing for self-defense. To counter this, the police occupied Columbia Point.

The busing of black and white children to relieve racial imbalance in the Boston schools has finally been won after

a decade of concerted School Committee opposition to improvements in the education of black children. Now, in addition to continued obstruction by the School Committee, a serious problem is developing in the form of organized opposition to busing in many of Boston's predominantly white working-class neighborhoods.

Although Democratic Party demagogues like City Councillor Louise Day Hicks and School Committee Chairman John Kerrigan have promoted racist politics, we cannot underestimate the deep-seated, well-organized quality of racism among large numbers of white working-class people in Boston. Unlike other cities where whites launched violent but rather short-lived demonstrations against busing, the opposition to desegregation in Boston has been mobilized for several years on a block-by-block basis in predominantly Irish South Boston and other sections. It will be a dangerous force to contend with for some time to come. The racist scum of the earth, Ku Klux Klan and Nazi Party organizers, have come to South Boston, sensing the potential for a turn towards fascism.

Because white working-class people have been prominent in the racist attacks, it has been difficult for some socialists to explain racism without reducing the problem to one in which either the corporate elite is manipulating working-class people by provoking racism, or to one in which the race-baiting politicians of the old Democratic machine are whipping up racism to advance their own political fortunes. While both of these are partial explanations, they miss the real point. White working-class racism is not simply a question of bad ideas being put into people's heads by racist demagogues, nor is it simply a question of the ruling class manipulating workers into racist positions. There is a material basis to white working-class racism in Boston and elsewhere.

White working-class people oppose integrated education as a way of defending their material advantage over blacks. Most white working-class people are against busing white children to black schools because in a racist society black schools are poorer schools. Many white working-class people are against even voluntary busing of black children to white schools because they fear that if black students come

in, their "neighborhood" schools will be allowed to deteriorate in various ways. Some people in Boston's white working class have chosen to help blacks fight discrimination by joining the struggle of blacks for equality. Many others have chosen to defend segregation by attacking the black struggle for equality in education. The thrust of the racist movement that has crystallized this fall is to keep black people in their place—in segregated schools, in ghetto housing, and in the lowest-paying jobs.

The question of neighborhood schools is not the issue in Boston. White working-class parents have in some cases chosen to send their children some distance to attend predominantly white parochial schools, or even to special Boston-wide public high schools. Busing is not really the issue, because schoolchildren have been bused back and forth across the city for some time. Nor is the issue one of compulsion. School itself is compulsory, regular attendance is compulsory, a certain curriculum is compulsory. Busing is no more forced than any of these other aspects of schooling.

The issue is racism, and it is wrong to shift the debate away from it at this time. To argue now about the educational value of busing or of community-controlled schools versus integrated schools would be to equivocate. It is wrong to avoid the issue by arguing about the merits of various hypothetical alternatives; options to the current busing plans do not now exist for most black parents in Boston. While we do not call for integration, we do oppose forced exclusion and segregation of blacks and other minorities; we support their right to integration either as a goal or as a tactic to secure equality. It is also wrong to avoid the issue by emphasizing the poor quality of white schools in Boston. However poor their quality, there has been an organized racist attempt to attack black children attending these schools.

While the serious problems with this particular busing plan are the fault of the court and the obstructionist School Committee, we think it is wrong to see busing as a ruling-class plot. The achievement of busing is, in fact, the result of a long struggle Boston blacks have waged against segre-

gation. We oppose those left groups who attack the plan because it seems to be dividing workers at the present time. Most black people in Boston, whatever their initial assessments of the busing plan, now support busing as one way of achieving better education for their children. In this case, we support the right of black students to be bused in safety. We also believe white children need to be bused because, unless there is a two-way busing, the black schools will be allowed to deteriorate further. In fact, some black schools have already been repaired in anticipation of the arrival of white students.

To waver on the issue of busing is to play into the hands of those racists who know that the defeat of busing (which is possible) would greatly strengthen the racist status quo. If the racists succeed in stopping busing, they will have gained a victory and set a dangerous precedent; they will also have inflicted a real defeat on black people and the movement for working-class unity. Conversely, a black victory will be a working-class victory. As black people demand and achieve democratic rights and equality, they are transforming the structure of the working class. In doing so, they narrow the differences between blacks and whites, erode the material base of racism, and create greater opportunity for class unity. In this sense, we see this black demand for equality as a class demand.

In short, we are arguing that racism is at the center of the conflict in Boston this fall. We see racist divisions within the working class as one of the mainstays of capitalist domination. Since our political focus is on racism, its origins and development, we are less concerned here with important questions about quality education or the history of the Garrity busing decision.

Given this emphasis on the problem of racism, our argument proceeds as follows: 1) we look at how the political economy of metropolitan Boston structures the situation within which the black struggle and the white reaction have developed; 2) we present the recent history of attempts by Boston black people to improve educational opportunities as one way of decreasing the material differences between blacks and whites; and 3) we then show how white racist

organizations — led by the School Committee — have fought to retain their material privileges.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RACISM IN BOSTON

The development of black support for busing and the strength of the opposition to busing in white working-class areas must be seen in the context of an evolving struggle over scarce resources not only in education, but in the job and housing markets as well. The bigger struggle being waged over desegregation is clearly part of a larger and longer struggle that has taken place within Boston's troubled political economy.

Although New England led the nation in industrialization during the early 19th century, Boston remained largely a commercial and financial center. Since it was not primarily an industrial city, the first immigrants sought jobs in the public sector through the Democratic patronage machine that developed in the early 20th century, and clung tenaciously to craft jobs in the building trades and light industries through exclusionary AFL unions.

Because Boston did not become a major industrial center, the black migration to the North during World War I was much smaller than it was in other cities. Although the rate of post-World War II black migration to Boston has been comparable to that of other Northern cities, blacks still constitute a relatively small proportion of the population (18%). And of course blacks have suffered in Boston's severely limited job market. Lacking industrial jobs and lacking access to jobs in unionized sectors, black migrants were stuck for years in service occupations and other menial jobs. Unlike earlier immigrants, notably the Irish, they were not able to secure government jobs, which still occupy a large percentage of the city's work force. However in the post-World War II era, Boston blacks have slowly improved their occupational position by gaining federal and state jobs, by commuting to the new suburban jobs in light industry, and by gaining a foothold in Boston's enormous private institutional sector. Black women are increasingly important in the city's hospitals and, to a lesser extent, in its large secretarial labor force.

Blacks have even worked their way into some of the better paying industrial jobs traditionally dominated by whites, notably in meatpacking, where one of the city's few CIO unions developed in the 1930's. Although building trade unions were still officially segregated through the 1960's, a few blacks worked their way into some crafts.

This black progress, though rather limited, has nevertheless frightened many white workers who maintain their jobs through the old patronage machine (city workers, white collar and blue collar) or the old exclusionary AFL unions, especially in the building trades. White workers still enjoy important advantages over black workers. Although the proportion of blacks increased in many occupations between 1950 and 1970, the black-white wage differential did not change over these years. In 1970, as in 1950, black workers earned only about two-thirds what their white counterparts earned. Furthermore, many jobs remained closed to blacks, including most of the best-paid construction jobs, jobs as policemen and firemen, and upper-level white collar positions.

White working-class people in Boston's most segregated areas have also maintained a relative advantage over blacks in the housing market. Racist real estate agents and discriminatory bankers that "red-line" ghetto districts have prevented blacks from moving into areas like South Boston, Hyde Park and West Roxbury where many working-class people own their own homes. Blacks have also been kept out of the poorer white working-class sections where most people rent rooms in three-decker apartment buildings or projects. Although the white tenants in these poorer sections suffer from rent-gouging landlords and poor city services, they have not suffered nearly as much as blacks.

Tenants in the worst white housing projects have used violence to keep blacks out, because they believe that the presence of blacks or Puerto Ricans will cause housing to be neglected even further. For example, last year white youths in South Boston's D Street Project shot and killed a black teenager who lived with the only black family in the project. Subsequently, the several Puerto Rican families in the project were literally driven out. As bad as the D Street project is, its white residents believe that it could get worse



if black or Spanish-speaking tenants move in.

The racism of these white tenants does not result simply from a hatred of non-whites; there is also a material basis to this racism. These poor whites are making last-ditch efforts to defend their relative advantages over blacks and to prevent the spread of ghetto-like housing conditions in their neighborhoods. This directly parallels their defense of white "neighborhood schools" and their opposition to busing white students to black ghetto schools which have been deliberately neglected over the years.

The bad housing situation in Boston has been worsened by the urban renewal demolition which began in the 1950's. It destroyed all of the multi-ethnic West End and most of the racially-mixed South End, both low-rent districts, and it wiped out nearly all of Lower Roxbury, which used to be the center of the black community. Urban renewal occurred when the old patronage machine was deposed and new "good government" politicians appeared who would assist big capital instead of trying to bleed it for taxes as James Michael Curley did during his mayoralty. The old machine lost out to the new politicians who today are represented by Mayor White on the city level, but the machine saved its Irish and Italian neighborhood strongholds from urban renewal. It also preserved some relatively low-rent housing in these neighborhoods while similar housing was being destroyed in more mixed sections of the city where the machine no longer had political power.

The post-World War II suburbanization intensified the segregation of the housing market in the area. The GI Bill opened the suburbs to many white workers, but racist real estate companies and banks helped these working-class suburbs remain as lily white as the wealthy suburbs. Over 90% of the black population in the metropolitan region lives in Boston and Cambridge.

Working-class movement to the suburbs accelerated in the 1940's and then again in the 1960's with the development of light industries and research outfits along Route 128. But a large number of white working-class people have remained within the city limits of Boston to compete with growing numbers of blacks and Spanish-speaking people for scarce jobs, poor housing, and limited school facilities.



In early October, Massachusetts Governor Sargent called in 350 state troopers. Here a contingent marches from South Boston High School to Gavin Junior High School. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX

Boston has never had a significant tax base. Old industries, textiles and shoes, developed outside Boston while private, tax-free institutions multiplied within the city. When the Irish political machine took over the city during World War I, Yankee finance capitalists responded with a freeze on large-scale building which lasted until urban renewal began in the 1960's. However, urban renewal failed to increase the city's tax base to the extent that city services improved substantially. Meanwhile, suburbanization drew more taxpayers out of the city. Today, Boston's metropolitan area has a much larger percentage of suburban dwellers than any other city in the country. So Boston's hard-pressed taxpayers, including many working-class home-owners who have remained in sections like Hyde Park and West Roxbury, support city services that are exploited by an increasing number of suburban commuters.

Inner-city whites have a good deal of resentment against middle-class suburbanites who use the city's services but escape its frustrations, notably busing. However, this resentment of the suburbanites' class privileges has not diminished their hostility toward the city's black people. Instead of really attacking the many obvious privileges suburbanites enjoy, many white working-class people insist on attacking the favors blacks have allegedly received from the government and private institutions of various kinds.

While it is true that blacks have fought for federal and state jobs with increasing success and that some blacks were able to set up their own forms of patronage through a few of the federal poverty programs in the sixties, these developments failed to compensate for the exclusion of blacks from the best paying blue collar and white collar jobs in the city. Furthermore, blacks have certainly not displaced any white workers on the federal or state level, let alone on the city level, where black people are all but excluded from the thousands of jobs still dispensed by the patronage machine. As a result, blacks get much worse treatment than whites when it comes to city services, partly as a result of the fact that the police, fire, sanitation, and street repair departments, as well as other agencies, are still staffed almost exclusively by whites.

But it is no easier to convince white working-class people that blacks get poorer city services than it is to convince them that blacks are not taking any more advantage of welfare than poor whites. In an economy of scarce jobs; rising taxes, rents, and food prices; declining city services; and deteriorating schools, any gains made by black people, no matter how limited, are viewed as a threat by most white working-class people. And when the only organizations that represent these whites are exclusionary craft unions and the demagogic remnants of an old patronage machine, the result is that the fears and frustrations of many white working-class people are turned into organized racism. While the racist mobilization led by machine politicians uses codewords like "forced busing" and "neighborhood schools", it is clear that more is involved than school desegregation. The racist mobilization developing in Boston is also a defense of important material advantages white workers still enjoy over black workers in the crippled political economy of Boston.

## THE BLACK STRUGGLE AGAINST SEGREGATION

Racism emerged as a major force in the politics of education in Boston in the early 1960's. In 1960 a number of people upset with the worsening conditions of the Boston schools formed "Citizens for Boston Schools". Primarily a white group with an elite professional membership, the group did involve some younger leaders of the black community. The Citizens group ran four candidates for the School Committee in the fall of 1961. Its two white candidates won, and its two black candidates lost. Neither before nor since has there been a black member of the School Committee. Also in the early 1960's the Education Committee of the NAACP tried to get the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) to both recognize and criticize the existence of de facto segregation in the Boston schools. But the MCAD refused to do so; in fact, it said that racial segregation was not a problem in the schools. The NAACP continued to push for the recognition of de facto segregation. In the fall of 1962 it tried unsuc-

cessfully to discuss the problem with the Superintendent of Schools.

In the spring of 1963 the Citizens group, the NAACP, and CORE all completed studies of the Boston schools that were critical of the de facto segregation in the city. The three groups began to support each other's work. Then, in May, the NAACP came out with a more detailed report which requested a public hearing before the School Committee. The Committee and even Louise Day Hicks, first elected in 1961 to "keep politics out of education" and not yet identified as a foe of desegregation, was conciliatory and set up a hearing for June.

At about the same time, a group of black and white civil rights activists, the Massachusetts Freedom Movement, was organizing a demonstration in support of civil rights workers in Birmingham who were being brutalized by Birmingham Police Chief "Bull" Connor. Composed of young liberals and radicals who had organized picket lines against Woolworth's as part of a national boycott, the Massachusetts Freedom Movement called for a one-day boycott of the schools to protest the poor education that black children were receiving. But as word got around about their plans, Edward Brooke, then State Attorney General, and Governor Endicott Peabody intervened to stop the demonstration. They won a promise that the boycott would not be held if the School Committee was responsive at the hearing.

The hearing was held June 11, 1963, and different groups were able to present their criticisms of the schools. The prepared reports and the comments documented the inequities of de facto segregation. CORE and the Citizens group emphasized differences in expenditures for predominantly black and predominantly white schools, and documented discrimination against black teachers and administrators. Six of the nine predominantly black elementary schools were overcrowded; for instance, one school with a capacity of 690 had an enrollment of 1043, and another with a capacity of 300 had an enrollment of 634. The average cost per pupil in Boston's elementary schools was \$275.47, but in one largely black district the average was \$238.05, and in another it was \$228.98. As of 1963, there had never been a black principal in Boston, and there had been only one

black administrator. Only 40 of the 2000 teachers were black.

The NAACP presented fourteen demands. The first one called for "immediate public acknowledgment of the existence of de facto segregation". While the School Committee acknowledged some problems resulting from de facto segregation, a majority refused to agree with the bald statement itself. Because of the unwillingness of the School Committee to acknowledge de facto segregation, the boycott took place on June 19, 1963. About a quarter of the black students stayed out; over half of the junior and senior high school students boycotted. Following the boycott there were attempts to confront the School Committee at its meeting and there was picketing at the Committee headquarters. The response of the School Committee was to propose that a committee more representative of the black community be set up to study the question. A bi-racial committee was set up, but before long its black members quit, saying they did not want to be Uncle Toms. As a result, the School Committee was forced to call another meeting but within minutes it was gavelled to a close by Hicks because a majority of the BSC refused to discuss de facto segregation. Picketing continued throughout the fall.

The summer of 1963 saw the development of clear intransigence on the part of the majority of the School Committee. During this time Hicks changed her line and used latent racism in conducting a victorious re-election campaign that fall. Of all the candidates, she received the most votes. Since 1963 race has been the primary political issue in the Boston schools.

## THE RACIAL IMBALANCE LAW

In February 1964 there were nation-wide one-day boycotts of the schools to protest the poor quality of education for black students. In New York and other cities hundreds of thousands of students stayed out for the day. Over 20,000 supported the boycott in Boston, and many of them attended freedom schools that had been set up for the day. This boycott, along with more informal pressure, led Governor Pea-

body to call for a blue-ribbon committee to study discrimination in the state's schools. This study was presented in April 1965. It found that of 55 schools in the state that were predominantly black, 45 were in Boston. It also stated that this imbalance was harmful to both black and white children. The findings were accepted by the succeeding Governor John Volpe, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (Cardinal Cushing had been a member of the committee). Its recommendations included two-way busing of both black and white students, and suggested that there be legislative action.

Volpe proposed legislation to deal with de facto segregation, and the Racial Imbalance Law was enacted in August 1965. Racial imbalance was defined as a "ratio between nonwhite and other students in public schools which is sharply out of balance with the racial composition of the society in which nonwhite children study, serve, and work." The Law gave the state the power to direct school committees to come up with plans for desegregation, to review and revise those plans, and to withhold state funds if necessary to enforce its decisions. The Law specifically stated, however, that desegregation plans could not involve busing students outside of their school districts if their parents objected. In other words, the Law demanded desegregation, but undercut the most effective short term solution.

## BLACK PARENTS CREATE NEW PROGRAMS

After the passage of the Law, there was a lull in activities directed against the Boston School Committee. In part there was a wait-and-see attitude given that the state now had the legal power to move. In part there was a lull because of the declining strength of the NAACP after the early 1960's. But there was not a lull in activity around education within the black community itself. As early as 1962 the Northern Student Movement (NSM) and a number of churches in the Roxbury area set up after-school tutorial programs. These programs were begun in a number of Northern cities in the early 1960's by the NSM, a group that formed to support black civil rights activities in the



Signs painted on South Boston High School the night before busing began. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX



South and to deal with the problems of segregation and inequality in the North. In the space of two years about 2,000 students made use of the programs set up by NSM and the churches. Beyond the help that the students received, these activities provided an arena within which some of the NSM leaders gained skills and recognition; today many of the former leaders of NSM in Boston have become leaders of Boston's black community. Another result of the tutorial programs was that they provided a place for parents to get together, to meet one another, and to discuss the educational alternatives open to them.

In the fall of 1965 Operation Exodus began. Ellen Jackson, a parent at the Gibson School, organized a boycott of classes to protest conditions in the school. This was the same school described in *DEATH AT AN EARLY AGE* by Jonathan Kozol, who had been fired the previous spring. To dramatize their boycott, the parents took advantage of a recent decision by the School Committee. The School Committee had instituted a new program called the "Open Enrollment Policy", whereby parents could send their children to a school outside their home district if there was space for them in another school. Subsequently, the courts have recognized that this does not work to relieve school segregation: even if a large number of black parents make use of it, white parents do also, taking their children out of black schools and sending them to white schools, thus increasing segregation. But whatever the larger results of open enrollment, the parents who were boycotting the Gibson School found that their children were going to better schools. Taking advantage of the new policy, they decided to continue sending their children to the other schools. Out of this grew Operation Exodus, a privately organized busing plan that involved, in its first year, over 400 black students going to schools outside their own districts. The schools did not pay for this; hence the primary activity of the parents in Operation Exodus became that of fund raising. They held bake sales, made contact with suburban liberals, and in one way or another raised the \$1200 to \$1400 needed every week to keep their children going to better schools.

After much work, the parents won public funding to cover transportation costs. This permitted further expansion, peaking with about 1,100 students in 1969-70. The following year Operation Exodus dropped to about 170 students as other options became available.

Busing alone was not enough. The students involved encountered various kinds of discrimination. Some school administrators removed desks and chairs so they could argue that there was no room for a black student, but would have them replaced when a white student applied. There was some physical segregation of blacks within the schools, and at times they were stuck in the backs of classrooms. However, despite discrimination in the receiving schools, the general success of Operation Exodus — parents felt their children were in smaller classes and learning better — increased the pressure for more busing.

The following year (1966) another volunteer busing program was begun by older established liberals in the black community working with suburban liberals on the various school committees. Known as the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), it bused black students — elementary through high school — from the city to the wealthier suburban schools. Today there are about 2,500 students involved and there are ten applications for every opening in METCO. Like Operation Exodus, METCO won federal funding and a foundation grant, so that neither the parents nor the suburban communities have to bear the costs of the program. The Boston School Committee did not attack the program because it did not affect Boston's white schools.

In the winter of 1965-66 some parents with children in tutoring programs at Roxbury's St. Ann's Church began discussing the possibility of starting their own school. They were soon joined by some parents from the Gibson School. The group split over the role of outside professionals and whether the school was to be for the neighborhood or for the larger community. The split followed along class lines with the slightly poorer parents from St. Ann's in favor of less professional influence and more local emphasis. The Gibson School parents opened the New School for Children with a professional staff earning good salaries; the St.

Ann's parents opened the Roxbury Community School with fewer outside experts, parents sometimes serving as teachers, and more of a neighborhood flavor. Both of them have raised thousands of dollars. They, along with Roxbury's third black community free school — the Highland Park Free School, started in 1968 — got a Ford Foundation grant of \$500,000 and \$175,000 from a group of local foundations. Together these three schools have been important in Boston as a focus of support, and beyond Roxbury have been able to attract liberals and innovative educators because the teaching and learning styles encouraged there are seen as models.

While most people active at this time were in the parents' groups, the Black Panther Party was setting up in Boston, as in other cities, a free breakfast program for children. In some of the poorer housing projects in the city, the Panthers fed hundreds of children before school every morning. Although they did not gain as much support in Boston as in other cities, their program served as a model which was picked up by other groups including some city schools, which were shamed into giving breakfasts.

Operation Exodus, METCO, and the free schools provided several alternatives to the neighborhood public schools for a number of black students. But the overwhelming majority of black students remained in schools that were run-down, poorly maintained, under-staffed, and under-supplied. The next wave of protests came from within these schools.

## PARENTS AND STUDENTS ORGANIZE SCHOOL BOYCOTTS

Between the fall of 1968 and the spring of 1971, parents or students organized boycotts or walk-outs in a number of schools. For instance, on the first day of school in the fall of 1968 a group of parents at the Gibson School demanded that the newly-appointed principal resign. She refused, and parents claimed the school as their own and installed their own principal. When the parents were locked out of school the next day, they took their children to a nearby community center and were joined by several teachers who had

helped to start the group. The teachers were fired; but they and the parents ran a liberation school that lasted a couple of months. It started with all 600 of the students in the school, and even after two months of harassment by the school officials, welfare department, etc., there were still 85 children whose parents refused to let them go back to Gibson. Some of them went to the New School for Children, some went into METCO or Operation Exodus. The Gibson School has generated so much parent involvement because it is one of the worst schools in Boston. But there were boycotts and pressures from parents at other schools as well. For instance, at two of the junior highs in Roxbury parents got together to demand that black headmasters be appointed. They were successful, even though the appointments took place only at the last moment, right before the beginning of school in the fall of 1968.

These pressure groups and boycotts were not organized by existing groups in the Boston community. The NAACP was weak in Boston at this time, and the Urban League also lacked a base. Rather, these boycotts were organized by indigenous groups, and influenced by the national growth of black liberation and black nationalist groups and ideologies.

In the high schools, the initiative was taken by the black students themselves, not by their parents. From 1968 through 1971 there were sporadic boycotts of schools by black high school students. They formed black student groups within the high schools, and slowly organized a loosely-structured union of black students, the Black Student Union. These boycotts were like the earlier ones: started by a few students, but once underway gaining wider support. In 1968, for example, a student was suspended from English high school by the principal for wearing a dashiki, a violation of the dress code. Black students walked out, joined by some white students. Similar boycotts occurred sporadically for the next two years.

In February 1971, the Black Student Union organized a city-wide boycott to protest racial segregation in the schools. They walked out and presented five demands to the School Committee: 1) recruit black teachers; 2) recruit black guidance counselors; 3) commission an independent study of racial patterns in the city's schools; 4) end ha-

rassment of black students; and 5) grant amnesty to all striking students. John Craven, Chairman of the School Committee, called the BSU statement "outlandish", and as usual the BSC made no concessions. The strike failed to attain its demands, but in other ways it clearly won a great deal. Many black students got experience in organizing; they allied with and got support from the Student Mobilization Committee; they held public hearings; and they even got support from white students who went out on strike. From April until the end of school in June, it was a black-led student boycott with blacks and whites protesting the racism and poor conditions of the schools.

## COMMUNITY CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS

Out of the community schools, the parent boycotts, and the student boycotts — and out of the national interest in community control — community control of schools became an issue in Boston. In the 1971 and 1973 School Committee election campaigns a black woman and member of the Communist Party, Patricia Bonner-Lyons, ran on a community control platform. Although the CP did not have a sizeable following in Boston generally or in Roxbury in particular, Bonner-Lyons did well. In the first election she polled over 50,000 votes and almost won; in the second she ran less successfully, but still did well in Roxbury. At first members of the BSU were not active in her campaign; but as their strike ended and she was clearly a better alternative than any of the others, some people in the BSU worked for her.

The unsuccessful Bonner-Lyons campaigns did not spell the end of concern for community control. From the early 1970's through to the election of November 1974, it was one way that black parents sought to change the schools. Community control has also been supported by Mayor Kevin White, a liberal Democrat, and many of the white professionals who are also eager to take power away from the School Committee. A variety of community control plans were voted on in this year's primary elections. In the November elections the voters were given a choice of con-

tinuing with the School Committee or doing away with it, creating several community committees, and giving power to the Mayor's office. The plan was defeated overwhelmingly, and the BSC was retained.

In March of 1972, while some blacks were working on community control, a group of black parents supported by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund brought a case against the BSC in Federal District Court to challenge the continued and increasing segregation of the schools. It was this case that finally resulted in the June 21, 1974 decision by Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. in which he ordered that the School Committee begin the first stage of school desegregation in September 1974. It had been clear for at least two years that Garrity would decide in favor of the plaintiffs, and that he would order desegregation. In doing so he was not taking a particularly courageous stance, but was following the logic of Northern school desegregation cases that has been established in the past few years.

## THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Unlike other city school systems that then prepared to cooperate with the court order, the Boston School Committee has continued to act in a high-handed racist way, and continues in its efforts to foil parents and state and federal officials in developing a good plan.

Why has the School Committee played this role for the past decade? What are the sources of its power? We will consider these points as well as how it has perpetuated and deepened the patterns of racial segregation in the city and how it has worked in every way it could to frustrate the plan now being implemented.

The present organization of the Boston School Committee dates back to 1949, when it was reorganized by the State Legislature, controlled by Yankees. The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts — as with all states — gives the state the power to grant charters to cities; it also gives the state the right to review and annul local laws. The Legislature ruled that there be five at large members, all of whom serve two-year terms, and that they run as non-

partisan candidates in elections held in odd-numbered years. Whatever the original thoughts of the Yankees in the State Legislature, the city-wide elections have helped the Irish and other white candidates, and prevented any black from ever being elected.

In its heyday the Irish machine could mobilize support through its patronage power, and the schools were and are part of this. There are managerial, teaching, and janitorial jobs within the schools; there are the contracts for building and repairs in the schools. Over the years members of the School Committee have had relatives and in-laws who worked as teachers or administrators in the schools. There is evidence that the School Committee has raised the salaries for certain jobs and then received large campaign pledges from people in those jobs. Testimonial dinners are given for Committee members, and teachers are pressured into buying costly tickets. Thus, even with one-third of the students of the city in parochial schools, the school system had an importance far beyond its educational function. With the general decline of the machine its vestiges have been able to regain control of the School Committee.

In a larger context the School Committee represents "local" capitalists in their resistance to "national" capitalists. The Committee, through such current and past members as Hicks and Kerrigan, has links to local real estate and banking interests. As small owners they, and the people they represent, do not have the capital for urban renewal schemes, and they have opposed the attempts of the larger banks, the insurance companies, and the university and state managers to restructure the city. On the other hand, they use racism — as do the big banks when useful — to keep housing patterns clearly delineated by race. Because of the two-way relationship between school integration and housing integration, they have used the schools to keep blacks not only out of the schools, but out of certain sections of the city as well.

The Boston School Committee grasped onto the issue of race in the Spring and Summer of 1963 as a political rallying point. Since then the opposition to black demands for better schools has been, in part, a ploy on the part of demagogic politicians to hold on to their political strength

through racist populism. The School Committee and its supporters — particularly home owners — have fought against desegregating the schools because of the fear of “white flight”. Time and again the BSC and its supporters have scored points in blasting the suburban liberals who urge integration while not experiencing it themselves. Recent marches and demonstrations have also gotten support from white working-class suburbanites who want to defeat busing now to prevent the possibility of metropolitan busing, and also to keep blacks down in the ghetto and out of the suburbs.

### HOW THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE FIGHTS DESEGREGATION

The School Committee has gone about its racist business in a number of different ways. Its members have used racial slurs in their electoral campaigns. For instance, in 1965 Committee member Joseph Lee — who happens to come from an upper-class Yankee background — said that “white children do not want to be transported into schools with a large portion of backward pupils from unprospering Negro families who will slow down their education.... White children do not want large numbers of Negro pupils from unprospering Negro families shipped into their mainly white schools....” And in the same year Louise Day Hicks said, “We have in our midst today a small band of racial agitators, non-native to Boston, and a few college radicals who have joined in the conspiracy to tell the people of Boston how to run their schools, their city, and their lives.”

Since 1965, when the Racial Imbalance Law was being considered, the School Committee has focused on busing. At first the NAACP and the Citizens for Boston Schools denied that they were for busing either. But Hicks and the others kept denouncing busing as they sensed the growing political support for that issue. When the school superintendent wanted a minor busing program in the fall of 1965 to relieve overcrowding in a black school by transferring some students to a white school with room, the School Committee rejected the proposal, even though busing had



been used in the past to deal with overcrowding. Furthermore, the School Committee had used busing to MAINTAIN segregation. In 1972 it was revealed that black children were being bused past white schools with room for them, and white students were being bused past black schools with room for them.

In hiding these facts, the School Committee, along with many others, has helped to foster myths about busing. In fact, there has been a steady increase in the number and percentage bused to and from school. With the rise of larger schools with more varied curricula, more and more students have ridden buses to school. Presently in the U.S. about 43% of all school children go to school on buses, but only 3% of students are bused to relieve racial imbalance. In Boston about one-third of the students in public schools are already bused or are using public transportation to go to special high schools or to new "magnet" schools that are meant to attract students from throughout the city. Similarly, the Boston School Committee has harped on about the sanctity of neighborhood schools when, in fact, many of the district boundaries are drawn, not along natural boundaries, but artificially so as to maintain racial segregation in the schools.

The School Committee has consistently furthered racial segregation in the Boston schools. In 1965 there were 45 racially imbalanced schools. By 1973 there were 68. In part this increase is due to the growth of the black population within the context of segregated housing. This results in de facto segregation. But Judge Garrity — following recent court decisions about similar situations in other large cities — agreed that there was de jure segregation as well. For example, he found that the BSC intentionally furthered racial segregation by allowing some schools to become overcrowded while leaving others with extra space; by making use of portable classroom facilities to avoid transferring students; and by opening new schools in such a way as to further racial segregation. He found that the BSC drew school district lines in such a way as to perpetuate racial segregation. He found that the patterns of feeding students into the high schools were developed with the intent of maintaining segregation. Open enrollment and



Police push back anti-busing demonstrators on the street across from South Boston High School on first day of school. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX

transfer policies were managed with a "singular intention to discriminate on the basis of race". Staff and faculty were distributed in the school system in such a way that the predominantly black schools had the less-qualified people.

The School Committee has also fought desegregation in other ways. It has withheld information and only released it under threat of a court order. For example, the Board of Education, in drawing up the current desegregation plan, were not able to get the school-related demographic statistics they needed, and the BSC had to be forced to release them. Even then they did not provide all that was needed. The BSC has also prepared "desegregation" plans that wouldn't alter racial patterns. It has even tried to resubmit such plans after they have been rejected by the state. It has tried to count as part of its "desegregation effort" the independent actions of black parents in Operation Exodus and METCO. As a consequence of this intransigence the city has lost millions of dollars because state and federal governments determined that the school committee was in violation of the law.

By December 1973 — half a year before the Garrity decision — forces were converging on the School Committee in such a way that it was obvious it would lose its court cases. The BSC's attorney, James St. Clair — before going on to represent Nixon — told them that "All legal avenues had been exhausted" and that further appeals would be "frivolous". The Committee, never having made any preparations for school integration, then began to stall and ask that the implementation date be put forward to September 1975. Over the summer the School Committee did nothing to prepare the school administrators, teachers, or parents for the desegregation plan this fall. It held no public meeting to explain how the plan would work; it held no workshops for administrators or teachers or students on how to deal with the upcoming situation.

One of the consequences of the BSC's racist intransigence is that the plan drawn up by the State Board of Education and ordered to be implemented by Garrity is a very poor one. In the first stage of the integration plan not all students in all parts of the city are involved, and this has caused a lot of bitterness on the part of many white parents

who are now involved. The plan has also faltered because Garrity has not become involved in the intricacies of the plan, and often appears to concerned parents and teachers to be making decisions by fiat.

There is also considerable opposition to this particular busing plan among blacks, because of the dangers it presents for many black students and teachers. But since school started most blacks have rallied to defend the rights of black students to be bused safely. There are various groups and individuals — in and out of government positions — who have monitored buses, bus routes, and schools. The Black Caucus (of state legislators) led a black demonstration demanding protection for black students. In the primary elections the one black politician who endorsed Governor Sargent's compromise voluntary busing plan was soundly defeated for the State Senate nomination by Representative Bill Owens, a supporter of mandatory busing and an outspoken critic of the racists in Boston city government.

## THE HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

The School Committee has worked to mobilize support for its racist policies in a number of ways. Its members have continually spoken out in a variety of forums in which they could whip up racist sentiments and opposition to busing. But they have also organized support for their position, and have stifled opposition. In Boston there is no PTA. Instead there is a "Home and School Association", whose by-laws prohibit it from criticizing the School Committee or the School Department.

The Home and School Association acts as a front organization for the School Committee. For the past several years it has not really concerned itself with any educational issues beyond the maintenance of segregation. The Home and School Associations exist only in white or partly white areas. Liberals who have tried to raise educational issues or have questioned racist orthodoxy have found their attendance at meetings discouraged. In some areas the school

principal has even appointed the parent head of the organization.

With this close relationship to the school administration, the Home and School Association has used school supplies, duplicating machines, mailing lists, and other material and information to publicize anti-busing demonstrations. Furthermore, the School Committee has directed principals to use the teachers, through their homeroom classes, to act as conduits for informing parents of anti-busing rallies and demonstrations. In at least one instance the students were supposed to return notes from their parents if they wanted rides. These notes were then passed from the teachers' hands back to the principal, who would see to it that parents got rides to the demonstration.

The Home and School Association is now entrenched in block-by-block organizations in several white sections of the city. Using phone chains and word of mouth, the Home and School Associations act as the organizational base through which hundreds of people can be turned out to demonstrate within hours. Like most community-based organizations and like most organizations concerned with schools and children, the Home and School Associations are predominantly controlled and run by women in the neighborhood.

This fall we have mostly heard about the Irish stronghold of South Boston. South Boston is a virtually all-white area: it can have a good block organization without having to skip over or worry about the presence of black families in the area. In Hyde Park, another area with a lot of racial violence this fall, and where the white home owners have voted overwhelmingly for the racist candidates, the Association is not as strong because of the presence of black families in the area. With the recent decision by Garrity that next fall all of Boston will be involved in the integration plan, the Home and School Association is now organizing in other sections. There are now eight anti-busing information centers operating in areas of Boston and nearby suburbs. These centers are part of the effort to defeat integration, and provide little other "information". For instance, when parents phone with a question about occurrences in the schools, they are told that they were warned that integra-

tion would not work and they should keep their children at home until the busing plan has been defeated.

In the last year an umbrella organization known as ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights) has emerged. ROAR puts forward the calls for motorcades, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, etc. This group holds its weekly meetings in the City Council chambers, and may have been organized by Louise Day Hicks, now a City Councillor, to replace the School Committee as the organizational center of anti-busing activity in case the BSC was enjoined from taking part in these racist mobilizations.

The strategy of the School Committee, the Home and School Association, and ROAR is to defeat the busing plan, and they think they can win. There have been anti-busing rallies and demonstrations for years, but since last spring there has been a marked increase in activity. In February and March there were large meetings to protest the busing plan and to organize protests against the Racial Imbalance Law. Hicks spoke at a meeting in South Boston, and Kerri-gan spoke in Hyde Park. In April thousands demonstrated against busing in front of the State Capitol.

One of the few groups that gave concrete support to the desegregation plan was the Boston Teachers Union. While it did not do much, its leadership supports the plan. The current leadership of the union, in fact, is a reform group that organized in the fall of 1968 when the BTU did not support the teachers fired from the Gibson School. Now, more liberal than many of the members of the union, the BTU leadership has been cautious about confronting the racist sentiments of the teachers.

With only a modest effort by the BTU and the concerned but minor efforts of a black and white reform group called City-Wide Education Coalition, the racists have been the main force this fall. They began the year with a boycott of the schools which kept overall school attendance down in the whole city for several weeks. By mid-November attendance was normal at most schools, especially at the elementary level, but at several high schools not many white students are attending. Beyond the boycott, there have been weekly Sunday rallies with ROAR speakers, local state representatives, and a local popular radio talk show host. Some

rallies are planned to draw in support from sections of the city to be affected next year. They also draw support from white working-class suburbs, many of whose residents have only recently moved out of South Boston or some other white or transitional area.

## CONCLUSION

In short, the issue in Boston today is racism. It is not only the institutional racism of capitalist job and housing markets and the hypocritical racism of the suburban liberals who control the state government, but it is also the well-organized racism of the Boston School Committee and its white petit bourgeois and working-class supporters throughout the city. We have tried to point out that the racism of the School Committee is a direct outcome of the declining patronage machine which, through various exclusionary methods, is attempting to preserve the relative advantage of white workers over black workers in Boston's shrinking economy.

In fact, the kind of racism that holds center stage right now is organized racism in several of Boston's white working-class neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods suffer from high unemployment, poor housing, and lousy schooling, it has been tempting for liberal journalists and leftist groups alike to explain away white working-class racism as a product of "lower-class frustration", "backlash" or "manipulation" of various kinds. But it is wrong to explain racism away by romanticizing the ethnic pride and community solidarity of neighborhoods like South Boston (which in fact contain real divisions), or by resorting to a conspiracy theory that explains away racism as a frustrated response to a ruling-class plot in the form of busing.

We have tried to show that busing is, in fact, the result of a determined civil rights drive fought on a national level and an equally determined drive which Boston blacks have launched for better education on a local level. The racist resistance to the black battle against school segregation is no different from the ongoing fight to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods with decent housing or to keep Third

World workers out of high-level white collar and blue collar jobs.

In Boston, this resistance has been mobilized largely through the remnants of the old patronage machine, represented by appendages like the Boston School Committee and allies like the exclusionary AFL craft unions. It is part of a hard-fought defense of the relative privileges of white workers over black workers. These privileges are more significant in the areas of jobs and housing than in education, but racist leaders realize that if schools are desegregated, the blacks will have won an important victory against institutionalized racism and will have set a dangerous precedent.

Although the old patronage machine has lost much of its power since Curley's time, it still represents the last line of defense against black encroachments into the white world of Boston, into its segregated schools, jobs, and housing facilities. The Yankee capitalist class has seriously undercut the economic power of the old machine over the years, and the liberal Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party has deprived it of considerable power in the city, state, and federal government. As a result, the machine controls fewer jobs than ever before. In a metropolitan area with high unemployment and in a period of high inflation, the various leaders of the old machine, notably the Boston School Committee pols, have resorted more and more openly to organized racism as a means of intimidating blacks who challenge what control the old machine still has over jobs and public facilities in the city of Boston.

Busing has of course been a boon to these demagogic leaders of the old machine; it has enabled them to unite the white petit bourgeoisie of the city with large sections of its white working-class around a defense of the various material benefits segregation has preserved for them. These racist politicians know that the desegregation of schools is but the first battle in a full-scale assault working-class blacks will wage for equality in jobs and housing.

As long as these racist politicians control the School Committee, they will be able to maintain considerable working-class support by dispensing patronage jobs and by favoring predominantly white schools, but the very exist-



ence of the School Committee is being threatened by various black groups who have the support of liberal political leaders in City Hall and the State House. In fact, the total domination of the Democratic Party by the liberal wing led by White in City Hall, Governor-elect Dukakis in the State House and Kennedy in Washington, may force the old-line machine politicians to make some kind of formal split. A Northern Dixiecrat movement of this sort, led by Hicks and Kerrigan, would probably play right into the hands of the proto-fascist American Party, which did quite well in working-class districts of Boston during the last election.

In any case, the defeat of busing would strengthen the beleaguered School Committee and its racist leaders immensely and would therefore prolong the existence of the old patronage machine in many white working-class communities. The left in Boston, though not large, has made some inroads in working-class communities where the power of the old patronage machine has broken down. But the left has been totally insignificant in segregated areas like South Boston where the machine is still strong and helps to mute class antagonisms.

The defeat of busing would be much more than a defeat of the latest thrust black people have made to improve education; it would also be a serious setback to the general struggle against the kind of racism which divides the working class. Furthermore, the implementation of busing, as one means of breaking down an important form of segregation, is a victory not only for the black struggle for equality but also for the working-class struggle for unity.

First of all, the breakdown of segregation raises the possibility of black-white cooperation for better education, a phenomenon that has already occurred in more integrated sections of the city. In fact, there is already tangible evidence to show that the busing of white children to poor black ghetto schools has resulted in improvements within these schools which black parents were never able to achieve in the past. In other words, despite the obvious problems with this busing plan, it does create some limited possibilities for improving educational facilities for both black and white students.

The blow busing strikes at Boston's dual system of education also raises the possibility of the ultimate defeat of the old patronage machine and its overtly racist leadership. Although Hicks and Kerrigan, and others of their ilk, have received much national publicity of late (some of it quite favorable), they have failed to fulfill their promise to stop busing. This promise alone has accounted for much of their political appeal in recent years. And their political fortunes will probably suffer in the long run because of their failure to keep this promise. In fact, Hicks, Kerrigan, and other political leaders of the old machine have recently suffered defeat in their campaigns for higher office.

Although it is difficult to be optimistic about the short-term effects of the busing crisis in Boston, the following points should be noted: the racist defenders of segregation have suffered a major defeat; the powerful Democratic Party has been seriously divided and disrupted; and, most importantly, the solidarity of the black community in Boston has forced predominantly white community organizing groups to deal seriously with the issue of racism for the first time and has encouraged some segments of the left to organize what should be an important national mobilization and demonstration against racism in Boston.

Nevertheless, the immediate effect of the busing crisis has been to increase tension between black and white workers in this city. There is no way to deny this. No rhetorical calls for black-white unity around educational demands or broader political demands will erase this fact. White racism in Boston is a deep-seated and well-organized phenomenon, and it will not be uprooted easily. The only hope for working-class unity in Boston and other segregated cities lies in a direct assault on segregation in all its forms and in an organized defense against the racist attacks which segregation fosters.

Jim Green and Allen Hunter for the RA editors

# THIS MAGAZINE

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# Class Struggle and European Unity

*Guido Viale*

## INTRODUCTION

Capitalist development has always had a cyclical quality : periods of expansion and development are followed by periods of contraction of production, employment, and investments. During the past century, crises have followed one another with great regularity. But in the course of the last seventy years, things have become more complex.

This century opened with a period of expansion, following a serious crisis which occurred around 1880. Then, in 1929, followed the most serious crisis which capitalist development has ever known. This was followed, in almost all Western countries, by ten years of stagnation. In the judgment of many economists — bourgeois as well as Marxist — we are now on the path to a new world crisis.

Many comrades have rightly pointed out that our expla-

nation of the capitalist crisis has been limited, not scientific enough, and unilateral. These critiques are valid when they stress the fact that our analysis of the crisis fails to make reference to the international situation, or underestimates how intrinsic the crisis is to capitalist development, or explains everything in terms of the struggle between the proletariat and capital without taking into account the overall situation in which this struggle is produced. In this case all we can say is that we are sorry that our critics have not gone further on the path towards a positive contribution regarding the analysis of the crisis — a topic about which the revolutionary left in Italy and elsewhere needs a great deal of clarification.

On the other hand, there is a way in which these critiques may miss the point entirely and become the excuse for a real display of opportunism toward the class struggle. We are thinking of those who in their explanation of the crisis tend to completely disregard the working class, or at most to reduce it to the bourgeois concept of work force, so that their explanation of the crisis is based strictly on the situation of the labor market. This results in the total disappearance of the very concept of workers' autonomy, which means first of all autonomy from the laws of capitalist production, but also has a material base in the experience, in the history, and in the social relations which link the various sectors of the proletariat; hence, workers' autonomy is an indispensable element in explaining capitalist development and capitalist crises, including the dynamics of the labor market.

But, let us proceed with order.

The principal question is not so much to explain why there are crises, but rather to explain why they no longer have the regularity of yesteryear; why, for example, the last twenty-seven years have been marked by an almost continuous expansion, interrupted only by minor recessions which hardly ever had a global magnitude.

## THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

In the aftermath of the last world war, capitalism grew within the framework of a unified world market, under the

hegemony of the United States. The colonial empires were dismantled and replaced by neo-colonialist domination. Japan and the victor and vanquished nations of Europe depended entirely on the U.S. for their development. The domination of the U.S. was extended to the entire world — with the exception of the U.S.S.R. and the countries of Eastern Europe — to such a point that the notions of imperialism and that of the unity of the world market became interchangeable for many people.

Things were not the same before the Second World War ! The world market was divided into colonial empires and spheres of influence, and the two world wars were unleashed with a view to dividing the world among the different powers. This is not to say that imperialism cannot change its form once again. In fact, since the end of the Second World War, American imperialism — guarantor and instrument of counter-revolution on a planetary scale — has suffered a series of reverses which have weakened its uncontested domination. The major blow against imperialism has come from the liberation struggles of those peoples who have fought, or are still fighting, to escape from its domination : China, Korea and North Vietnam, Cuba, the rest of Indochina and all those countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America where armed struggle against imperialism is the order of the day.

#### THE APPEARANCE OF INTER-IMPERIALIST CONTRADICTIONS

Still another factor tends to weaken the uncontested hegemony of American imperialism : the law of the unequal development of capitalism, which has allowed Japan and Western Europe a much greater rate of economic growth than the U.S. and which has loosened up the relationship of subordination of those countries to the U.S. economy. This modification of world equilibrium is in part counter-balanced by the opening of the Soviet and Eastern European countries to the world market. This opening up, which initially benefitted Western Europe and Japan, will come more and more to benefit the U.S. as already is beginning to happen.

In addition, we can establish that in the midst of the 'underdeveloped' world arises a sort of 'sub-imperialism' — at the head of which we find states like India, Iran, South Africa, Brazil, Israel... to whom are increasingly entrusted the tasks of international repression which the U.S. formerly undertook itself. It is necessary not to exaggerate the importance of this evolution, for these countries are still totally subordinated to the U.S. Nevertheless, these nations are beginning to create an embryonic production machine capable of giving them a certain autonomy from imperialist domination particularly favorable, especially in times of crisis, to breaking the bonds of subordination.

The current surfacing of an inter-imperialist conflict for now concerns exclusively Japan and the Western European countries (though competitors with each other) on the one hand, and the U.S. on the other; moreover it is manifesting itself in a very partial manner. The crisis of the international monetary system is no doubt the most sensational expression of this, since for years the 'free circulation' of the U.S. dollar had been the most tangible evidence of the unity of the capitalist market. Other expressions are the increasing intensification of 'trade wars' (the system of 'dumping' of fifty years ago has given way to direct export subsidies by the State) and the struggle for the control and manipulation of natural resources (in the case of energy resources, the best example is, of course, the so-called 'oil war' presently underway).

But to the extent that these three aspects grow, a fourth aspect will emerge, and is more important still: the struggle to conquer new trade outlets. During the last quarter century, commerce and foreign investments were more and more concentrated in the advanced capitalist countries. To the extent that the latter no longer offer outlets for expansion, the conquest of new markets is going to become a life and death question for the imperialist bourgeoisies.

The very possibility of inter-imperialist armed conflict seems, therefore, not as absurd as it might have been in the past. We have already seen a rough sketch of this in certain conflicts which, in Africa and the Middle East, put into conflict different imperialist interests.

It is certainly wrong to take these tendencies for ac-



complished facts. The appearance and sharpening of these inter-imperialist conflicts is still embryonic.

## THE CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN PROLETARIAT AND BOURGEOISIE

In the third place, imperialism's capability of facing up to these disintegrating forces collides with the class struggle in the imperialist countries themselves.

In the U. S. the most important fact of all is that American imperialism seems to have been incapable of involving in a massive way the American proletariat in a long war of repression. This is undoubtedly the Vietnam war's greatest contribution to the development of world revolution. Still other factors weaken American imperialism 'from within.' The increasingly contradictory development of American capitalism has progressively deprived the ruling classes of their control over the behavior of large sectors of the American proletariat — the so-called 'marginals'; students, the unemployed and the underemployed, racial minorities — who are not marginalized by chance, seeing that they constitute in many cases the heart of the American working class.

On the other hand, the slow and controlled inflation which characterized post-war economic development tends today to become a menace to development. The need which Nixon found to control prices and wages in order to save profits shows how much the class struggle threatens American economic development and how precarious is the solution adopted for getting out of the recession of 1971.

In the rest of the 'advanced' capitalist world, the exceptional post-war economic growth was based on the capitalist class's success in suppressing the class struggle which had exploded during and after the war. This suppression was rapid and 'efficient' in Japan and Germany; it is not by chance that — thanks to the social peace thusly conquered — these two countries have been able to attain the highest rates of economic growth. In France and Italy — where the working class has maintained a stronger relationship with its militant tradition — economic growth has been slower and by no means 'accomplished.' In Britain, finally, where

the Labour Party largely succeeded in confining (channeling) the class struggle to the level of local plant issues, economic development has moved at a rate barely above stagnation levels.

The 1960's mark a turning point all over Europe: the rate of growth slows down, and wages begin to push upward to the detriment of corporate profits. In France and Italy this turning point finds its expression in the massive revival of workers' struggles. But even in those countries where 'social peace' is not temporarily affected (West Germany being the key example) the impact of these changed relations of force between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat on the mechanism of development is equally felt.

At the same time, the relations between the European bourgeoisie and American imperialism have gradually begun to change. Previously, European economic development has been pulled along by American development. Without the European ruling classes' noticing it right away, the mechanisms of development for Europe and America began to enter into conflict in certain areas. Gaullism was certainly the first political expression of this conflict. But the fact that interests us now above all others is the following: the nascent conflicts between certain sectors of the European bourgeoisies and American imperialism have their origin in a modification of the relation of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Europe, which has been building up throughout the 1960's. Caught between the menace of a new workers' offensive in Europe — under different circumstances than the post - World War II struggles — and a complete subordination to American imperialism, the European bourgeoisie is forced to look for its own road of autonomous imperialist development. Thus, the development of inter-imperialist rivalries parallels, and is a consequence of, the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

#### EUROPEAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST - WORLD WAR II PERIOD

The post-war period has been marked by a very high rate of economic growth throughout the capitalist world,

especially when compared to the years of stagnation which preceded the Second World War.

This growth was partly a result of government policies aimed at supporting the demand (i.e., guarantee an outlet to capitalist production) which all states adopted. In the case of the U. S. A. this took the form of massive increases in military expenditures. This growth was also made possible — especially as regards the European countries and Japan — by a massive expansion of exports, i.e., by the widening of the international trade which was favored by the unification of a world market.

In addition, a determining factor for this development was what economists call 'unlimited labor supply.' This was particularly true as regards Japan and the countries of continental Europe — where for many years the rates of expansion were decidedly higher than those experienced by other capitalist countries.

In Europe, in fact, the de-population of rural regions, the draining of labor power from certain areas in favor of other areas, the influx of refugees from ex-colonies and from Eastern countries, the massive influx of immigrant workers from Mediterranean and North African countries, have fed this mechanism in a virtually uninterrupted way. Today there are about ten million 'refugees' whose nationality is that of the countries in which they now reside; no fewer are the proletarians who have come from rural regions, or from economically 'depressed' areas to areas of higher industrial concentration; and finally, there are more than ten million immigrant workers who have left their countries to work in the industrial sectors of Europe. Italy (Southern and North-Eastern regions), Spain, Portugal, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey are the North-Mediterranean countries from which this exodus comes. To them must be added — as regards France — the Arab countries of the Mahgreb and the countries of Mid-western Africa, and — as regards Britain — India, Pakistan and some African ex-colonies.

This continuous influx of labor has made it possible, for the first fifteen years of the post-war period, to maintain wages at extremely low levels and at the same time maintain a very high rate of exploitation (hence, productivity);

in actuality this meant the realization of 'income policies,' even where they had not been officially adopted. But starting from the 1960's things began to change throughout Europe, in some cases (as in Italy) under the direct pressure of militant workers' struggles, in other cases (as in Holland) without the need of one single hour of strike. The economic effects, however, have been the same: the 'income policies' (official or not) have broken down, and the portion of national revenue destined for wages has increased everywhere at the expense of profits, of the capacity for self-financing, and of the rate of accumulation itself. This has not been due to a halt in the influx of new workers into the labor market; on the contrary, in those very years immigration began to take on gigantic proportions. The reason must instead be seen in the consolidation (due to political reasons) within the labor market of three airtight compartments: 1) one labor market for the immigrant workers; 2) one for the 'national' working class; and 3) one for the new ranks of the 'national' proletariat, which has resulted from the expansion of the educational sector.

It must be pointed out that these three sectors are not in competition with one another; and even if they were, it would hardly be a 'perfect' competition. Holland provides the clearest example, since it was the only country that officially adopted an 'income policy.' In Holland, for more than ten years, three hundred thousand refugees from the ex-colonies of Indonesia had kept the labor market 'loose' — thus allowing the income policy to function. When this 'feast' (for the bosses and for the social democracy) was over, the hundreds of thousands of workers brought in from Italy and Turkey were not enough to re-create the original situation. Dutch wages slid upwards — without even the need for strikes — and immigrant workers' wages followed the same course. This resulted in the breakdown of the income policy.

### THREE LABOR MARKETS

In general terms, this is what happened: the immigrant working class went on to occupy jobs in the heaviest sectors — such as building construction, road construction,

mining — or the most 'degrading' ones, in sectors such as hotels, restaurants and public services. At the same time, however, this class became a large majority in those sectors where, on account of international competition, exploitation is much more intense (i.e., assembly-line jobs in the auto industry and in most of the machine industries). But as we have seen, these are also the propelling sectors of the whole post-war European economic development. It meant, therefore, that the European bourgeoisie found itself forced to place the most delicate part of its productive apparatuses in the hands of a working class which it cannot control except through the harshest repression and police surveillance.

Since the immigrant workers are a mass which expands and contracts with relative ease, the fluctuations in employment which characterize the capitalist cycle were absorbed primarily by this sector of the working class; this allowed the 'national' working classes to 'conquer' something like a right to 'full employment,' which according to all the idiots of world social democracy would represent the great victory of the working classes in the post-war period. But this was not the only gain of the 'national' working classes: they were also freed from the heaviest, dirtiest, most degrading and least skilled jobs. It is on the basis of these two elements that a link could be forged between the social democracy and the 'national' working classes. To be sure, this link was more a consequence than a deliberate plan, and rests primarily on the divisions created within the working class as a whole.

Lastly, a growing portion of the new ranks of the 'national' proletariat which have entered the labor market have gone through formal schooling, thus finding an outlet in the ever expanding occupational sectors such as clerical, tertiary, or in any case sectors which are not directly productive. Mass education has become the great 'carrot' that post-war reformist capitalism has offered the proletariat in exchange for suffocating its aspirations towards a real social emancipation. In this sense, it has functioned as a real instrument for the formation of a 'proletarian aristocracy,' whose development has paralleled the allocation of the heaviest and most dangerous jobs to the new army

of immigrant workers.

## THE EUROPEAN CRISIS: 'INTERNAL' AND 'EXTERNAL' FACTORS

The crisis in the development of European capitalism in the post-war period has been set off precisely by the division of the labor market into airtight compartments, i.e., by that very system which the European bourgeoisie had created in order to divide the proletariat and maintain political control over it.

The 1960's saw the collapse of incomes policies in the European capitalist economy. 1967 saw the explosion of the student movement throughout Europe (a phenomenon which, with the exception of the Soviet Union and of some Eastern countries, was of world-wide dimensions); its main effect was that of 'flooding' that 'privileged' sector of the labor market on which the very existence of the 'proletarian aristocracy' rests. Roughly during the same years the immigrant working class took on throughout Europe the role of protagonist of a new cycle of struggles; the radically new content of these struggles has manifested its condition of total estrangement from all aspects of capitalist society.

## DIVISIONS WITHIN THE WORKING CLASS IN ITALY AND EUROPE

The dominant problem for the class struggle in Europe is therefore the division between the 'national' and immigrant proletariat.

The immigrant working class is largely made up of production workers and unskilled youth with a high degree of geographical mobility and 'disaffection' from their work. It is the sector of the working class which in Italy has become the protagonist and the vanguard of the struggles of the recent years.

But there are some differences which should not be minimized. In the countries of continental Europe, the division existing between this 'new' working class and the 'national' working class — made up predominantly of skilled and qualified workers who are integrated into the social fabric of

their regions and are tied to the official organization of the labor movement — is much more marked than the one existing in Italy between that sector of the working class which led the struggles since 1969, on the one hand, and the working class which is tied to the revisionist tradition and which became 'burned' by the historical defeat of the official labor movement.

Here are some of the factors which accentuate this division in continental European countries :

— Firstly, there is the language problem, which should by no means be underestimated, for it prevents communication among workers at the most immediate and spontaneous level. In many plants the assembly-lines are real 'towers of Babel,' where workers from the most varied nationalities are mixed so as to undermine any possibility of communication among them.

— Secondly, the problem of 'mobility' further aggravates the language problem. In its most recent form, emigration is founded on a continuous workers' turnover — deliberately planned by the bosses so that the immigrant's period of residence would never last more than two or three years; or, at best, even when emigration involves a final settlement, it still takes the form of a transitory situation. This is also true in Italy, among the younger immigrant workers. But while in Italy it is still largely due to the 'instability' of the labor market, in the countries of Central Europe the mobile character of immigration is purposefully planned, encouraged and often made compulsory by the bosses and the government. Immigrant labor power can therefore be exploited to the maximum without the country that 'hosts' these workers having to bear the cost of their social integration. Hence the emergence in many Mediterranean and African countries of a new type of proletariat for whom the period of emigration and wage-labor in industry covers only a fraction of his life. This phenomenon is of the highest importance, and will be discussed again below.

— Thirdly, there is the problem of legal inequality to which immigrants are subject: they do not have the right to vote; they do not have 'political' rights which would enable them, for example, to hold meetings, to form associations, to carry on propaganda; often they do not even have

'civil' rights, in the sense that they are the object of constant surveillance and of an oppressive attitude by the governments that 'host' them, which deprive them of even the most formal and phony bourgeois 'liberties.' Finally, as these restrictive measures increase, immigrant workers become the object of a real 'slave trade' as the news reports of recent years have borne out. Often the immigrant worker is not even a 'free wage earner,' but rather a real slave at the mercy of the bosses who can count on the full collaboration of the government and of various police rackets. All this does not contradict the essence of capitalist exploitation, for historically capitalism has shown many times that it can make use of slave labor more than of 'free wage labor.' This point is worthy of consideration, especially when one talks of the 'fascistization' of European society. After all, the difference between a Nazi lager and a 'neocapitalist' Wohnheim, or between a 'Fremdarbeiter' (prisoner of war) and a 'Gastarbeiter' (immigrant) is certainly not as sharp as it may appear on the surface.

When viewed in the framework of the European situation, the 'advanced' character of the class struggle in Italy becomes more evident. Clearly the factors involved are many, but one in particular has played a key role: this is the link that has occurred in Italy between the 'new' immigrant working class and the more 'traditional' working class. The former sector — as a major protagonist of the struggles since 1969 — has been a real mass vanguard, i.e., it did not isolate itself from the rest of the working class, but on the contrary transmitted to it the experience and the political 'contents' around which it rallied.

Outside Italy, where immigrant workers' struggles have certainly not been lacking, this link has not occurred spontaneously, and nothing can lead us to assume that the isolation of the immigrant working class can be overcome spontaneously. This may explain why the immigrant working class has found it enormously difficult to push its struggles beyond a certain point.

This point is very helpful in attempting a materialist explanation of the differences existing (and which should not be ignored) between the Italian 'revisionist' workers' movement and the European social democracy — or even the



'stalinism' of the French C. P. The theorists of the Italian C. P. have always tried to explain this difference in idealistic terms, i.e., in terms of the particular history and circumstances out of which the I. C. P. leadership emerged. This explanation has been uncritically accepted by many French, German, and Italian revolutionary comrades. But in our view the explanation must be sought elsewhere: in the fact that in the Central European countries the profound division within the working class has made the official organizations of the workers' movement the conscious 'administrators' of capitalist domination (whatever their ideology, 'stalinist' or 'social democratic'), whereas in Italy the greater unity and combativity of the working class has prevented the C. P. leadership from assuming this role entirely.

#### THE EUROPEAN SOUTH

There is another element of analogy between the Italian situation as we know it and the European situation as a whole. The function that the Mediterranean countries (including Southern Italy) and the North-Western African countries are increasingly playing for European capitalist development is similar to that which Southern Italy is playing for the Northern industrial regions: that of a huge reservoir of labor power. Of course, one cannot push this analogy too far. It is true that the 'underdevelopment' of those regions — or even of those which are forming in Central Europe — is always the product of capitalist development, and not the 'residue' of a previous situation. In fact, the draining of labor power described above is certainly one of the main forms assumed by the relation of economic dependency of one region on the other. But there is, however, a very fundamental difference in the fact that the South and the North of Italy belong to the same nation-state, whereas Greece, Spain, Yugoslavia or Turkey — not to mention Senegal — is quite a different thing from France, Germany or Sweden. This difference can be seen most clearly in the internal relations between sectors of the bourgeoisie. For instance, the President of the Italian Republic is a Neapolitan boss who undoubtedly has played and still plays his part

in organizing the 'underdevelopment' of his home-city, Naples, while it would hardly be possible that a Greek general would become president of the Bundesrepublik.

Nonetheless, this analogy is quite valid to help clarify three fundamental problems: 1) There should be no illusion that immigration is transitory or 'conjunctural' in character. This would be tantamount to believing that capitalist development in Italy could go on after having sent back to the South the three million or so proletarians who have been dragged to the North during the past twenty-five years. This point should be obvious. Yet many comrades and organizations in the European left continue to ignore this problem, and keep on talking of the working class, or of the contradictions between bourgeoisie and proletariat, or between proletariat and revisionism, etc., as if these ten million or more immigrant workers did not exist, or as if they were a mere transitional phenomenon devoid of any consequences. 2) When one reflects on the Italian government's 'southern policy' of the post-war period, as well as on the kind of social stratification it has generated, one soon realizes that this policy has been dictated by the necessity of maintaining an uninterrupted flow of labor power toward the industrialized regions and the 'poles of development.' Likewise, one can see the efforts, past and future, made by the imperialist countries of Central Europe toward maintaining the Mediterranean basin and North Africa in a state of 'underdevelopment' so as to insure a constant flow of immigrant labor from these countries. 3) But the third point is of fundamental importance. Twenty-five years of emigration have radically changed the social structure, the character, the content, and even the social protagonist of the class struggle in Southern Italy. The (geographical) mobility of the immigrant working class, particularly in the past few years, has become the main vehicle through which the experience, the attitudes and the consciousness of the immigrant working class shaped in the factories of Europe could be propagated and become diffused throughout the social fabric, thus becoming the collective heritage of those proletarians who had never had a direct experience of factory work. The 'disruption' of the traditional social fabric

in Southern Italy, caused by 'planned underdevelopment,' has therefore been accompanied by the emergence of new elements of 're-groupment' along clearer class lines, and in a way that is directly linked to the contents of the class struggle in the most 'advanced' centers of capitalist development.

Though in a different manner and with a different tempo, a similar process is underway in all those countries which supply immigrant labor to Europe: from Yugoslavia, where emigration takes the form of 'contracting out' excess labor power and is directly organized by the State or by the 'self-managed' enterprises, to Senegal, where the international mafia which specializes in slave trade negotiates directly with the tribal chief the sale of its 'subjects.'

In order to understand the terms in which the contradiction between proletariat and bourgeoisie presents itself in the imperialist Europe of the 1970's, it is essential that one realize to what extent the workers' struggles carried out in the factories of Zurich, Cologne or Lyons are in reality played out in the highlands of Anatolia or in the villages of Croatia — certainly not in terms of liberation struggles of oppressed people, but in terms of a struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie, or more precisely, between workers and bosses (even if, strictly speaking, in those regions the workers and the bosses are few).

These changes in the social structure of Southern Italy described above become more significant as European capitalism increasingly orients itself towards 'time-limited' immigration, which has the effect of creating a type of proletarian who is no longer a peasant and at the same time is not yet a worker (except for certain years of his life), who is socially available for wage labor but does not find work or does not want it. This is the new type of proletariat that has fed both the flow of immigration and the swelling of southern urban centers.

This process is fundamental in explaining why certain regions are losing their 'attractiveness' as hunting grounds for slave trade. The most evident and contemporary example can be seen in the rapidity with which the channels of immigrant labor — especially that destined for large factories — are being shut to the proletarians of Southern Italy,

despite the fact that from a legal standpoint Italian immigrants enjoy greater freedom of circulation in Europe than workers of other nationalities. From this point of view, the situation in Ireland is very illuminating. Although distorted by a nationalism which reflects its petit-bourgeois direction, the struggle of the Irish people is largely the result of a similar process, which has reached even more acute proportions.

There are many regions in the European Economic Community which in all probability will play a similar role as the process of economic integration accelerates. But it is evident that the process of proletarianization engendered by emigration will be greater in areas such as Southern Europe and Northern Africa (Europe's labor reservoirs) which are outside the present boundaries of the E.E.C. This will mean, in effect, the creation of a permanent 'industrial reserve army' which will be the fourth driving force of the revolution in Europe in addition to the three we have already discussed (i.e., the immigrant working class, the 'national' proletariat, and the 'proletarian aristocracy').

## CONCLUSIONS

The European crisis has already begun. It affects the very mechanism upon which the post-war economic development rested. Two elements have been especially determinative: on the one hand, the over-all crisis of the imperialist framework and in particular the increasing difficulties of U. S. capitalism which have direct repercussions on Europe by blocking its development. On the other hand, the labor market has ceased to function as a propelling force in the way in which the European bosses had intended in the post-war period. In more general terms, the fundamental causes beneath the European crisis are the same as those which — though with greater weight and considerable anticipation vis-a-vis other countries — have been operative in Italy.

But the European crisis is not a 'catastrophic' one. The ruling class can overcome it: in fact — though in an ex-

tremely contradictory form — the basic lines of such a strategy are already well delineated. At the international level, it means the emergence of a new world equilibrium founded on a redistribution among five powers of the role of guarantor of international order which up to now was held exclusively by the U. S. A. and the Soviet Union. On the domestic level, it means a growing 'fascistization' of the European states through the authoritarian control and increasing regimentation of the work-force. The attempt to sharpen and to instrumentalize the divisions within the working class (i.e., between immigrant and non-immigrant workers) is central to this trend. These projects are, however, loaded with contradictions : for example, the presence within the European ruling classes of a strong pro-American 'fifth column,' and the sharpening of inter-imperialist conflicts which cannot but lead to a redistribution of power at the world level. The main contradiction at the domestic level stems from the fact that the crisis entails a capitalist attack against the living conditions of the whole proletariat. This tends to unify rather than divide its various sectors, and mainly favors the development and radicalization of struggles.

Britain is not the best example, primarily because the mechanism of capitalist development has been different from that of other European countries; moreover, the British working class has traditionally enjoyed greater privileges — even if all they amount to is greater bargaining strength. However there is no doubt that the wave of struggles which has hit Britain grows from the halt of the mechanism of development and from the British bosses' attempts to 're-structure' their economy in view of the European unification. Though in varying degrees and in different forms, all other European countries will soon experience a similar situation.

But if the European crisis has to find a revolutionary outlet, the essential condition is the unification of the European proletariat, i.e., of those four components which we have pinpointed above. Obviously, this unification involves a long-range process; it depends not merely on the development of struggles in particular areas of Europe, but more importantly on the diffusion and generalization of the 'con-

tents, objectives, and experience of those struggles throughout the whole of the European proletariat.

It must be pointed out, finally, that in the context of the European situation, the tempo of the crisis in Italy, as well as the process of proletarian unification, has been extremely rapid. But Italy is not an island in the midst of a capitalist world: one can hardly conceive of the development of a revolutionary process in Italy extending to the seizure of power, except in the context of a sharpening of the crisis and of a radicalization of the class struggle throughout Europe. The future of the class struggle in Italy, the very role of the Italian proletariat and its mass vanguards, are linked to the development of the European social crisis. If it is true that today Italy is the 'weakest link' in the chain of capitalist power, it is also true that this chain cannot break except in the face of much stronger tensions which would then place the rest of Europe in the same condition as Italy.

What the Italian proletariat and its vanguards may instead represent for the rest of the European proletariat is something else. Though in different and somewhat 'easier' conditions, the four basic components of the European proletariat are all present in Italy. The history of their mutual relationship in the face of a growing radicalization of the struggle and of the sharpening of the crisis has been an experience full of lessons.


The growing distrust that European bosses show towards Italian immigrants clearly indicates their fear of this experience, and of the profound effect it can have for the whole of Europe.

It seems unlikely that the formation of new proletarian vanguards in the rest of Europe can occur in the same 'spontaneous' manner as in Italy: the bosses are already on the alert, and moreover the conditions, as we have seen, are more unfavorable.

To put the experience we have accumulated during the three years of class struggle at the disposal of the European revolutionary left is of crucial importance for the formation of these vanguards. But we must also realize how little our theoretical elaboration has kept pace with our work and our experience, and how significant is the revolutionary responsibility which falls upon us, not only with

respect to the Italian situation but also with respect to the European situation as a whole.

The international debate in *Lotta Continua* must above all serve that purpose.



*GUIDO VIALE* has worked with *Lotta Continua* (an Italian revolutionary organization) since it was formed in 1969. He has written many articles for their daily paper, including this article which originally appeared in November 1972.

*BRUNO* and *JUDY RAMIREZ*, of the Canadian *NEWSLETTER* from Toronto, translated the article.



CORRECTION TO VOLUME 8, NUMBER 5  
(CLASS STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN)

A typographical error reversed the meaning of the first sentence on page 8. Referring to the struggles of women and non-white workers, it should read, "Insofar as these groups dominate traditionally low-paying jobs, especially in non-unionized sectors and government-supported social services, their militancy is least susceptible to Labour's promise of a 'social contract.'"

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# **Immigrant Workers and Trade Unions in the German Federal Republic**

*Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack*

## PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The manuscript of the present article was completed in February 1974. It was written under the influence of two important events in the summer and autumn of 1973: the wave of strikes in which immigrant workers played a major part, and the stopping of labor recruitment to Germany in November, ostensibly because of the "oil crisis." Now, a year later, it has become obvious not only that these events are interconnected, but also that they represent a turning point in West German immigration policy. A complete or partial ban on immigration of workers (except

from members of the European Community) is likely to be a long-term feature of German economic policy. Why has the importation of labor — so long a major factor in West Germany's economic expansion — ceased to be necessary or profitable to the capitalist class?

In brief, there are two main reasons. First, the West German economy is coming into the phase of "stagflation" which has been characteristic of the U.S.A. and Britain for some years already. Seasonally adjusted unemployment is at its highest level since the early fifties, while the inflation rate hardly drops below last year's peak. Any measures taken to ease unemployment will increase the rate of inflation, thus further eroding the already much reduced international competitiveness of West German products. (A dramatic example of this is the fact that Volkswagen is considering building a plant in the U.S.A., because wage rises in Germany and changes in international exchange rates now make production costs lower there than at home.) The need for new immigrant labor is therefore likely to be small in the near future.

Secondly, the economic and political advantages of cheap immigrant labor have declined in recent years. One reason for this is that the competition between Germany, Switzerland, France, Sweden, etc. for workers during the boom years of the mid-sixties forced concessions with regard to family entry and social provisions, which have necessitated social investments. To avoid misunderstandings: immigrants still have far worse conditions than most indigenous workers and many necessary social facilities are not provided, but the old situation of bringing in masses of single workers who could be housed in old shacks is no longer typical, so that the cost-differences between immigrant labor on the one hand and indigenous labor or labor-saving rationalization measures on the other are much reduced. In addition — and here we see the connection between the strikes of 1973 and the stopping of immigration — the immigrant workers are no longer willing to put up with the worst forms of exploitation. Strikes against low pay and actions such as rent strikes, house occupations, and demonstrations against bad social conditions have made it clear to the capitalists that, along with the immigrant workers,

they have imported a new potential for social conflict. Unlike the German workers, the immigrants have not gone through the stultifying process of fascism, anti-communism, and control through social-democratic party and union bureaucracies. They are often prepared to take militant action. The bosses fear that the spark may ignite the hitherto passive German proletariat.

The immigration stop, combined with the recession, has already led to a large reduction in the number of immigrant workers since the last year, although an exact figure is not yet available. As in 1966, the bosses are able to export a large proportion of unemployment, thus reducing social conflict at home. At the same time, racist campaigns are used to whip up feelings against immigrants, diverting attention from the real causes of the economic difficulties.

Despite these changes since the completion of the article, immigrant labor will remain a major factor in the German economy for the foreseeable future, and the arguments and hypotheses outlined below maintain their validity.

S.C. and G.K., October 1974

## INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the sixties, West German capitalism has been running into increasing difficulties, which has reduced willingness to make economic concessions to the working class. The result has been a gradual move away from the apathy characteristic of many workers during the period of the "economic miracle" (1949-65), and an increase in class conflict. A peak in this development was the unofficial strike movement in 1973. A new factor in this movement was the leading role played by immigrant workers in many strikes. In some cases they led the strikes or even struck alone, in others they acted as a catalyst in factories where German workers were also militant.

The militancy of the immigrant workers creates fresh and pressing problems for the trade union leadership. In order to understand these and the measures which result from them, two questions must first be answered:

1. What function does the employment of immigrant

workers have for West German capitalism and what changes have there been in this function over the last fifteen years?

2. What is the general function of the trade unions in West German capitalism and what is their specific function in regard to the immigrant section of the proletariat?

After this we will describe the actual policy of the unions since the beginning of the recruitment of the foreign labor and then discuss possible reactions of immigrant workers towards trade union policy.

## THE FUNCTION OF IMMIGRANT LABOR IN WEST GERMAN CAPITALISM

The employment and super-exploitation of underprivileged groups in most capitalist countries — for example, the blacks in the U.S.A. and South Africa, the rural-urban migrants in Italy and Japan, and the immigrant workers in almost all Western European countries — has two main functions:

1. The unemployed masses form an industrial reserve army which puts pressure on wages, thus helping to keep the profit rate high.

2. The working class is split according to race, nationality or area of origin. (1)

The underprivileged position of one section of the working class is complemented by the somewhat better position of another section. Like the whites in the U.S.A. and South Africa, the indigenous workers in Western Europe tend to have certain privileges, better working conditions and higher pay. The mass media, the official propaganda apparatus and the educational system deepen the split in the working class by spreading nationalism and racism in order to gain the collaboration of the privileged section of the working class in oppressing the other. The result is the creation of a "labor aristocracy" prepared to defend its apparent economic and social security by betraying its real class interests. This weakens the labor movement. Discriminatory legislation (in Germany the *Ausländergesetz* — Foreigners Law — of 1965; in Britain the 1971 Immigration Act) denies vital civil and political rights to the al-

ready underprivileged section of the working class, which deepens the split.

The use of an external or foreign reserve army became necessary for the capitalists in West Germany later than in other countries. Up until 1961 three other labor sources were available to put pressure on wages, keeping up profits and allowing the long-lasting export-led boom known as the "economic miracle." These were: the large numbers of unemployed created by the collapse of the Nazi war economy in 1945, the seven million expellees in the territories lost to Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia at the end of the war, and three million refugees from the German Democratic Republic. The first labor shortages appeared in building and agriculture in the mid-fifties, and the bilateral labor recruitment agreement with Italy — the first of its kind — was made at this time.

The employment of immigrant workers was initially regarded by employers, unions and government as a temporary measure. But by the beginning of the sixties the existing domestic labor reserves had been absorbed, the stream of refugees from East Germany had stopped, and it had become apparent that further internal reserves (rural-urban migrants, not-yet-employed women, could not be mobilized to an appreciable extent. Nationalization and the replacement of relatively labor-intensive methods of increasing production by capital-intensive methods were not in themselves sufficient to maintain the growth and competitiveness of West German industry. Capitalists began to recruit (through an efficient state recruitment system) large numbers of workers from the undeveloped parts of Southern Europe and from Turkey. In this way they were able to prevent rapid wage growth in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories.

By the mid-sixties the employment of immigrant workers had become an essential part of West German economic structure. By 1966 there were 1.3 million immigrant workers (not counting dependents). But the government continued to emphasize that immigration was not a permanent factor for Germany, in order to avoid making the social expenditure — on housing, schools, health facilities — which was already necessary. The employers regarded the immigrant

workers as a "mobile labor potential," as Ulrich Freiherr von Gienanth, an official of the German Employers' Association, put it. They could be got rid of quickly in case of economic difficulties. "It would be dangerous to limit this mobility through a large-scale settlement policy," wrote Gienanth in support of the government policy. (2)

The advantages (for the bosses) but also the limitations of this labor market policy became apparent in the 1966-67 recession. The causes of the recession were, on the one hand, the increase in wage levels in the years immediately preceding, on the other, the rising level of international competition. The recruitment of immigrant workers could not hold back wage growth to the same extent as had formerly been the case with the internal labor reserves and the refugees from East Germany. The immigrants were mainly without industrial training and experience, lacked general education, and most could not speak German. Their competition could not hold down the wages of skilled and non-manual workers, who together make up more than half the labor force. The braking effect on the wages of unskilled and semi-skilled workers was not sufficient to prevent considerable growth in the general average wage level at this time. The employers used a recession to control wage-growth and restore "labor discipline." A further advantage for the bosses was that they were able to export a substantial part of the social costs of unemployment. For although the number of immigrant workers sank by 400,000 in only a few months, the number of immigrants receiving unemployment benefits was never more than 29,000. In addition a large-scale propaganda campaign against the immigrants by the bosses and their mass-media led to a considerable increase in hostility towards immigrants at this time. The immigrant workers were used as scapegoats to divert attention from the real causes of the recession. (3)

On the other hand the limitations of the "mobile labor potential" policy also became evident. The number of immigrant workers did not fall below 900,000 although large numbers of Germans became unemployed. It became obvious that immigrants could not always be easily replaced by German workers, because they were concentrated in certain industries (building, engineering, chemicals) and above

all in certain socio-economic groups (unskilled and semi-skilled manual). Qualified German personnel were often unwilling to take such jobs. In addition, the employers frequently sacked older German workers rather than young immigrants who, due to their lack of industrial experience and their need to earn a lot quickly, could often be conned into working their guts out on piece-rates. Moreover, even then a large number of immigrant workers had already brought over their families and become firmly established in a specific area. All in all, it proved impossible to make the immigrant workers bear the full burden of unemployment in the recession.

After the recession the number of immigrants employed rose steeply once again, reaching a peak figure of 2.4 million in 1973. Including dependents, there must be close to four million immigrants in West Germany. Eleven per cent of all employed persons are immigrants, and the quota is far higher among manual workers in industry — 20 to 25 per cent. In addition to its political function for the ruling class (division of the workers), immigrant labor has today a double economic function: one section of the immigrant labor force remains a "mobile labor potential" which can be moved from branch to branch or sent home as the interests of capital dictate; another section provides most of the labor in certain industries and occupational categories (those with the worst pay and poorest working conditions). This second group cannot be dismissed easily, as there are not enough German workers willing and able to replace them.

The legal and administrative measures of the German authorities reflect the role assigned to immigrant labor. Immigrants' political rights are severely restricted by the Foreigners Law and by new regulations issued since. A special department of the Verfassungsschutz, the German equivalent of the F.B.I., watches over immigrants, and it is known that the authorities tolerate the activities of Spanish, Greek, Persian and other secret police and even cooperate with them. Any immigrant who steps out of line is likely to be expelled immediately. A system of varying types of residence permits conferring different rights helps to divide the immigrants among themselves: hard-working, "politic-

ally reliable" immigrants get privileges compared with the others. On the other hand, efforts are made to keep part of the immigrant labor mobile, in order to save the social costs which cannot be avoided in the long run in case of permanent settlement. The state government of Bavaria went so far as to introduce a "rotation policy," according to which no immigrant should be allowed to stay more than five years. Such measures are in part a reaction to the growing unwillingness of immigrants to accept the worst social conditions, which has been shown in a wave of rent strikes and squatting in the last few years. A further measure has been the recent increase in the recruitment fee of the state recruitment service: an employer must now pay DM. 1000 (over \$350) per worker, instead of DM. 300. This has had little effect, however, since many employers (illegally) pressure the workers into paying the fee back to them.

#### THE FUNCTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS WITH REGARD TO IMMIGRANT WORKERS

The trade unions of the German Federal Republic have long since become a stabilizing factor in the capitalist system. With its Dusseldorf Program of 1963 the D.G.B. (German Trade Union Federation) accepted the capitalist form of economic growth and made this its own goal. This means that the unions — like the employers — must have an interest in guaranteeing capital accumulation through high profit rates, which means relatively low wages. The unions are therefore compelled to restrain their members from wage demands and industrial action which might endanger the high profit rates.

On the other hand, the unions cannot openly oppose the day-to-day interests of their members. This would lead to a weakening of the union's basis through loss of membership, so that it would no longer be capable of carrying out collective bargaining or industrial action. Such weak unions do not even serve the interests of the bosses: the ideology of "social partnership" requires unions at least strong enough to canalize and restrict the demands of the workers. (4) If the unions become too weak the probable result



is spontaneous mass movements outside their control, which may eventually lead to revolutionary forms of organization. Thus even unions which support the capitalist system cannot afford to entirely ignore the demands of their members.

The unions therefore work in the following way: they represent the interests and demands of the members to a limited extent. In case of disputes they take over the leadership and then take the steam out of the movement through long-drawn-out negotiations and formalized procedures which eventually only get out of the bosses what these can afford to pay without endangering profits. (5) The increasing difficulties of West German capitalism in recent years make this double task of the unions more and more arduous. The capitalists attempt increasingly to move away from a free labor market in order to allow long-term planning of wage costs. Incomes policy in Germany takes the guise of voluntary "concerted action" and "stability policy" in which the unions participate. This makes it increasingly difficult for the unions to even appear to represent their members. The result is an increasing tendency towards spontaneous movements — notably the waves of unofficial strikes in 1969 and 1973 — which question the policies and structures of the unions.

What does this dual function of the unions mean for their policy towards immigrant workers? In so far as the recruitment of immigrant workers serves capitalist growth, it is supported by the unions. However, as the presence of immigrant workers tends to harm the interests of German workers by keeping down wages, the unions must try to alleviate these effects. They do this by demanding equal pay for immigrant workers and by calling for measures to aid social integration from the government. Integration and control of the immigrant workers also fits in with the interests of the union leadership, who fear that immigrants may become more militant than German workers. Through measures like the setting up of advisory services and the publication of information in foreign languages, it is hoped to get the immigrants into the unions and to reduce their potential for independent unofficial action. (6)

The unions face a dilemma: on the one hand they must try to prevent immigrants being used to put pressure on

wages, on the other hand labor immigration is profitable for capital just because it keeps wages down and splits the working class. If the unions carry out their system-stabilizing task of limiting wage demands, then they must act against the demands of the members, who want this downward pressure on wages eliminated. The unions try to solve this contradiction by trying to convince the German and immigrant workers with resounding phrases that their interests are being looked after, while at the same time pursuing a policy of disciplining the immigrant workers. The dialectical repressive function of the unions is shown in their policy towards immigrant workers yet again: the unions can only support the capitalist system if they are able to appear not as oppressors but as mediators, on the one hand between labor and capital, on the other between German and immigrant workers. The unions tend to lose their function to the extent that the workers come to understand it. But if the unions are no longer capable of fulfilling their integrative mediation function, then the workers are compelled to fight — either spontaneously or in new organizations — against the now evident power of capital.

#### UNION POLICIES TOWARDS IMMIGRANT WORKERS

The contradictory aims of the unions are justified in the following way by the Federal Executive Committee of the D.G.B.:

In order to surmount existing labor market bottlenecks, the D.G.B. and its member unions agreed in principle in 1955 to the employment of foreign employees. They saw in this a necessary contribution to safeguarding full employment in an expanding economy and at the same time a practical step of social and trade union solidarity. In order to prevent foreign employees being used as wage-cutters, the D.G.B. demanded right from the outset that recruitment abroad should not be carried out directly by the employers but rather in the framework of definite labor market policy through

the Federal Labor Office. The Federal Government agreed to this. In every case the principle of equality with German employees in wages, labor and social rights is to be applied. (7)

In fact, the legal recruitment monopoly of the Federal Labor Office does not prevent illegal recruitment by so-called "slave dealers," nor does formal equality prevent de facto discrimination against immigrants at work. Even real wage equality would not prevent the foreign reserve army from putting pressure on wages, as the expended labor in itself tends to keep wages down. As to the working and living conditions of immigrants, it is therefore not so much what the unions have achieved in terms of formal guarantees that counts, but rather that they have to fight actual discrimination and to achieve concrete improvements.

The unions have protested against the more spectacular examples of "slave-dealing." They have demanded better working conditions and safety regulations, they have complained about the bad housing conditions and restricted educational opportunities of the immigrants, they have demanded reforms in the Foreigners Law to ease family reunification and to give "well-behaved" immigrants the right to settle in West Germany. But all these campaigns have taken the form of verbal demands and appeals to the humanity of the exploiters. The unions have not led a real struggle for change. Above all, they have never used their main weapon, the strike, to force the bosses to improve immigrant workers' conditions. They have done little more for the immigrant worker than to play the role of a social fire brigade, which appears where the system shows its worst aspects. They act like a charitable organization which alleviates the worst effects of the capitalist market economy and in doing so helps to safeguard the system as a whole.

The analogy to a charitable organization is not coincidental. In West Germany social work with immigrants has been delegated by the government to voluntary organizations, mainly religious ones. Like these, the unions have set up advisory offices, which are partly financed by the government. Here immigrants can get advice on problems

concerning work, family, housing, law and so on. The unions treat the other social services as competitors, as the following quotation from a report of the Metal Workers Union (I.G.M.) shows :

Where these social services detect a weakness in the work of the trade union organization, where there are no shop stewards for the foreign colleagues or where the stewards remain passive or do not receive adequate support, particularly where the works council does not take action in the case of complaints from foreign employees, there the social services take special satisfaction in outdoing the union in its very own field — particularly in the eyes of the public and the foreign employees. (8)

In examining the relationship of the unions to the immigrant workers, one cannot limit oneself to describing special union social services for them. Much more important is the participation of the immigrant workers in the normal life of the union, as shown by membership and the holding of union offices. At the beginning of 1971 the six main immigrant nationalities (Yugoslavs, Turks, Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese) had an average membership rate of 22.4 per cent. The Turks and Spaniards had the highest membership rate (27 per cent), followed by the Italians (23 per cent), the Greeks (22 per cent), the Yugoslavs (17 per cent) and the Portuguese (15 per cent). The membership rate varies considerably from industry to industry. The Chemical Workers Union (I.G. Chemie) has organized 43 per cent of all immigrants working in its sector. (9) Nearly one third of all immigrant workers in the metal industry are members of the Metal Workers Union (I.G. Metall), indicating a membership rate only slightly below that of German workers. This is all the more astonishing when one takes into account that most immigrants are of rural origin and that trade union membership may lead to repressive measures by the reactionary governments in the countries of origin upon return.

But immigrant workers are considerably unrepresented

among trade union office holders. In 1973 only 5,633 foreign workers were elected as shop stewards of the Metal Workers Union — 4.7 per cent of all stewards elected. (10) This is an improvement compared with 1970, when only 2.4 per cent of all stewards were immigrant workers, but is still low when one considers that about 10 per cent of the union's members are immigrants. On average there is one foreign shop steward for about every forty foreign union members in the metal industry, compared with one German steward for every fifteen German union members. (11) Under-representation is still greater with regard to works councils. (12) Since 1972 foreigners have had equal rights to be elected as works councillors, but they still have to overcome greater difficulties than German colleagues when they wish to represent their compatriots. The Metal Workers Union only puts immigrants with a good knowledge of German on its candidates lists, which excludes many able and militant immigrants. Unions often give the best places on the lists (which is decisive due to the system of proportional representation) to workers who have been in the factory longest. This practice is disadvantageous to immigrants, and was one factor in the conflict between immigrant workers and the works council at Ford of Cologne during the strike in August 1973 (which will be described below). A Turkish union member standing for election in the 1972 works council elections was assigned, despite his popularity, a very low place on the candidates list. When the local union leadership refused to give him a better place he stood for election on an independent list and was elected with a very large number of votes. Against this, the works council majority refused to apply for him to be released from work to carry out his works council duties, accusing him of anti-union behavior. (13)

Altogether, 1,445 immigrants were elected as works councillors in the metal industry in 1972; that makes 2.2 per cent of the total elected. This compares with an immigrant share in the labor force in the factories concerned of 14.2 per cent. (14) It seems likely that immigrant workers are even more under-represented in other industries, with the possible exception of chemicals. The degree of under-representation varies from nationality to nationality

and is probably greatest for the Turks, the largest and on average most recently arrived group of immigrants. The Greeks, Italians and Spaniards are somewhat better represented, though still much worse than Germans.

If the unions seriously want strong immigrant participation, then they need to take measures to improve the representation of immigrants in trade union offices and works councils. The Ford strike showed how great the gulf between the unions and the works council on the one hand and immigrant workers on the other has become in some cases: here the Turkish workers refused to negotiate with the employers if the works council took part in the meetings. They regarded the works council as a tool of the bosses which had sold them out. The under-representation of immigrants in union representative functions leads to the supposition that the union leadership wants only the passive membership of the immigrants, but is basically concerned above all with the interests of the German workers.

The most important criterion for the policy of the unions towards immigrant workers is their behavior in actual industrial conflicts in which immigrants are involved. Here it is only possible to mention a few cases, which however may be regarded as fairly typical for the behavior of the unions. (15) There are three basic types of conflicts, which require varying responses from the unions.

Firstly there are general conflicts between labor and capital, which are not necessarily carried out within the factory. The most important case was the anti-immigrant campaign between 1964 and 1966. (16) This was a large-scale propaganda campaign of the bosses, who, through their mass media, tried to create hostility towards immigrants and to use it to fight against the trade union demand for shorter working hours. The campaign started with the speech of the then Federal Chancellor Erhard in May 1964. He called upon German workers to work longer so that the immigrants could be sent home. The peak of the agitation was the headline in the mass-circulation BILDZEITUNG of March 31, 1966, which asked provocatively: "Do foreign workers work harder than German workers?" The climate of hostility towards immigrants was such that the headline led to a series of fights and unofficial strikes. The unions

tried to counter the campaign through articles in the trade union press and leaflets distributed in factories. In some cases meetings were held to discuss the problems of the employment of immigrant workers. But no decisive steps were taken to fight against the anti-immigrant propaganda. Offensive measures like strikes or overtime bans were never even considered. The moral appeals for international solidarity were not successful in reducing hostility towards immigrants, as a series of opinion polls taken at this time show. (17) As the unions basically support the capitalist system, they were unable to show how exploitation of the industrial reserve army and the use of propaganda to divide up the workers is an intrinsic part of capitalism that can only be combatted by fighting the system as a whole. The moral appeals could have no effect on the workers, who know perfectly well that the bosses recruit immigrants to keep down wages and raise profits. In retrospect the anti-immigrant campaign of 1964-66 can be seen as the ideological preparation for the 1966-67 recession, during which the unions were just as helpless in preventing the splitting of the class and in defending immigrants' rights as they had been during the preparatory phase.

Secondly, there are industrial conflicts in which unions carry out official action to secure higher wages. In such cases, the West German employers often try to weaken the workers' front through special forms of repression against the immigrants. For example, during the rubber workers' strike in the State of Hessen in November 1967, the management tried to break the strike by threatening to expel the immigrants from the works hostels if they did not resume work immediately. At the same time they distributed a leaflet to German workers, blaming the strike on the immigrants, whom they described as "a drunken Mediterranean horde." In this case the Chemical Workers Union was able to take measures which successfully countered these attempts to split the workers, and the strike was won. (18) Frequently, immigrants who strike are threatened by the bosses with deportation, and the authorities collaborate in such measures. However, the authors know of no industrial dispute in which immigrant workers have allowed themselves to be used as scabs. On the contrary, the solidarity

shown in the behavior of the immigrants often leads to the removal of prejudices during industrial disputes.

Thirdly, there are industrial disputes in which immigrant workers fight against special forms of discrimination. Such struggles, which aim at combatting the oppression of immigrants, seldom receive support from the unions and the German workers, and tend more and more to take the form of unofficial strikes. Examples are the strikes at Hella in Lippstadt in September 1969 and July 1973, and at Kharman, Ford, and Pierburg in 1973.

The Hella car components factory in Lippstadt has the distinction of being one of the few factories which played a prominent part in the strike movements of both 1969 and 1973. In both cases, immigrant workers took the lead. In 1969, 95 per cent of the workers in the northern branch works were immigrants, mainly Spanish and Italian women, graded as semi-skilled. They were paid much less than the German workers in the main works, who were for the most part skilled. The immigrants had had to sign contracts, which they could not properly understand, in their countries of origin. Wage discrimination was the original issue in the strike. In addition, demands were made concerning Christmas bonuses, which the management cut when workers had been off sick, and the length of holidays. The German workers gave the strike some verbal support but did not join in. The Metal Workers Union tried to get the immigrants back to work: the claims were justified, said the officials, but the method of an unofficial strike was not permissible. The management called in the police and the consuls of the countries of origin. The immigrant women found themselves unable to continue against this united front; they returned to work without achieving their demands.

The behavior of management and union had not changed in 1973 at Hella. The German workers were given an "inflation-bonus" of 15 pfennig per hour, while the immigrants got nothing. In this way the bosses successfully split the workers, for the Germans took no part in the subsequent strike of the immigrant workers. The Metal Workers Union once again opposed the strike. The bosses called in the police and the consuls. But this time the immigrant workers had elected a militant strike committee which led the strug-



gle. Their unity resulted in victory : an increase of 40 pfennig per hour for the lower wage group and 30 pfennig per hour for the upper one. (20)

The strike at the Ford factory in Cologne in August 1973 was to date the most important expression of workers' resistance against their super-exploitation. It also showed most clearly the gulf between the union apparatus and the immigrant workers. Ford has 34,000 employees of whom more than half are immigrants, the largest group being the 14,000 Turks. The Germans have mainly skilled or supervisory posts, as have some of the Italians. The semi-skilled work, particularly the extremely arduous and intensive assembly work on the production-line, is carried out almost entirely by Turks. Management has used the special situation of the Turks — their poverty and rural origins, the long waiting lists (about a million Turks have applied for work in Germany) at the German recruitment centers — to raise the speed of production at an unbearable level. The shop stewards and works councillors, nearly all skilled German workers, who do not understand the problems of the Turks, have done nothing to prevent this and have therefore lost the trust of the immigrants. As early as 1964, a survey carried out on behalf of the Metal Workers Union showed how great the gap between German and immigrant workers had become, (21) but no effective measures were taken to change the situation. The works council elections of 1972, already mentioned above, were another danger sign which was ignored.

The strike started when 300 Turkish workers were fired because they overstayed their holidays. The 20-day annual holiday is far too short for those who have to travel for seven or eight days to reach their families in Anatolia. The sacked workers were not replaced, making the pace of work even greater for those who remained. The result was a spontaneous strike in one department, which quickly spread throughout the works. A strike committee was elected and demands were made which at first united immigrant and German workers : a raise of 1 DM. per hour for all workers, reinstatement of the sacked workers, six weeks paid holiday, reduction of production-line and machine speeds, more workers on the line and the machines. This immi-

grant-led strike at a major industrial plant terrified the German bosses, and they used all the weapons at their command to break it. Together they condemned the strike, which, they alleged, was led by foreign communist agitators. Large police forces were made ready. The BILDZEITUNG mobilized nationalist feelings with headlines about "Turkish Terror at Ford." The works council did everything possible to undermine the unity of the workers. By making concessions on pay, which was the main issue for the German workers, the management was able to divide them from the Turks. This made possible an attack on the strike leadership by supervisory staff assisted by disguised policemen. The leaders were arrested and the demoralized Turks were forced back to work by threats of dismissal and deportation. The BILDZEITUNG celebrated the event with the headline "German workers liberate their factory" (as if the factory belonged to the workers!) while the Ford management praised the works councillors for their help and their "physical courage" in fighting against the workers. Ford is an extreme example of how German trade unionists have become tools of management against the immigrants, who now have to fight not only against the bosses and against the police, but also against their own "representatives."

An important factor in the Ford strike, as in other strikes in 1973, was that the immigrants were fighting not only for higher pay but also for better working conditions, in particular for a reduction in the health-destroying work-pace on production lines and in piece-work. Traditionally, the West Germans have not struggled for such demands. Rather they have become "wage-machines" concerned only with raising pay-rates through national negotiations. In the collective bargaining and official strike in Baden-Wurtemberg in the autumn of 1973, immediately following the unofficial movement, the Metal Workers Union for the first time raised demands concerning working conditions.

To sum up, it may be said that the unions seldom take account of the special needs and interests of immigrant workers, and that the immigrants often do not feel that the unions represent them. In many cases they see the local representatives of the unions as tools of the bosses. Such

problems do not concern the immigrants alone. Most shop stewards and works councillors are German skilled workers or even foremen. (22) They tend first and foremost to represent the interests of the group from which they come. It is not just the immigrant workers whose interests are neglected—the same applies to all unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Apart from immigrants, the largest group in these categories are women workers who in West Germany, as elsewhere, are considerably underpaid. This explains why the unions generally make demands for a percentage rise in wages, which corresponds to the interests of better-paid workers by maintaining differentials, but until the strikes of 1973 did nothing against piece-work and inhuman working conditions.

#### TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION OR SELF-ORGANIZATION FOR THE IMMIGRANT WORKERS

In the struggles of 1973 the unions showed themselves on the whole to be incapable of fighting for the special interests of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, in particular of the immigrant workers. This applies not only to the national leadership but also to the union representatives at the factory level. At present the unions seem unable to fulfill either of their contradictory functions adequately: they neither represent the whole of the working class, nor do they serve the interests of the bourgeoisie effectively, for they no longer have the workers under control.

It is not yet evident how the unions will behave in this situation. On the one hand, they are likely to take further special measures to encourage the "social integration" of the immigrants and to increase their loyalty to the unions. Advisory services, language courses and special training facilities for immigrant union members might increase the unions' control over immigrant workers. On the other hand, an increased witch-hunt for "foreign agitators" is probable. This would mean, however, that union officials might in some cases become agents of the foreign police. The hysterical reaction of many officials to the Ford strike indicates that such a development is not impossible.

Active and class-conscious unionists cannot support such

strategies. It must be their task to increase the number of immigrant shop stewards and works councillors, with the aim of bringing them into the struggle for returning the unions to their original aim: that is, to represent the workers in the fight against capitalist exploitation. The unions must be made to move away from their policy of collective bargaining on a national or state level and instead to make demands which concern the immediate, concrete, local interests of the various groups of workers — demands concerning not only wages but also the humanization of working conditions. But a change in union policy in this direction is hardly to be expected and will certainly not come from the present leadership, for it would mean rejecting the stabilizing role which the unions have come to have for the capitalist system.

If the unions do not take such steps to become truly representative of immigrant workers' interests, then the question of the self-organization of the immigrants will become pressing. Self-organization means that the spontaneous and temporary coalitions of immigrant workers, which come into being in strikes when the unions fail to support the immigrants, could gradually become permanent organizations, representing immigrant workers at first locally, then regionally, and even for the whole country. But the development of "national" or "multi-national" organization carries with it the danger of a repetition of the tragic error of the R.G.O. (Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition — revolutionary trade union opposition) policy carried out by the German Communist Party at the beginning of the thirties. By splitting up the workers and making the militants easily identifiable, this policy did much to help the bosses and the Nazis in destroying the labor movement in 1933. Separate unions for immigrants and Germans would mean institutionalizing the split in the working class, and would serve the interests of the employers. A joint struggle of immigrants and Germans would become very difficult.

But union officials who see an R.G.O. under the bed every time attempts are made to improve the trade union representation of immigrant workers are needlessly alienating the immigrants. In the last analysis, the decision whether to form separate organizations or not can only be taken by

the immigrant workers themselves. But such decisions are affected strongly by union policy. If unions are unable to represent discriminated groups, if union officials become tools of the bosses and participate in discriminatory policies, then independent organizations cannot be avoided in the long run. In the U.S.A. and South Africa, where the established unions have in part become organs of racism, the formation of independent black organizations was a necessary and correct step. Things are not (yet) so bad in West Germany: few union officials consciously serve the interests of capital; most oppose the discrimination and super-exploitation of immigrant workers, at least verbally. But if this verbal opposition is not in the near future transformed into effective policies, then there can be little doubt that a section of the immigrant workers will look for new forms of organization.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. For a fuller treatment of these problems see: Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, "The Function of Labor Immigration in Western European Capitalism." *NEW LEFT REVIEW* (73, July 1972).

2. Gienanth, "So schnell geht es nicht," in *DER ARBEITGEBER* (March 20, 1966).

3. For further details see: Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *IMMIGRANT WORKERS AND CLASS STRUCTURE IN WESTERN EUROPE* (London, 1973), pp. 167 ff and 430 ff.

4. The example of the Swiss unions shows what happens when unions all too obviously collaborate with the bosses and betray the interests of the workers. There have been hardly any official strikes in Switzerland since 1937, when the unions made an "industrial peace" agreement with the bosses. The result is that the unions are rapidly losing membership. In particular the unions, due to their nationalistic policies, have been unable to organize most immigrant workers. Today these unions are being increasingly ignored, even by the bosses.

5. See Walther Muller-Jentsch, "Entwicklungen und Widerspruche in der westdeutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung," in *GEWERKSCHAFTEN UND KLASSENKAMPF, KRITISCHES*

JAHRBUCH '73 (Frankfurt, 1973), p. 150 ff.

6. See the D.G.B. publication: "Die deutschen Gewerkschaften und die ausländischen Arbeitnehmer" (Frankfurt, November 21, 1971), pp. 9-10.

7. Ibid., p. 1.

8. Vostand der I.G. Metall, BERATUNGSBERICHT ZU DEN FRAGEN GEWERKSCHAFT UND AUSLANDISCHE ARBEITNEHMER (Frankfurt, February 5, 1970), p. 13.

9. Ernest Piehl, "Gewerkschaften und ausländische Arbeiter," in GEWERKSCHAFTSSPIEGEL, No. 1/1972, pp. 19 ff.

10. I.G. Metall, SCHNELLINFORMATION UBER DAS ERGEBNIS DER VERTRAUENSLEUTEWAHLEN 1973. Vertrauensleute are roughly comparable with shop stewards and are elected every three years for a whole industry at once.

11. These figures indicate the degree of representation of immigrants, but do not mean that shop stewards are elected only by specific national groups. Stewards, like works councillors, are of course elected by the whole work force in a factory or department.

12. Works councils can be elected in every West German enterprise with more than 10 employees. They are elected by all employees (not just union members) and have various social and legal functions as laid down in the Works Constitution Law of 1972.

13. According to the size of the enterprise, a certain number of works council members are released from work (on full pay) to carry out their duties. Obviously, those released have far more opportunity of representing their colleagues than those who have to go on working.

14. I.G. Metall ERGEBNISSE DER BETRIEBSRATSWAHLEN 1972, p. 10 and p. 13.

15. For a fuller discussion see: Castles and Kosack, IMMIGRANT WORKERS . . . , pp. 152 ff.

16. See I.G. Metall, DIE AUSLANDERWELLE UND DIE GEWERKSCHAFTEN (Frankfurt, 1966).

17. See for instance: "Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft," DEUTSCHE UND GASTARBEITER (Bad Godesberg, 1966), DIVO Repräsentativerhebung February 1966, DIVO Pressendienst.

18. F. Dobler, "Der Streik in der hessischen Gummiindustrie im November 1967 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der 'Dunlop' Hanau" (Hanau, 1968).

19. See Castles and Kosack, IMMIGRANT WORKERS . . . , p. 159.

20. See KLASSENKAMPF (Frankfurt, September 27, 1973); KOMMUNISTISCHE VOLKSZEITUNG (2, September 12, 1973); DER SPIEGEL (September 3, 1973).

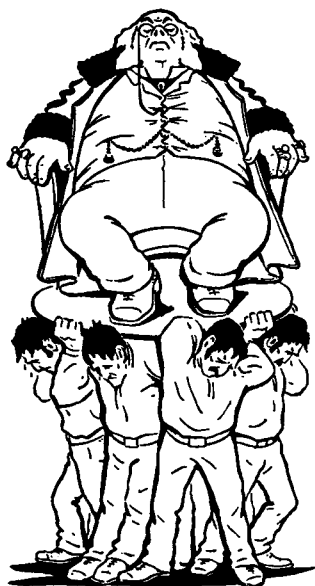
21. Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft, ARBEITER — VERTRAUENSLEUTE — GEWERKSCHAFT, (Bad Godesberg, 1964).

22. Rainer Riehl, "Der Aufstand der Angelernten," KLASSENKAMPF (October 28, 1973).



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# **Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution**

*Peter Rachleff*

There already exists a multitude of books and articles on the Russian Revolution. However, the overwhelming majority of them focus on the activities of the parties or the prominent individuals involved. Precious few analyze in any detail the activities of the working class — its accomplishments and its failures. Such an analysis is of value to radicals today as we enter a period of social crisis which will see new bursts of revolutionary activity throughout the world. Although the Russia of the first two decades of this century hardly approximates the situation in the developed capitalist countries today, it is certain that many similarities will arise, and a study of the Russian events may help us better understand what may come.

The Russian workers were able to evolve forms of struggle and social reconstruction which transcend the importance of the place and time in which they arose. These new organizations were neither empty forms nor were they

created out of whole cloth. Rather, they were developed on the basis of decades of experience of sometimes tumultuous class struggle, and were designed to meet problems that arose from a severe social crisis.

The following essay traces the history of two kinds of organizations — soviets and factory committees — which grew from the experience of the Russian workers. (1) Regardless of how one evaluates the final results of the revolutionary period, (2) it is clear that there was considerable working-class participation in the events of 1917, and it is just this which is focused on in this essay.

Capitalist development in Russia before the First World War had assumed a form quite similar to what exists in many underdeveloped countries today. Almost all industry was under the control of foreign capital and was located in a few urban areas. Although the working class was extremely small in relation to the total population (Trotsky's estimate of 10% is the highest of all accounts), industry — and therefore the working class — was very concentrated. Most factories were large and constructed along then-modern lines. The working class had grown rapidly in the three decades prior to the war, and a sense of class had been developing by leaps and bounds since the turn of the century.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, Russian industrial workers often spent only part of the year in the urban areas, earning their living in the factories. They also spent part of the year in their old villages, working the land, and their primary ties remained with their agricultural activities and village life. However, the rapid development of industry soon provided year-round employment to an ever greater number of workers. They and their families moved to the urban areas, breaking their old rural and village ties. Between 1885 and 1897, the urban population grew by 33.8%, while the rural population grew by 12.7%. (3) These people began to think of themselves primarily as workers, not as peasants who worked part of the year in the factories. Their major problems changed from those of indebtedness to landlords to those of wages, working conditions, and the prices of the necessities of life. The lack of a craft tradition contributed to this growing sense of belonging to a working class, as the divisions among workers were few.

Concentrated together in rapidly growing urban areas, workers discovered that they shared a very specific set of problems, quite unlike those of their previous rural existence. In this way, a new sense of class grew along with Russian industry.

This developing Russian working class made its first pronounced appearance in economic and political struggles in the latter part of the 1890's. In May 1896, a strike of over 35,000 textile workers in St. Petersburg — both the largest strike which had yet taken place in Russia, and the first to transcend the confines of a single factory — was "initiated and organized by the workers themselves" (4) over the question of holiday pay during the festivities of the coronation of Nicholas II. The workers stayed out for the length of the three-day holiday and demanded their pay when they returned. When the management refused, the entire textile industry was shut down, with workers going so far as to demand a reduction in the standard working day from 13 to 10 1/2 hours. Hunger forced the workers to return to their jobs within a week, having won nothing tangible. In January of 1897, another textile strike did result in the lowering of the length of the working day to 11 1/2 hours. In May of 1900, thousands of workers took to the streets of Kharkov in the first mass demonstrations in Russia. Wildman describes the course of events in this city — events which were to be typical of every mass strike through 1917:

In Kharkov, where the local Social Democratic organizations had made few or no preparations, the workers took matters into their own hands. Several thousand of them marched from factory to factory around the outskirts of the city, singing and proudly bearing improvised red banners. The arrest of some of the demonstrators touched off a general strike which closed down most of the factories in Kharkov and involved 11,000 workers. (5)

The relationship between workers and the existing Social Democratic organizations in this period (1895-1904) has considerable bearing on the activities of these organiza-

tions in 1905 and, in particular, the role the Bolsheviks came to play in 1917. Although the Social Democratic organizations were focusing their attentions on the nascent working class, the workers were developing a sense of class that prevented these parties from playing a fundamental role in their activities. Tensions first appeared on the question of control over the "kassy", funds collected by workers for a variety of purposes, social as well as political. Disagreements on this matter appeared in major industrial centers — St. Petersburg, Ekaterinoslav, Kharkov, and Odessa. Workers' suspicions about the intentions and activities of the Social Democratic organizations spread from the subject of control of the "kassy" to matters dealing with strikes and the membership and attitude of the organizations. Nemchinov, a Moscow worker and a member of the Social Democracy, related that: "We sometimes received strike instructions from the center, but they were very vague, and did not always take into account the particular conditions of a factory; so the workers carried out their plans according to their own experiences." (6) Such tensions spawned the creation of autonomous working-class organizations which — though short-lived — articulated the new sense of class consciousness. For example, in 1897, a proclamation appeared in the underground press of St. Petersburg in the name of a group called "The Self-Liberation of the Working Class". It said in part:

The ardent revolutionaries honor themselves by mistake with the title "Ideologue of the Proletariat".... Into their organization least of all are admitted the very ones whose interests they presume to "defend".... The workers must finally take their own cause into their own hands. (7)

This entire ten-year period witnessed a developing sense of class among Russian workers, one that was particularly fostered by their experiences of struggling on their own for matters which made sense to them. Another important feature of these experiences was that any struggle of consequence led to a confrontation with the State. Thus, workers were acting not only on the realization that only they could

win their battles, but also on the realization that the autocratic state of the Tsar stood in their way.

The events of 1905 were made possible by this developing sense of class, which was to develop farther throughout the course of the year. The turmoil began with a strike wave which was intensified by the repression of "Bloody Sunday" in January. Demonstrations reached all the major industrial centers of European Russia before that month ended. The workers were joined by peasants, intellectuals, and professionals in their political demands — such as the desire for a constituent assembly to create a representative government and mitigate the power of the Tsar. Moreover, the workers also voiced specific economic demands of their own — the eight-hour working day, better working conditions, higher wages, and recognition of their right to bargain collectively.

Although a lack of funds forced an end to the strike in early February, sporadic strikes continued throughout the winter and spring months, reaching a new peak in mid-May with some 220,000 workers on strike. A general strike began in Ivanovo-Voznesensk on May 12 involving more than 70,000. The strikers once again raised the economic and political demands of the January strikers. A strike committee of 150 was elected, which began to call itself a "soviet", the only results being slight wage gains for the workers.

Unrest prevailed across Russia throughout the summer. In mid-June, the Tsar imposed martial law in the port city of Odessa after the residents there and the mutinous crew of the battleship Potemkin joined forces in a general strike. Violence there left most of the city in ashes and 2,000 dead. In early August the Tsar attempted to quiet the unrest by offering a Duma (parliament) with the right to speak, but with no power to implement its decisions. (9)

This concession failed to bring stability to the Russian scene. Agrarian activity spread and led to the formation of a Peasants' Union organized around the political demand of a constituent assembly. In the early fall, workers elected committees throughout the urban areas to organize strikes, raising the same economic demands as in January. (10)

In mid-September, typesetters and printers in Moscow launched an industry-wide strike. Over fifty shops were shut down. Other workers (bakers, wood workers, machine-tool workers, textile workers, tobacco workers, and railroad workers) in that city began to strike in sympathy with the typesetters. At the beginning of October, typesetters in St. Petersburg went out on a three-day strike to show their solidarity with their Moscow fellow-workers. At the end of the first week in October, the railway workers throughout European Russia decided to strike, and called for a national general strike, demanding the eight-hour day, civil liberties, amnesty, and a constituent assembly. The strike began to spread throughout the urban areas, succeeding in closing down all productive activities by the 12th, save those necessary for the success of the strike, such as print shops, trains carrying workers' delegates, etc.

Beginning October 10, factories in St. Petersburg began sending delegates to meetings of what was to become the Soviet. At first, not more than thirty or forty delegates attended. On October 13, they sent out a call for a political general strike, i.e., for a constituent assembly and political rights, and asked all factories to send delegates. Workers immediately understood the principles of such representation on the basis of workplaces. There were the experiences of sending factory representatives to the Shidlovski Commission (which was studying factory conditions) and the strike committees of the past nine months upon which to draw. (11)

More and more factories elected delegates. Within three days there were 226 delegates representing 96 factories and workshops. (The principle was usually one delegate for every 100 workers in a factory.) It was also decided to admit representatives of the socialist parties (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Social-Revolutionaries). On October 17, this group decided on the name "Soviet of Workers' Deputies" and elected a provisional executive committee of 22 members (two for each of the seven areas of the city, two for each of the four most important unions) and decided to publish its own newspaper, "News from the Soviet of Workers' Deputies". The Soviet, at first performing no other task than organizing and leading the strike, changed itself

over the course of several days into a general organ of the working class in the capital. According to Anweiler, "this change was neither deliberated nor consciously expressed. After having at its peak engendered the Soviet, the revolutionary movement surged on with greater impetuosity than ever, and the organ it had created accompanied it on its path." (12) The Soviet had been formed out of necessity — that of organizing and maintaining the general strike. No one needed to convince the workers that such organization was crucial. Even the end of the strike in late October did not immediately stop the functioning of this "workers' parliament".

Similar organizations appeared amidst strikes in all the urban areas of European Russia (and in some larger villages as well). Between forty and fifty came into existence in October. Although most functioned only for a short time, their importance should not be underestimated. This was the first experience of direct representation for most of

A revolutionary poster saying "Arise ye dead of the Paris Commune under the red flag of the soviets."



**МЕРТВЕЦЫ ПАРИЖ-  
СКОЙ КОММУНЫ  
ВОСКРЕСЛИ ПОД КРАСНЫМ  
ЗНАМЕНЕМ СОВЕТОВ!**

those involved. No political party dominated the soviets, and it was not without opposition that the parties were given representation. The soviets were created from below by workers, peasants, and soldiers, and reflected their desires.

In late October the Tsar made extraordinarily far-reaching political reforms, granting civil liberties and universal suffrage and giving the Duma power to veto any of his actions. The immediate reaction to the Tsar was one of joy as well as the spread of a new sense of power, especially among the working class. Workers were impressed with their new-found power and were determined to use it to win the economic demands they had voiced and struggled for over the past ten months. The St. Petersburg Soviet outlived the October mass strike, and in November a Soviet was formed in Moscow, representing some 80,000 workers. Turbulence spread to other parts of the population. For example, sailors in Kronstadt harbor mutinied rather than return to the former naval decorum. The St. Petersburg and Moscow soviets exchanged delegates as they sought to find a way to coordinate the growing strike activity. It is apparent that they never managed to achieve this, as mass strikes in Moscow and St. Petersburg in December remained isolated not only from the rest of the country, but also from each other. Armed battles with government troops ended both of these strikes, and as the Tsar turned to full-scale repression to quell all disturbances, individual groups of workers found themselves standing alone in trying to win their economic demands. They were militarily crushed by the end of 1905, and the Russian working class suffered a defeat that would demoralize and disorganize it for almost a decade. (13)

For the next ten years an uneasy stability reigned in Russia. Industrial production stagnated until 1910, and, as a result, there was little growth in the labor force. The number of strikes fell drastically between 1905 and 1910. However, 1910-1911 saw an increase in production again, and in the next four years the industrial labor force increased from 1,800,000 to 2,400,000. Strikes also began to mount, reversing the pattern of decrease which had existed between 1905 and 1910. (14) It was in 1914, however, that



we can see a real rebirth of the Russian working-class movement. In April the massacre of strikers at the Lena goldfields brought about a mass response, with over 100,000 striking in St. Petersburg and some 250,000 throughout the urban areas of the country. (15) May Day saw half a million people demonstrating in the streets.

St. Petersburg, the location of the greatest growth in the industrial labor force, accounted for between one-half and two-thirds of all Russian strikers in the first six months of 1914. (16) Many of these strikers were recent immigrants from rural areas who had experienced vast changes in their social relations and mode of life. Although these workers often began strikes, the other workers, those who had lived through and learned from 1905, soon joined in. In early July of 1914 a meeting of workers from the Putilov metal works, called to support a strike in the Baku oil fields, was brutally suppressed by the police. A general strike was the immediate response made by the St. Petersburg working class, and within four days 110,000 were out on strike. Two days later, the Bolsheviks, who had experienced a rebirth in popularity since their lowest point in late 1913, called for an end to the strike. However the striking workers, exhibiting the independence that had been their tradition, paid no attention to them. Instead, they built barricades and engaged in pitched battles with the Cossacks. The strike quickly spread to some other cities, but was much weaker elsewhere than in St. Petersburg. (17) And it was here that the working class was to suffer a military defeat on a par with that of 1905. Once again, the workers were isolated and defeated by the forces of order. There was no rallying point for the other groups in Russian society, especially the vast peasantry, to join forces with the workers who, due to their small numbers, were thus doomed to failure.

This defeat, coming at the outset of Russia's entry into World War I in the summer of 1914, led to another period of social calm. However, unlike the period of 1905-1914, this one was to last only two years. Russian participation in the war rapidly turned into a total disaster. Casualties mounted as the Russian army proved no match for the Germans. Meanwhile, more and more of production was devoted to the war effort, and management and the government be-

came even stricter in their treatment of workers in their efforts to boost productivity.

By early 1917 the situation faced by the Russian population had become unbearable. How could they go on suffering the severest deprivations for what certainly appeared to be a lost cause? Russia's dependence on Western Europe for raw materials further crippled her. Inflation, usury, and shortages of food supplies reached crisis proportions. Production plummeted. The size of the draft led to a shortage



Poster of 1919 honoring the Red Fleet as the "Vanguard of the Revolution".

of skilled labor in industry and a shortage of agricultural workers. Fuel became even harder to obtain, both for personal use and for industrial production. There was no apparent hope for the masses of the Russian people, especially the industrial working class. Voline writes from his personal experience :

In January 1917 the situation had become untenable. The economic chaos, the poverty of the workers, and the social disorganization of Russia were so acute that the inhabitants of several cities — notably Petrograd — began to lack not only fuel, clothing, meat, butter, and sugar, but even bread. February saw worse conditions; not only was the urban population doomed to famine, but the supplying of the army became totally defective. And, at the same time, a complete military debacle was reached. (18)

Dissension appeared in the army and the navy as the war wore on. Peasants in the army began to rebel against the despotism of the officers, and camaraderie developed among the draftees in the face of the ever-worsening military situation. Discussions between workers and peasants spread within the military. The beginning of 1917 saw the armed forces seething with revolt.

On February 23, a strike began among women textile workers in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). Demonstrations, which were virtually bread riots, spread throughout the city. The troops who had crushed similar demonstrations in 1905 refused to put down the uprising, and many joined in. By the end of the month, after three days of spontaneous demonstrations and a general strike, Petrograd was in the hands of the working class. Victor Serge, a participant in the events, writes :

The revolution sprang up in the street, descended from the factories with thousands of striking workers, to cries of "Bread! Bread!" The authorities saw it coming, powerless; it was not in their power to overcome the crisis. The fraternization of

the troops with the workers' demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd consummated the fall of the aristocracy. The suddenness of the events surprised the revolutionary organizations.... (19)

Trotsky makes clear that the revolutionary organizations acted in February as obstacles to the working class :

Thus, the fact is that the February Revolution was begun from below, overcoming the resistance of its own revolutionary organizations, the initiative being taken of their own accord by the most oppressed and downtrodden part of the proletariat — the women textile workers, among them no doubt many soldiers' wives. (20)

The revolution spread throughout Russia. Peasants seized the land; discipline in the army collapsed; sailors seized their ships in the Kronstadt harbor on the Baltic Coast and took over that city; the soviet form of organization reappeared, first in industrial areas, then among soldiers, sailors, and peasants.

A Provisional Government came to power when the Tsar abdicated. Made up of members of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, this group at first sought the institution of a constitutional monarchy. They were soon to give up on this notion. But, regardless of their proclamations, laws, and debates, they failed to come up with solutions to the problems experienced by the bulk of the population, both workers and peasants. The soviets, which had sprung up across the country, were viewed as the legitimate government by the workers, peasants, and soldiers, who came to them with their problems.

However, a close look at the formation and functioning of the soviets indicates that they were not mass organs that offered workers and peasants the means to exercise power over their daily activities. The most famous of all the soviets — and a good example of their organizational structure and functioning — was the Petrograd Soviet. This organization was formed from the top down by a group of liberal and radical intellectuals who got together on February

27 and constituted themselves the "Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet". (21) They then called for elections to the Soviet itself. On February 28, in response to a proclamation from this "Executive Committee", elections were held in the factories. By 1:00 in the afternoon, over 120 delegates assembled for the plenary meeting. However this meeting — like most future ones — was chaotic; credentials could not be verified and little was accomplished. All essential decisions were made within the "strict intimacy" of the Executive Committee. (22) Some of these decisions, such as the one of March 2 stating that the Soviet would not cooperate with the Provisional Government, were submitted to the Soviet as a whole for ratification. Most decisions, however, were not.

Sukhanov, a journalist and a member of the Executive Committee, describes the functioning of the Soviet:

To this day, I, a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet, am completely ignorant of what the Soviet was doing in the course of the day. It never interested me, either then or later, because it was self-evident that all the practical pivotal work had fallen on the shoulders of the Executive Committee. As for the Soviet at that moment, in the given situation, with its quantitative and qualitative composition, it was clearly incapable of any work even as a Parliament, and performed merely moral functions.

The Executive Committee had to accomplish by itself all the current work as well as bring into being a scheme of government. In the first place, to pass this programme through the Soviet was plainly a formality; secondly, this formality was not difficult and no one cared about it....

"And what's going on in the Soviet?" I remember asking someone who had come in from beyond the curtain. He waved his hand hopelessly: "A mass meeting! Anyone who wants to gets up and says whatever he likes!" (23)

The most interesting feature of this soviet was the sitting and discussing together of delegates of both workers and soldiers in one body. The presence of so many soldiers' delegates gave the Executive Committee more actual power than the Provisional Government because it enjoyed the support of the local troops.

Over 3,000 delegates were members of the Soviet by the end of March, two-thirds of them soldiers. The delegates were elected on the basis of one representative for 1,000 workers, and one for every factory with less than 1,000, and one delegate for every military unit. In mid-April, on the suggestion of the Executive Committee, the Soviet voted in favor of re-organization, as its size had become unwieldy. The new body had some 600 members, half soldiers and half workers. This re-organization was undertaken by a special committee, appointed by the Executive Committee, who pared the Soviet by excluding "occasional delegates" and those from groups which had been reduced in size. However, the power still remained in the hands of the Executive Committee. This had been the case from the start, and it continued to be the case throughout the spring and summer of 1917. (24)

The Executive Committee expanded its role. It created various committees to deal with different problems — publishing newspapers, overseeing the police, helping organize transportation and the distribution of food. As the number of these committees increased, the base of the Soviet lost more and more of its power. Meetings became less frequent, and soon the Soviet itself became nothing but an open forum where workers and soldiers could come together, air their views, meet others like themselves, and keep their constituencies informed about what was going on. It did offer people who had been politically voiceless a chance to speak out. But it did not represent the power of the working class. If anything, it represented its powerlessness.

According to Anweiler, this soviet was quite characteristic of the soviets throughout Russia — both in the urban areas and in the countryside. Often, workers or peasants came into conflict with "their" soviet, over issues such as relationship to the Provisional Government and the need to organize production. Thus, although the form — the soviet

— was the same in 1917 as in 1905, the actual functioning of these organs was not the same. Hence, the appearance of a particular form of organization is no proof of the revolutionary nature of the activities it is carrying out. No more than the Provisional Government can the soviets of 1917 be considered instruments of working-class power.

Moreover, the existing trade unions also confronted the workers as a power separate from them and over them, a power which hindered them rather than helped them in their attempts to solve their pressing problems. Until the turn of the century, trade unions had been illegal. The tradition of guilds, which had been an important precursor of trade unionism in Western Europe, was lacking due to the fact that industry was still rather young in Russia. Only the most politically minded of workers could be expected to take an interest in trade unionism under the repressive conditions, and such workers were usually more apt to join the already existing radical political organizations. In 1905 the existing trade unions played an insignificant role in the upheaval. Many of them were crushed in the repression of the next few years. A select few were allowed to continue to function, but only under police supervision. By the time of the February 1917 uprising, several trade unions existed as national organizations, but few had any influence within the factories. Most of the trade-union leaders were Mensheviks, who rejected the notion that workers should have any say about the internal affairs of a factory, and supported the continuation of the war which the workers saw as the chief cause of their difficulties. During the first few months of 1917, trade-union membership increased from a few scores of thousands to 1.5 million, but most of this increased membership was purely formal: it became a matter of principle for radical workers to belong to trade unions. The real activity was represented by an incredible proliferation of factory committees, organs consisting of and controlled by the workers within each factory. It was through these committees that most of the workers sought to solve their problems.

Whereas the soviets were primarily concerned with political issues, e.g., the structure of the government and the question of the continuation of the war, the factory commit-

tees initially dealt solely with the problems of continuing production within their factories. Many sprang up in the face of lockouts or attempted sabotage by the factory owners. It was through these committees that workers hoped to solve their initial problems — how to get production going again, how to provide for themselves and their families in the midst of economic chaos. Many workers were faced with the choice of taking over production themselves or starving. Other workers who were relatively assured of employment were influenced both by the burst of activity which characterized the revolution and by the worsening economic situation. If they were to remain secure, they had to have a greater say in the management of their factories. They realized that they needed organizations on the shop level to protect their interests and improve their situations.

These committees were seen to provide the organizational structure through which workers could confront their first problem: the taking over of production within their factory. Only through organs such as the factory committees, directly controlled by all the workers assembled within a factory, could the workers develop the organization, solidarity, and shared knowledge necessary to manage production. (As the soviets were concerned primarily with "political" issues, and because their meetings were usually chaotic, they offered little assistance for solving the pressing problems of the workers.) Such committees appeared in every industrial center throughout European Russia. The membership of a committee always consisted solely of workers who still worked in the factory. Most important decisions would be made by a general assembly of all the workers in the factory. The committees were utilized by the workers in the early months of the revolution to present series of demands, and in some instances to begin to act to realize those demands. Paul Avrich describes the functioning of some factory committees in the first months of the uprising:

From the outset, the workers' committees did not limit their demands to higher wages and short-



er hours, though these were at the top of every list; what they wanted in addition to material benefits, was a voice in management. On March 4, for example, the workers of the Skorokhod Shoe Factory in Petrograd did, to be sure, call upon their superiors to grant them an eight-hour day and a wage increase, including double pay for overtime work; but they also demanded official recognition of their factory committee and its right to control the hiring and firing of labor. In the Petrograd Radiotelegraph Factory, a workers' committee was



The Revolution of February 1917 in Nikolaevsk on the mouth of the Amur. The banner reads: "Long Live the People. Land Liberty Peace."

organized expressly to "work out rules and norms for the internal life of the factory," while other factory committees were elected chiefly to control the activities of the directors, engineers, and foremen. Overnight, incipient forms of "workers' control" over production and distribution appeared in the large enterprises of Petrograd, particularly the state-owned metallurgical plants, devoted almost exclusively to the war effort and employing perhaps a quarter of the workers in the capital. (25)

At the same time, the Provisional Government sought to impose its own ideas about the management of production. It sought to undermine the activities of the factory committees, limiting them to overseeing health and safety conditions within the plants. All coordination should be under the supervision of the Provisional Government and its agencies. This provided another impetus for the factory committees to join together. Alone, they could be stripped of their power by the Government. United, they could present a force that could not be destroyed without stopping all production — a rather unlikely step for the Government to take, especially in light of its determination to continue the war effort.

The first meeting of a group of factory committees appears to have taken place in mid-April in Petrograd. The major resolution of this conference was a strong reaffirmation of the workers' right to control the internal life of the factory, matters "such as length of the working day, wages, hiring and firing of workers and employees, leaves of absence, etc." (26) However, there appears to have been no progress made regarding communications between factory committees for the purpose of organizing production on a city-wide level.

The Provisional Government also acted in April. On the 23rd day of that month, statutes were enacted which recognized the rights of the factory committees to represent the workers in bargaining with management and to oversee health conditions inside the factory. The apparent goal of these statutes was to limit the power of the factory committees by circumscribing their scope. (27) But the Pro-

visional Government had no power to enforce these statutes. Workers throughout Russia quickly recognized what it was that the Provisional Government sought to do, and they responded forcefully. According to Pankratova, a Bolshevik historian of the factory-committee movement, every major factory and every large urban area was the scene of spontaneous activity in response to these statutes. Workers rejected the Government's new regulations and took steps to strengthen their own power within their factories. New attempts at communication and coordination between factories appeared. All this was not just in response to the Government's actions, but also because the economic situation continued to deteriorate. (28)

On May 29, there was a conference of factory committees in Kharkov, which resulted in a strong affirmation of the principles of workers' self-management, but failed to resolve the serious problems of the coordination of supply, production, and distribution. The next day, a conference of all the factory committees in Petrograd and its surrounding areas convened in the capital city. Some 400 representatives of committees attended. A statement was adopted in the course of that conference which explained the progression of events up to that time — and indicated how these events were understood by the workers who were involved in them :

From the beginning of the Revolution the administrative staffs of the factories have relinquished their posts. The workmen have practically become the masters. To keep the factories going, the workers' committees have had to take the management into their own hands. In the first days of the Revolution, in February and March, the workmen left the factories and went into the streets. The factories stopped work. About a fortnight later the mass of workmen returned to their work. They found that many factories had been deserted. The managers, engineers, generals, mechanics, foremen had reason to believe that the workmen would wreak their vengeance on them, and they had disappeared. The workmen had to begin work with no

administrative staff to guide them. They had to elect committees which gradually re-established a normal system of work. The committees had to find the necessary raw materials, and altogether to take upon themselves all kinds of unexpected and unaccustomed duties. (29)

The final resolution of the conference described the factory committees as "fighting organizations, elected on the basis of the widest democracy and with a collective leadership," whose objectives were "the creation of new conditions of work...the organization of thorough control by labor over production and distribution." Moreover, this resolution also commented on "political" questions, demanding that there be a "Proletarian majority in all institutions having executive power." (30)

The conference sought to go beyond a mere affirmation of the principles of workers' self-management to try to formulate tentative plans for greater coordination of production. Representatives at the conference turned to the trade unions for assistance. As we saw earlier in this essay, the trade unions, although weak and inconsequential as far as the course of events up to now, did have an existing pan-Russian (i.e., national) structure, representing at least a structural framework for inter-industry coordination. It was hoped at this conference that the factory committees could simply appropriate this structure in coordinating their own activities. Although qualms were expressed about turning to any other organization for assistance in co-ordination (be it political parties, trade unions, or anyone but the factory committees themselves), the severity of the economic crisis impressed upon the representatives the need for speedy action, and the adoption of an already existing structure appeared easier than the creation of a totally new one.

Beginning about this time, the Bolshevik Party within the factory committees began to reach sizeable proportions. At the outset of 1917, this had been a fairly small group of professional revolutionaries who argued, under Lenin's leadership, that a "socialist revolution" was possible in Russia. Until Lenin returned from exile in April, they had

been fairly isolated from the events taking place. Lenin, however, quickly changed the orientation of the Party. In the first months of the revolution, the Bolsheviks wavered on the questions of workers' control of production, the division of land among the peasants, support for the Provisional Government, and the continuation of the war — all questions considered crucial by workers and peasants. Lenin, not without difficulty, brought the Party around to clear positions on all these issues. In so doing, he brought the Party's program into line with the already articulated demands of the working class (e.g., control of production by the factory committees, political power to be exercised by the soviets, the end of participation in the World War) and the peasantry (e.g., the end of the war and the division of land among those who work it). No other political party placed itself openly in favor of the actions and demands of the Russian masses. (31) Thus, in the face of attempts on the part of the Provisional Government to undermine their accomplishments and their attempts at expanding their power, many workers saw the Bolshevik Party as a welcome ally. Therefore, many militant workers joined the Bolshevik Party because it alone appeared to support their activities. According to most accounts, the Bolsheviks were a strong influence as a group with distinct plans at this conference, favoring the uniting of the factory committees to present a counter-power to the Menshevik-dominated soviets.

Within several weeks, it became apparent that the factory committees could not rely on the trade unions for purposes of coordination. At the end of June there was a trade-union conference in Petrograd. Here it became clear that the unions desired to subordinate the existing factory committees to their control. Their conception of "coordination" was that the national organs should make all the fundamental decisions concerning production and distribution, and the factory committees (which would become institutionalized within the unions) would implement these decisions. In other words, "coordination" through the trade unions would mean control by the trade unions.

In early July, mass discontent with the Provisional Government and its policies (the continuation of the war, its

attempts to undermine the factory committees) and with the inactivity of the soviets surfaced in the form of violent mass demonstrations and peasant land seizures. On July 3, a group of soldiers and armed workers burst into the Petrograd Soviet (while a much larger group demonstrated outside) and assailed its members for compromising with the bourgeoisie and hesitating to take over power from the Provisional Government. They demanded that all power be taken by the Soviet, that all land be nationalized, that various bourgeois ministers be removed, and that participation in the war should end. (32) The entire month of July saw mass demonstrations and strikes throughout the urban areas of the country. The Provisional Government sought to blame the Bolsheviks for these disturbances. In fact, the Bolsheviks had tried to halt some of these demonstrations, arguing against them in their journals and demanding that Party members not take part. As a result, they came to be viewed with suspicion by groups of workers, and some workers who belonged to the Party tore up their party cards in disgust.

In early August, a general strike took place in Moscow, presenting mostly "political" demands — an end to the war, and that the soviets should replace the Provisional Government. The Moscow Soviet was opposed to the strike, its leadership as yet unwilling to put itself forth as an alternative to the Provisional Government. Moreover, in the face of severe economic problems, the Soviet was becoming more and more concerned with the continuation of production. This strike was organized by the factory committees in the city, who quickly transformed themselves into strike committees, "informing and educating the workers, collecting money, giving out subsidies," and raising the demand for control of production by the producers themselves, exercised through the factory committees. (33) Polarization between the workers and the existing Soviet sharpened.

On August 7-12, the second conference of factory committees of Petrograd and surrounding areas took place. This conference

made a definite attempt to construct an efficiently

**TO THE DISTRICT  
SOVIETS OF WORKER'S DEPUTIES AND  
SHOP-FACTORY COMMITTEES**

# **ORDER**

**THE KORNILOV BANDS OF KERENSKY ARE THREATENING THE OUTSKIRTS OF OUR CAPITAL. ALL NECESSARY ORDERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO CRUSH MERCILESSLY EVERY COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ATTEMPT AGAINST THE PEOPLE AND ITS CONQUESTS.**

**THE ARMY AND THE RED GUARD OF THE REVOLUTION ARE IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE SUPPORT OF THE WORKERS.**

**THE DISTRICT SOVIETS AND SHOP-FACTORY COMMITTEES ARE ORDERED:**

- 1) To bring forward the largest possible number of workers to dig trenches, erect barricades and set up wire defenses;
- 2) Wherever necessary for this purpose to **SUSPEND WORK** in shops and factories, it must be done **IMMEDIATELY**.
- 3) To collect all available plain and barbed wire, as well as all tools **FOR DIGGING TRENCHES AND ERECTING BARRICADES**;
- 4) **ALL AVAILABLE ARMS TO BE CARRIED ON PERSONS**;
- 5) **Strictest discipline must be preserved and all must be ready to support the Army of the Revolution to the utmost.**

**President of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers & Soldiers Deputies  
People's Commissar LEV TROTSKY.**

**President of the Military-Revolutionary Committee  
Chief Commander PODVOISKY.**

*[Reproduction in English of the Russian text]*

working center of united factory committees by resolving that 1/4 of one percent of the wages of the workers represented by factory committees was to be put aside for the support of the Central Soviet of Factory Committees. This was to give the Central Soviet a means for support, independent of the state and the trade unions. (34)

There was a consensus that the trade unions could not be used for organizing and co-ordinating production. Members of the Bolshevik Party, who made up a majority of the delegates at this conference, clearly saw this Central Soviet as a body with a very different function than mere co-ordination. They argued that it should have considerable power to make decisions concerning production and distribution, decisions which would be binding on the factory committees. (35) Many of the other delegates saw that such a body could undermine the already existing (and expanding) control of the process of production by the producers themselves, taking important decisions out of their hands. There was thus considerable ambivalence about creating this Central Soviet, which would solve the problem of coordination only by weakening the power of the producers themselves in their factory committees. (36) The final resolution, which stated that "all decrees of the factory committees were ultimately dependent on the sanctions of the Central Council, and the Council could abolish any decree of the factory committees," (37) represented a real defeat for those who opposed control of the committees by any body constituted above them. At about the same time — early August — there was an all-city conference of factory committees in Moscow. Here too an attempt was made to devise a structure of coordination, but again in the form of a "centralization" under the control of a regional council.

While these attempts at coordination were being made, the factory committees kept working on their initial problems: the taking over of the productive apparatus and its operation by the producers themselves. The necessity of doing so was becoming ever greater as the prices of food, clothing, shoes, and other necessities rose two to three times faster than wages, and as more and more factory



owners attempted to shut down production. (38) The Provisional Government, alarmed by the activities of the factory committees, launched an all-out legal attack on them. The Government's view that the committees had to be destroyed gives us an indication of how much these committees must have been doing. On August 22, Skobelev, the Minister of Labor, issued a circular letter which stated that:

The right of hiring and firing of all other employees belongs to the owners of these plants.... Coercive measures on the part of workers for the purposes of dismissal or employment of certain persons are regarded as actions to be criminally punished. (39)

Another circular letter of August 28 forbade the holding of factory-committee meetings during working hours. However, as the Government lacked the power to enforce these new laws, they were generally disregarded by the workers. The factory committees offered the workers the best means of maintaining production and controlling it for their own benefit. Thus, the workers were unwilling to yield to the unenforceable decrees of the Provisional Government. Into the fall of 1917 this struggle continued, a struggle which could only end with the destruction of one protagonist or the other. Pankratova takes note of the logic of the struggle:

The passage from passive to active control had been dictated by the logic of preservation. Intervention of workers' committees into hiring and firing was the first stage toward the direct intervention of the workers into the productive process.... Later, the passage toward higher forms of technical and financial control became inevitable.

This placed the proletariat before a new problem: taking power, establishing new production relations. (40)

However, the workers and their factory committees failed to see the importance of their fighting for social power. Their efforts remained within the sphere of the "economy".

"Political power" was a problem for the soviets. The workers hoped that the soviets would soon wrest "political power" away from the Provisional Government and allow the factory committees and their expanding regional organizations to manage industrial production. By October, such councils of factory committees existed in many parts of Russia: Petrograd, Pskov, and Nevel in the Northwest; Moscow and Ivanovo-Vosnesensk in the Central Industrial Region; Saratov, Kazan, and Tsaritsyn in the Volga Provinces; Kharkov, Odessa, and Iuzovka in the Ukraine (Southern Mining District); Rostov, Nakhichevan-on-the-Dan, and Ekaterinodar in the Southwest and Caucasus; and Irkutsk in Siberia. Conferences of local factory committees in Petrograd and Moscow in late September and early October reaffirmed the necessity of proceeding with their role in production — managing the entire production process — and in developing better methods of coordination.

A short time later, the first "All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees" was convened. ("All-Russian" is a bit misleading, because the committees existed only in the industrialized urban areas.) Members of the Bolshevik Party made up 62% of the delegates and were the dominant force. By now, the Party was in firm control of the recently created Central Council of Factory Committees, and used it for its own purposes. According to one account

...the work of the Council proved to be very limited. The Bolsheviks, who entered the Central Council in a considerable number and who, as a matter of fact, controlled it, apparently deliberately obstructed the work of the Central Council as a center of economic struggle on the part of the workers. They used the Council chiefly for political purposes in order to strengthen the campaign to win the unions. (42)

The Bolsheviks at this conference succeeded in passing a resolution creating a national organizational structure for the committees. However, this structure explicitly limited the factory committees to activity within the sphere of production, and suggested a method of struggle which embodied

a rigid division of activities. The factory committees, under the supervision of their national organization, would continue their activities at the point of production; the soviets (now under Bolshevik control) (43) would contest the political power of the Provisional Government; and the Bolshevik Party would bring together the activities of these bodies, as well as the disparate struggles of the working class and the peasantry. The non-Bolshevik delegates — and the workers they represented — did not reject this new plan. Few realized the necessity of directly uniting the “economic” and “political” aspects of the class struggle.

The Bolsheviks, now on the verge of seizing state power, began laying the foundations for the consolidation of their control over the working class. No longer did they encourage increased activity by the factory committees. Most workers and their committees accepted this about-face, believing that the new strategy was only temporary and that once the Bolshevik Party had captured “political power” they would be given free reign in the economic sphere.

Shortly thereafter, the Bolsheviks successfully seized state power, replacing the Provisional Government with their tightly-controlled soviets. The initial effect on the workers was tremendous. They believed that this new revolution gave them the green light to expand their activities, to expropriate the remaining capitalists, and to establish strong structures of coordination. E. H. Carr describes what happened immediately after the seizure of power :

The spontaneous inclination of the workers to organize factory committees and to intervene in the management of the factories was inevitably encouraged by a revolution which led the workers to believe that the productive machinery of the country belonged to them and could be operated by them at their own discretion and to their own advantage. What had begun to happen before the October Revolution now happened more frequently and more openly; and for the moment, nothing would have dammed the tide of revolt. (44)

Out of this burst of activity came the first attempt of the

factory committees to create a national organization of their own, independent of all parties and institutions. Such an organization posed an implicit threat to the new Bolshevik State, although those involved still saw their organization as relating only to the "economy".

The Bolsheviks, seeking to strengthen their position, realized that they had to destroy the factory committees. They now had available to them the means to do so — something which the Provisional Government had lacked. By controlling the soviets, the Bolsheviks controlled the troops. Their domination of the regional and national councils of the factory committees gave them the power to isolate and destroy any factory committee, e.g. by denying it raw materials. Lenin wasted little time in trying to take control of the situation. On November 3, he published his "Draft Decree on Workers' Control" in Pravda, stating that "the decisions of the elected delegates of the workers and employees are legally binding upon the owners of enterprises," but that they could be "annulled by trade unions and congresses." Moreover, "in all enterprises of state importance" all delegates elected to exercise workers' control were to be "answerable to the State for the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property." Enterprises of "State importance" were defined (Point 7) as "all enterprises working for defense purposes, or in any way connected with the production of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population," (45) i.e., anything that the State chose to define as being of "State importance". The carrying out of this decree resulted in tensions and struggles between factory committees and trade unions and the State. However, the power now resting in the hands of the Bolshevik State gave it the ability to go ahead with the dismantling of the power of the factory committees. Isaac Deutscher describes how the trade unions were used to emasculate the committees before the end of the year :

The Bolsheviks now called upon the trade unions to render a special service to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the factory committees. The unions came out against the attempt of the factory

committees to form a national organization of their own. They prevented the convocation of a planned all-Russian Congress of factory committees and demanded total subordination of the part of the committees. The committees, however, were too strong to surrender altogether. Towards the end of 1917 a compromise was reached, under which the factory committees accepted a new status: they were to form the primary organizations upon which the trade unions based themselves; but, by the same token, of course, they were incorporated into the unions. Gradually they gave up the ambition to act, either locally or nationally, in opposition to the trade unions or independently of them. The unions now became the main channels through which the government was assuming control over industry. (46)

There were to be future rebellions against the new state, for example Kronstadt in 1921 and Makhno's peasant movement in the Ukraine. However, they were labelled "counter-revolutionary" by the Government press (47) and viciously suppressed. The total power of the Bolshevik State over all



Poster explaining the establishment of workers' control in the factories and the formation of guard patrols to protect workers' interests from the grasping hands of the church, thieves and the capitalist class.

aspects of social and economic life was now consolidated, and the working class were relegated to living under the same powerless situation they had experienced prior to 1917. As Lenin wrote:

Large-scale machine industry — which is the material productive source and foundation of socialism — calls for absolute and strict unity of will . . . . How can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one . . . . Today the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labor process. (48)

Looking back over the course of events, several features stand out. The revolution was determined — if only passively — by the vast peasant population. The factory committees represented only a small portion of the population and could never have successfully managed all of Russian production — especially as the mode of production they sought to establish differed fundamentally from that sought by the peasants. The inability of the workers to break out of the blinders that led them to see their role in the narrow terms of the “economy” was to be expected. However, it confined their activities and allowed their accomplishments to be destroyed by the wielders of “political” power.

The developmental possibilities of the Russian Revolution of 1917-1921 were determined not by the conceptions of the contending political organizations, but by the aims and capacities of the social groups involved. While the entire population in revolt shared the political goal of the abolition of Tsarist despotism, the different social classes and groups within them had distinctly different economic needs. The tiny bourgeoisie was naturally interested in conditions making possible the expansion of Russian capital. The peasants, the overwhelming majority, forced to work the fields of the large landowners and to pay exorbitant rents for tiny plots of land, desired the expropriation of the large estates and the establishment of a system of small, privately owned farms. Finally, the workers, small

in number and concentrated in the urban areas of European Russia, were confronted by low wages, economic insecurity, and terrible working conditions, problems which called for some form of socialization and workers' control.

These goals were mutually incompatible. Aside from the obvious conflict between workers and bourgeoisie, a capitalistically organized agricultural sector could not coexist with a smaller socialized industrial sector. Because of the low level of agricultural productivity, not only would small-scale market agriculture provide an insufficient base for the development of industry, but violent fluctuations from year to year would preclude economic planning. A society regulated by the desires and needs of the workers was ruled out by their minority position, while a capitalist market economy was made impossible by the weakness of the bourgeoisie and their dependence on the state; the disorganization, poverty, and illiteracy of the peasantry; and, finally, the political strength achieved by the Bolshevik Party after 1917.

It must be stressed that "politics" and "economics" are not separate phenomena, but different aspects of social power relations. The question of the political form to emerge from the revolutionary process was to be decided by the achievement of social and therefore economic power by one of the contending groups on the scene. As it turned out, this was accomplished by neither the bourgeoisie, the peasantry, nor the proletariat, but by the fraction of the intelligentsia which made up the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. The feat of the Bolsheviks was to define a new social structure by the subordination of economics to the political sphere controlled by them, accomplished through the seizure of power over capitalists, workers, and peasants alike.

Even though we cannot downplay the failures of the Russian working class, the events clearly show that, under certain circumstances, working people are capable of creating their own organizations of struggle, organizations which can function as the means by which the producers can directly control the process of production within their workplaces. But "workers' control" over the production process within individual workplaces is insufficient. The next stage, the coordination of these organizations (i.e., the

attempt of the working class to manage all of the production of society and to destroy wage-labor itself), is much more difficult. And, finally, the realization that it is possible to organize the entire society in a completely new way — based on cooperation, production for needs, and free association rather than competition, exchange on the basis of value, and hierarchy — is even more difficult. Yet in the years ahead, it is just these possibilities — opened wider than ever before by the awesome world-wide development of the capitalist mode of production — that we must keep in the very forefront of our activities.

#### FOOTNOTES

\* This essay is a totally revised chapter of my thesis: *MARXISM AND COUNCIL COMMUNISM*. I owe a special debt of thanks to Paul Mattick, Jr., Rick Burns, and Jeremy Brecher for their pointed criticisms of parts of this essay and their assistance in revising it. A version of this essay will appear in a collection of essays edited by those of us who have been involved with Root and Branch and published by Fawcett.

1. In no way does this essay deal with the totality of the Russian events or the many issues which have given birth to heated debates over the past fifty-odd years. For those interested in more fully examining the role of the peasantry, Arshinov's *HISTORY OF THE MAKHNOVIST MOVEMENT* has recently been translated and published by Black and Red in Detroit.

2. For those interested in the question of the "bourgeois" or "proletarian" character of the revolution as a whole, useful material can be found in "Theses on Bolshevism" in *INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE*, No. 3, December 1934, and *REVOLUTION INTERNATIONALE* discussion bulletins #4 (January 1974) and #5 (February 1974), available for 2F each from BP 219, 75827 Paris, France.

3. Trotsky, 1905, pp. 38-44. Richard Pipes argues that we can only consider a working class to exist in Russia beginning in the mid-1880's. (*SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE ST. PETERSBURG LABOR MOVEMENT*, p. 2)

4. Pipes, *ibid.*, p. 99.



5. Wildman, THE MAKING OF A WORKERS' REVOLUTION: RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, 1891-1903, p. 87.

6. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 93.

7. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 112. Wildman also describes the appearance of a similar organization in the fall of 1900 which "aimed at strict autonomy and sought to make use of the intelligentsia only for specific purposes." (p. 114) The appearance of such groups seems to coincide with strike waves, after which they usually faded away.

8. Sidney Harcave, THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1905, pp. 134-154.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-170.

10. Oskar Anweiler, LES SOVIETS EN RUSSIE, 1905-1921, pp. 43-47. "The genesis of these councils during the revolution of 1905 irrefutably shows that these organs had for their original object the defense of the workers' interests on the basis of the factory. It is because the workers sought to unite their fragmented struggles and to give them a direction, not because they saw the conquest of power by political actions, that the first councils appeared." (p. 47)

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55. He notes that of the first forty delegates, only fifteen had been neither delegates to the Shidlovski Commission nor members of the strike committees.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

13. However, despite apparent failure, the revolution of 1905 paved the way for the events of 1917. Soviets had been formed on a factory basis and performed the functions of workers' parliaments, trade unions, and strike committees, and had provided the workers with a sense of self-government. These experiences would be relied upon in the face of the severe problems of early 1917, when workers found themselves in a situation of deep social crisis.

14. Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia", in SLAVIC REVIEW, December 1964, pp. 627-636.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 626.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 636.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 637-640.

18. NINETEEN-SEVENTEEN, p. 39. This classic has been reprinted along with Volume II as THE UNKNOWN REVOLUTION, just published by Black and Red.

19. L'AN UN DE LA REVOLUTION RUSSE, pp. 55-56.
20. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, p. 98.
21. Anweiler, op. cit., p. 128, reports that not one of these men was a factory delegate.
22. Ibid., p. 129.
23. Sukhanov, THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917, pp. 186-187. Sukhanov's recollections are corroborated by Anweiler, op. cit., and "The Political Ideology of the Petrograd Soviet in the Spring of 1917", in Richard Pipes (ed.), REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA; also, Chamberlin, THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, p. 109; Browder and Kerensky (eds.), THE RUSSIAN PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, Vol. I, p. 71; and Trotsky, HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, Vol. I, pp. 216-217.
24. Anweiler, LES SOVIETS EN RUSSIE, pp. 131-137. Cf. also Chamberlin, op. cit., p. 84; Irakli Tseretelli (a member of the executive committee), "Reminiscences of the February Revolution", THE RUSSIAN REVIEW, Vol. 14, Nos. 2, 3, and 4; George Katkov, RUSSIA 1917: THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION, p. 360.
25. Paul Avrich, THE RUSSIAN ANARCHISTS, pp. 140-141.
26. Resolution quoted in Robert Daniels, THE CONSCIENCE OF THE REVOLUTION, p. 82. See also Anna Pankratova, "Les Comites d'Usines en Russie a l'Epoque de la Revolution", originally written in Russian in 1923 and translated into French and printed in AUTOGESTION, #4, December 1967.
27. Pankratova, ibid., p. 12. See also Frederick Kaplan, BOLSHEVIK IDEOLOGY AND THE ETHICS OF SOVIET LABOR, p. 48.
28. Competition between factory committees and workers' stealing everything they could in some situations contributed, in many regions, to the economic chaos.
29. Resolution adopted during May 30 - June Conference of Factory Committees in Petrograd, quoted in S. O. Zagorsky, STATE CONTROL OF RUSSIAN INDUSTRY DURING THE WAR, p. 174.
30. Fragments of a resolution quoted in Maurice Brinton, THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS' CONTROL, p. 5.
31. This is especially true of the Mensheviks who, on

every issue, held a position contrary to that evinced by the working class. This party supported continuing participation in the war and supported the activities of the Provisional Government, including those seeking to dismantle the factory committees. The question of workers' control of production in factories producing war materials — when workers were opposed to the continuation of the war — was particularly crucial in understanding the cross purposes of the workers and the Mensheviks. The desire to end the war was perhaps the key desire behind all the workers' actions — on practical rather than moral grounds, of course.

32. Trotsky, HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, Vol. II, p. 19.

33. Pankratova, op. cit., p. 30.

34. Kaplan, op. cit., p. 66. .

35. According to Kaplan, the Bolsheviks were interested in the creation of this Central Soviet for reasons other than the smoother functioning of production. He writes: "The Bolsheviks seem to have wanted to strengthen the Central Council so that they could manipulate a workers' organization capable of taking a place alongside the trade unions and in opposition to other non-labor organizations." Ibid., p. 67.

36. Kaplan reports that "the initiative and enthusiasm for unifying and centralizing the factory committees does not seem to have grown from below. Skrypnik, a Bolshevik, in speaking of the difficulties facing the organization of a Central Council, pointed out the indifference of the factory committees to the central organ. He stated: "The work of the Central Soviet is seriously hindered by the lack of personnel. However, this in turn is caused by many reasons depending partly upon the workers themselves.... Some members of the factory committees refrained from participation in the Central Soviet because of Bolshevik predominance in it." Ibid., p. 67.

37. Ibid., p. 73.

38. Many workers understood the alternatives and the tasks confronting them. Pankratova cites a resolution adopted at a conference of textile-industry factory committees in late summer. The delegates there saw that their choices were "to submit to the reduction of production or

to risk being fired by intervening actively in production and taking over control and the normalization of work in the firm." They resolved: "It is neither by the bureaucratic path, i.e., by the creation of a predominantly capitalist institution, nor by the protection of capitalist profits and their power over production that we can save ourselves from catastrophe. The path to escape rests solely in the establishment of real workers' control." Op. cit., p. 40.

39. Quoted in Browder and Kerensky, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 722.

40. Pankratova, op. cit., p. 48.

41. Kaplan, op. cit., p. 81.

42. Browder and Kerensky, op. cit., p. 726.

43. Many members of the soviets saw the Bolsheviks as supporting the demands of the workers and the peasants (e.g., "All power to the soviets!"), and many other members, particularly the soldiers, who had supported the more liberal parties, left the cities over the course of the past several months to return to their villages. Thus, the Bolshevik Party achieved a majority within the soviets.

44. E. H. Carr, THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION, Vol. II, p. 69; also Paul Avrich, "The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry", in SLAVIC REVIEW, March 1963.

45. SELECTED WORKS, Vol. VI, pp. 410-411.

46. Isaac Deutscher, SOVIET TRADE UNIONS, p. 17.

47. Cf. Arshinov, op. cit., pp. 173-208, and Voline, THE UNKNOWN REVOLUTION, Black and Red edition, pp. 459-519.

48. SELECTED WORKS, Vol. VII, pp. 332-333, 340-342.



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