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AFTER THE ELECTION

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If you want to find out more about the ideas expressed in this magazine, please write to us at the above address.

EDITORIALS

AFTER THE ELECTION

For only the second time in the history of the 26 County state Fianna Fail have succeeded in achieving over 50% of the popular vote, the other occasion being 1938. With the assistance of the backfiring of the Tully constituency revision, this has given them an unprecedented overall majority of twenty seats in the Dail. The Fine Gael party suffered a major rebuff, losing twelve seats. The extreme right-wing of the party were massacred. Both Dookrells and one Belton lost their seats, as did Paddy Cooney, Minister for Justice, who was responsible for enforcing repressive legislation and the draconian prison regime. The equilibrium of the Fine Gael party was so disturbed that after Cosgrave's resignation the extreme right wing could not mount any serious challenge to Garret Fitzgerald for the leadership of the party.

Two Labour Party coalition ministers were defeated and another, Jim Tully, leader of the party's right-wing, was humiliated. Conor Cruise O'Brien, associated with hard-line support for repressive legislation, censorship and partition, and Justin Keating, held responsible for rising prices, were the ministers in question. The party suffered a slight decline in its overall share of the vote as compared with the 1973 election which they fought on a coalition basis. However, in 1969 the party achieved 17% of the vote as compared with less than 13% on this occasion. This decrease, wholly due to coalitionism, took place against a background of decline in the farming population, growing massive unemployment and falling living standards. These figures, therefore, conceal the true extent of the setback inflicted on the labour movement by the coalition policy of its leaders. The figures for Dublin city are a little more instructive: 28% in 1969, 22% in 1973 and 18% in 1977. The electoral debacle led to the immediate resignation of Corish and the eclipse of Tully, O'Leary and Halligan; Cluskey, the least discredited coalition "Minister" emerging as leader.

Noel Browne and Matt Merrigan, the leaders of the Labour Party left-wing, stood as independent labour candidates expressing opposition to the existing coalition arrangement. Browne was elected with a high poll. Another independent labour candidate, Mick Lipper, was elected in Limerick at the expense of Steve Coughlan, the official candidate, who was a supporter of the right-wing Tully faction. The Official Sinn Fein achieved respectable polls in several constituencies, taking advantage of the coalitionist position of the Labour Party. Significantly, their highest polls were in areas where their candidates had formerly been left-wing members of the Labour Party.

WHY FIANNA FAIL WON

The election took place in radically different circumstances from those obtaining in the fifties and early sixties. Fifty per cent of the population are under 26 years of age and about half a million young people were voting for the first time. Farmers now constitute only 20% of the population. The unemployed had not emigrated and living standards had been falling in recent years due to wage restraint and

inflation. The capitalist Fianna Fail party fought the election, not on a programme of attacks on the working class, but on a programme of concessions to the working class and middle class. Though they called for wage restraint, they made it clear that many of the concessions would be given in any event. They revamped their populist and nationalist image (with great assistance from Cruise O'Brien) including in their programme a call for "an ordered withdrawal" from Irish affairs by Britain. With the Labour Party fighting the election as part of the government on a coalition programme which merely promised a continuation of the policies of the last four years, it is not surprising that Fianna Fail got increased support among the working class, the youth and the middle class. In addition there was a swing to Fianna Fail among the farming population associated with the coalition's increased taxation of large farmers. This concession to the Labour Party in coalition damaged Fine Gael electorally.

In 1969 the Labour Party, pursuing a no-coalition policy, were on the brink of making major inroads into Fianna Fail support among the working class, as shown by their 28% share of the vote in Dublin. But faced with the major victories of the working class culminating in the maintenance men's strike and the mass mobilisation in the north on civil rights and the national question, which threatened the partitionist capitalist state institutions, the Labour Party and the trade union apparatus moved quickly to decapitate the mass mobilisation. This was expressed in the introduction of the "all-out" picket and the national wage agreements on the one hand and by coalition with Fine Gael in the south and the entry of the Catholic Labour leaders into the S.D.L.F. on the other. They have succeeded, at least temporarily, in reviving Fianna Fail and halting the development of the Labour Party.

CRISIS OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The new government takes office as a new offensive of the Irish and British working class begins on the wages front. Wage restraint in Britain has been dealt a major blow by the decision of the British T.G.W.U. and the miners against any further wage restraint. This will reinforce the growing movement in the 26 Counties against the national wage agreements and wage restraint. The victory of the building workers and the continuing lengthy strike of craftsmen in the steel industry in Cork are indications of the battles to come. The continued crisis of British rule in the north, and therefore of all the state institutions in this island, must give rise to new mass explosions. This crisis of bourgeois rule is a component part of the general crisis of capitalist and bureaucratic stalinist rule in Europe. The first blows in the European socialist revolution were struck in Portugal. Now mass explosions threaten in Spain, Italy and France, while the Kremlin and its satellite bureaucracies fear new outbreaks of the political revolution, particularly in Poland and Czechoslovakia. These developments will have important repercussions in Ireland, both in their effect on the militancy of the working class and due to the dislocation of EEC institutions which will ensue. The return to government has merely postponed the sharpening of factional divisions within Fianna Fail. Fitzgerald, the new leader of Fine Gael, has already pointed out the dangers of a capitalist party seeking election on the basis of raising the expectations of the masses. The wages offensive and the necessity to modify the forms of state rule in Ireland in order to maintain imperialist hegemony will again sharpen those divisions, with the national question as a key matter of contention. Already, during the election campaign, two Fianna Fail TDs expressed their opposition

to Lynch's policy on the national question.

Questions of church-state relations are an explosive question within both capitalist parties. Fitzgerald's accession to the leadership of Fine Gael leaves the large farmers, extreme right wing sections of the capitalist and upper middle classes without any adequate political expression. It is unlikely that the party can survive the storms ahead as a single unit.

The election has weakened the Labour Party apparatus in relation to the working class in general. The eclipse of the Tully wing and the dominance of a new ruling group in the apparatus around Cluskey is an expression of this more fundamental change. Equally, the trade union apparatuses have been weakened in relation to the rank and file. Fintan Kennedy, leader of the ITGWU, and Paddy Cardiff, new leader of the WUI, were Cruise O'Brien's nominators and leading backers in the election campaign. More importantly, both within their respective unions were militant supporters of coalition. The apparatuses led by them had squashed all attempts to maintain living standards, to organise opposition to unemployment and repressive legislation within the trade union movement in the interest of maintaining the coalition. Now they can no longer depend on a key stratum of Labour supporters to help them block the working class offensive. Changes within the bureaucracies leading to the eclipse of those most prominently identified with coalitionism and wage restraint cannot be long delayed. Nevertheless, the union bureaucracies, perhaps with new leaders or at least with a new face, will spare no effort to reach an accommodation with the new government in order to block the working class offensive.

THE FUTURE OF COALITIONISM

The Labour leadership are operating in completely different circumstances to those existing between 1964 and 1969. The crisis of imperialist rule in Ireland, expressed not least in the demise of Stormont, has advanced to a higher stage. Left wing demagogy on wages, unemployment, opposition to repressive legislation, not to speak of raising the perspective of a Labour government and a 32 County Labour Party, would fuel mass mobilisations which would further dislocate the institutions of imperialist rule and the labour and trade union apparatuses. The Labour leaders will be very sparing in their left wing talk if at all possible, but the offensive of the masses will compel them to go much further than they wish in order to maintain control, thus fuelling the very crisis which they wish to prevent. It is highly unlikely that the Labour and trade union apparatuses will be able to resurrect a coalition of right wing coloration such as has existed for the last four years. The sharpened crisis of the bourgeoisie leading to splits in the big capitalist parties will probably lead to a period of parliamentary instability, despite Fianna Fail's big majority. It will be necessary for the labour apparatuses, with the key intervention of the stalinists using their influence in the Labour Party left-wing, in the trade unions and in the republican movement, to seek a coalition of a left-wing coloration with fragments of capitalist parties, in order to protect the capitalist state, which in Ireland would also mean maintenance of partition. Such an arrangement is called a popular front.

It is necessary for socialists to prepare a fight in the labour and trade union movement against these policies, counterposing a united workers' front to coalitionism and popular frontism. This means a fight for a 32 County Labour Party, for the perspective of a full Labour government in the south and elections to an all-Ireland constituent

assembly after total British withdrawal.

THE BROWNE-MERRIGAN CAMPAIGN

The refusal of the Liaison of the Left Committee to organise a broad left opposition to coalition within the Labour Party over the past years caused the Labour Party left to be totally unprepared to meet the ruthlessness of the apparatus in blocking all candidates who might pose the slightest threat to the coalition. The Liaison leadership split into fragments, each going its own way. Browne and Merrigan got together a hasty ill-prepared and politically confused independent labour campaign. Despite its political limitations, it did provide a small framework for a fight against coalitionism from the left. It did succeed in regrouping a significant number of ex-Labour Party members and new young militants. Now it is necessary, after serious discussion and political clarification of the way forward, for the independents to demand re-admission to the Labour Party without victimisation or selectivity. Within the Labour Party framework it will be possible to educate new layers of militants drawn to the Labour Party in opposition, and to have the discussion and organisation necessary to wage a battle against the Labour apparatus and its policies of class-collaboration.

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LWR CONFERENCE

In this issue of our journal we publish the main document adopted at our conference held at the end of May this year. The other document submitted was a preparatory document on the balance sheet of the class struggle in Ireland since 1968. The general line of this document was accepted, and it will be published in a much expanded form later in the year. Since our conference the election has occurred, resulting in the crushing defeat of the Coalition. The aftermath of this is discussed in the editorial above, which complements the conference documents.

Our last conference documents were adopted in January 1976. In these documents we first advance the new tactical turn of the LWR, where we turned from the sectarian attempt to build a revolutionary party outside of the mass organisations of the working class to an orientation to those mass organisations. This is expressed in our publication of a bi-monthly theoretical journal rather than a monthly paper. A newspaper, even monthly, which is sold to the working class at large in such places as public houses, implies that the organisation which publishes it sees itself as an alternative to the existing leadership of the working class. This implies the counterposition of such a group to the traditional organisations of the working class. Small revolutionary groups can be no more than the nuclei of a future revolutionary movement, which will only be created through splits in the traditional organisations, and their eventual demise. In our activities over the past eighteen months we have fought for transitional demands in the workers' movement and advanced a Marxist analysis of various aspects of Irish and international affairs, with particular emphasis on the crisis of Stalinism and the problems of the Irish economy.

This year's conference documents are based on over a year's experience of this work, in which we have deepened our understanding of this orientation. At our recent conference we reaffirmed this orientation, which has already significantly strengthened our organisation; we will continue to discuss various aspects of our work, and publish our conclusions as appropriate.

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CONFERENCE DOCUMENTS

PERSPECTIVES

1. In our 1975/1976 Conference Documents we stated:

"The contraction of the world market has brought about a renewal of trade war, since 1971, when Nixon stated that the U.S. would make European capital pay for its own problems....

"The old antagonism between Europe and America has reasserted itself with full force. Yet Europe has inner contradictions, reflecting the problems of each national capitalism....

"In the face of the contraction of the world market the major industrial exporting countries find it difficult to maintain a favourable balance of trade and payments...

Although the first months of 1976 saw a limited growth both in trade and industrial production in certain countries (the United States, Germany, even Britain and Ireland) this never reached previous "boom" levels and levelled off mid-1976, and was based on increased productivity, not on increased employment. Far from the recession ending, it resumed with renewed ferocity, posing even greater problems for imperialism. Although unemployment and inflation increase, the working class refuses to bear the brunt of these attacks, thus exacerbating the problems of the bourgeoisie. The strength of the working class in the face of the economic crisis forces divisions in the bourgeoisie on how to confront the working class, leading to acute political crises on a world scale. The inability of the individual bourgeoisies to increase their rate of profit drives them into ever fiercer competition with one another, threatening trade war, not only between Europe and America, but more recently within Europe itself. Substantial growth in output for imperialism as a whole could only be achieved by economic penetration of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, and ultimately the reversal of the property relations there. But this can only be achieved by crushing, not only the working class of these countries, but of the whole world.

Meanwhile the crisis continues. Each bourgeoisie can only improve its situation in the limited world market by, on the one hand, attacking the share of production won by the working class, and, on the other, openly attacking the economies of other bourgeoisies through trade war. But the imperialist system as a whole also depends on the stability of its components. Thus the weak capitalist economies - Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland - in Europe, the backward countries - are

deeply in debt to those, as yet, relatively strong - West Germany, Japan, the United States, and the oil-producing countries. But this in turn increases the pressures both within and between the different capitalist countries. All of these countries see rising inflation and unemployment and continued industrial decline.

In Eastern Europe the economic crisis also worsens. The debt which these countries owe of 40 billion dollars intensifies their dependence on imperialism, opening the door to the "free circulation of goods and ideas" of the Helsinki Agreement. In China the political crisis which has continued since the death of Lin Biao has intensified with the struggle for the leadership since the death of Mao. This has its roots in the rapid growth of the Chinese population, and the inability of Chinese industry to meet the needs of Chinese agriculture and of the expanding population. A development of industry could be brought about through the exploitation of China's vast reserves of oil and minerals, but this is only possible with foreign investment, which would intensify the political crisis. The Vietnamese government has already sought a way out of similar problems by seeking foreign investment.

2. The counter-revolutionary Holy Alliance

The political dislocation of the bourgeois order established at Yalta and Potsdam by the representatives of imperialism and the Kremlin, which began in 1968 with the French General Strike and the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, continues. Since the signing of the Helsinki Agreement we have seen many more blows directed at the world proletariat in the interests of imperialism. While in 1974/1975 the Portuguese revolution and the disruption of the Paris Agreements in Vietnam gave a new impulse to the struggle of the working class, the refined counter-revolutionary offensive represented by the Helsinki Agreement has imposed a number of setbacks on the international proletariat. In India Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party, supported to the hilt by the Kremlin, the Indian Communist Party and by American and British imperialism, succeeded in unleashing a wave of repression throughout the country, repression aimed primarily at the working class who had recently challenged the government in a widespread strike wave. The crisis of the Indian bourgeoisie has been heightened by the crushing defeat of the Congress Party, which has countered the Indian masses to the policy of imperialism and the Kremlin bureaucracy.

In Lebanon the Syrian Army, armed to the teeth by the Kremlin, crushed the Palestinians with the collusion of the PLO leadership. They were assisted in this work by the Israeli Army intervening on the side of the Lebanese Falangists.

In Latin America the great proletariat of Argentina suffers under an army dictatorship which was welcomed by the Communist Party. In Africa the work of containing the masses has been done on behalf of the counter-revolutionary Holy Alliance by the troops of Castro. With very limited support among the masses, and threats both from rival organisations and from the working class in the form of strikes, the MPLA could not have maintained order alone. Here imperialism ceded its policeman's role to the Kremlin because of the explosive content of an American/South African takeover of the area, and because of the guarantees given to imperialism by the MPLA.

The imminence of the revolution makes necessary an offensive by imperialism against the world proletariat, and also makes imperialism exert

pressure on the Kremlin bureaucracy to play an ever-increasing counter-revolutionary role. Such a role is demanded by the interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy itself, which mortally fears the proletarian revolution. The Kremlin bureaucracy seeks to play this role by maintenance of the institutions of bourgeois rule in the face of the threat to those institutions by the working class. This has led it to support the Christian Democrats in Italy, the MFA in Portugal, the monarchy in Spain and the crisis-ridden Fifth Republic in France. These policies are carried out within the general strategic framework of the Popular Front, which in this period remains, with fascism, the last political resort of the bourgeoisie. The working class is still undefeated and therefore would crush any fascist offensive. The task of the Popular Front is to disarm and demoralise the working class in the face of fascism, to prepare the way for another Chile. Ultimately the counter-revolution must end in the reversal of the October revolution and the destruction of the gains of the working class throughout Eastern Europe and China.

3. The Imminence of the Revolution

But the setbacks suffered by the working class have not modified the nature of the period in which we are living as the period of the imminence of the revolution. Although the working class has suffered blows in the countries mentioned above, nowhere has the bourgeoisie established stable rule. In the Middle East, Israel itself hovers on the edge of a vast political crisis, heralded by a spate of scandals and suicides, and by growing resistance of the working class to the government. In Egypt, centre of the Arab Alliance, the government has been shaken by an explosion of strikes and riots which forced it to make concessions on the price rises which provoked them. At the other end of Africa, in South Africa, the super-exploited black proletariat have shown their resistance to the apartheid government of Vorster in continued strikes, protests and riots. This movement of the masses cannot be contained by any reform of apartheid. This has provoked a crisis in the whole of Southern Africa.

In Latin America the bourgeoisie has nowhere succeeded in containing the working class. The Chilean junta presides over economic chaos. Inflation runs at almost 400% in Argentina, and the army clique is divided between "ultras" and parliamentarians, while the working class expresses its combativity in, as yet, isolated strikes. In Mexico a recent massive strike wave has shaken the state, and raises questions last raised in the student upsurge of 1973. In Peru the government is racked by indecision: a state of emergency exists while massive strikes go on and political activity is unabated. Already a pre-revolutionary situation exists there. Brazil, the centre of imperialist reaction on the continent for years, sees the disintegration of the military dictatorship which now favours a "liberalisation" whose outcome it will not be able to control. Throughout the continent American imperialism is trying to compensate for its defeat in South-East Asia by intensified exploitation of Latin America. But this pressure threatens political stability which is the first concern of imperialism. Imperialism must bolster up the regimes it attempts to oppress. As the contradictions intensify, the working class will surge forward, finding more and more cracks in the institutions of bourgeois rule which will open the way for the development of pre-revolutionary situations throughout the continent.

In the United States the election of Carter solves nothing for the

bourgeoisie. The political crisis which culminated in the fall of Nixon arose out of the inability of the institutions of American democracy to continue to fully serve the needs of the American bourgeoisie on a world scale. The power of Congress contradicted with their need for a strong government centred in a figure unanswerable to any popular control. In his efforts to become such a figure Nixon succeeded only in unmasking those contradictions, and he had to go. The intervention of the SWP in its campaign against the CIA contributed significantly to the crisis of the institutions of American imperialism. The election of Carter does not do away with the need for such a strong government for the American bourgeoisie.

Faced with the deepening crisis of imperialism, American imperialism has been forced to go on the offensive. This it could not do while weakened by the defeat in South East Asia, and the internal crisis brought about by Watergate. With the election of Carter the American bourgeoisie has temporarily postponed its crisis, with the Presidency and the Congress both in the hands of the Democrats, and seeks to assert its weight on the bureaucracy to force it to carry out every more counter-revolutionary policies, to the extent of undermining the property relations within Eastern Europe itself. This is the content of Carter's championship of dissidents.

In the United States itself a significant new development has been the emergence of a powerful opposition to the class-collaborationist leadership of the AFL/CIO. In the candidacy of Sadlowsky for the presidency of the Steelworkers' Union, largest affiliate of the AFL/CIO, the American working class is expressing its first challenge to the Democrat-led, Mafia-ensnared labour bureaucracy, a challenge which implies the question of the political independence of the American working class.

The death of Mao opened the door to the political crisis in China which has been maturing since the Cultural Revolution. Faced with enormous economic problems in the 60s, the Chinese bureaucracy was under pressure from the Kremlin (which had twice attempted to sabotage the Chinese revolution) and from American imperialism, to open the doors to capitalist penetration. A section of the bureaucracy under Mao resisted this, and carried out a very limited and deformed mobilisation of the masses in order, under the control and tutelage of the Army, to crush the capitulationist wing in the Cultural Revolution. This mass mobilisation was itself cut short by the Maoist wing when it threatened to go beyond the framework of bureaucratic rule. None of the underlying problems were resolved by the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese bureaucracy has played a full part as an adjunct of the counter-revolutionary Holy Alliance (support for Pinochet in Chile, for Yahya Khan in Pakistan, for the EEC, for the Paris Agreements on Vietnam, for Nixon in the US). Since 1974 the pressure of imperialism on China has intensified, this time welcomed by the Maoist bureaucracy. The differences within the bureaucracy reurge with renewed vigour, bursting openly onto the scene with the death of Mao. Through the cracks in the bureaucracy the Chinese masses can and will surge forward, posing the political revolution not only in China but across the frontier in the USSR.

4. The European Revolution

The Stalinist bureaucracy was directly challenged on its own ground in the summer of 1976 when the Polish workers struck and rioted against price increases. As in 1970/1971, the bureaucracy was forced to retreat and the Kremlin bureaucracy lent the Polish a billion roubles to pay for the concessions to the working class. Both in 1970/71 and in 1976 the Polish working class set up soviet-

type organs, thus directly posing the question of the political revolution. The struggle continues between the masses and the bureaucracy with the battle for the defence of those jailed for their participation in the events of June/July.

In other Eastern European countries the political revolution is also raised. In Czechoslovakia the Charter 77 movement poses the most serious threat to the bureaucracy since the opposition to the Russian invasion in 1969-71. Faced with the support for the Charter, not only of intellectuals and known oppositionists but also of large sections of the working class, the bureaucracy hesitates between brutal suppression and attempted conciliation, but conciliation without conceding to the demands of the Charter and which therefore can only feed it. In other Eastern European countries similar demands are being made for democratic rights, and solidarity with Charter 77 has been expressed in Hungary, Yugoslavia and, most recently, Rumania, though the movement is much less developed than in Czechoslovakia.

In the Soviet Union itself, the working class continues its sullen passive resistance to the bureaucracy, and divisions are to be seen in the bureaucracy itself. The bureaucracy came into being on the basis of the gains of the October revolution. The reversal of those gains jeopardises the existence of the bureaucracy itself. But these gains can only be defended by a mobilisation of the Soviet masses on the basis of soviet democracy, which spells death for the Soviet bureaucracy. To defend itself against the challenge from the working class the bureaucracy must increasingly lean on imperialism. The counter-revolutionary role which the bureaucracy must play in the interests of imperialism allows greater and greater pressure from imperialism on the bureaucracy itself, in the form of loans and economic penetration of the Eastern European countries, thus paving the way for restoration. These pressures provoke an ever-increasing crisis in the bureaucracy, and will generate splits and divisions through which the working class will surge. The wing which, under pressure from imperialism, wishes to travel to the end of the restorationist road, is opposed by that which has a closer identification with the conquests of October, on which its privileges rest. These differences are expressed throughout the Stalinist apparatus, creating cracks which the working class can and will use.

In Germany, where the counter-revolutionary policy of the Kremlin is concentrated in its division of Germany and the German proletariat, a challenge to that policy has provoked a deep crisis. When Wolf Biermann, an advocate of German unity and a communist militant, expressed his view at a concert in West Germany (which he had been permitted to attend) his East German citizenship was revoked. Throughout Germany, but particularly in the East, this sparked off a storm of protest and intense discussion. Again, the action of the bureaucracy intensifies its own crisis.

In Germany the question of national oppression by both imperialism and the bureaucracy is sharply raised. The unity of Germany, against the bureaucracy and imperialism, is a precondition for the unity of the German working class and for a socialist Germany. Both in the other Eastern European countries and within the Soviet Union itself national oppression continues to be a powerful powder keg of resentment against the Kremlin bureaucracy.

Throughout Eastern Europe the contradictions within the bureaucracy and its crisis, and the resistance of the working class, students and intellectuals, raises the questions of full trade union rights

and political freedoms, of the end to bureaucratic privilege and to national oppression - in short, the programme of the political revolution enshrined in the Transitional Programme.

The proletarian revolution is equally concentrated in Western Europe. The Portuguese revolution of 1974 gave a great impetus to that process. This revolution experienced a setback in November 1975, when the prolonged opposition of the CP and the SP to the formation of a government of workers' parties paved the way for the counter-attack of the bourgeoisie to the deliberate provocation of the CP and the Carvalho wing of the MFA, supported by leftists. This setback, from which the Portuguese working class has not yet recovered, made possible the launching of an offensive against the working class by the minority Socialist Party government, which has resulted in demoralisation among the working class. But this setback is not a defeat, and the working class are fighting the Socialist Party offensive, as shown by the vigorous workers' opposition within the Socialist Party. In this situation the Communist Party has experienced a resurgence, and is preparing to play again the role of the main prop of bourgeois order in Portugal. But the struggle of the Portuguese working class, already buoyed up by the collapse of Francoism, and by the offensive of the working class of Spain, France and Italy, will bring it into conflict with the reformist and Stalinist parties, already weakened by the events of the past three years.

In these countries the political crisis intensifies. In France the institutions of the Bonapartist Fifth Republic are deeply shaken. In local and Presidential elections it has been shown that the government, torn by dissension and shaken by scandal, has no mandate to govern. Yet the Communist and Socialist parties, in their class collaborationist policy of Popular Unity, continue to keep it in power and to avoid a dissolution of the National Assembly, which would raise the question of a Socialist Party/Communist Party government.

In Italy the policy of Stalinism has been openly shown by the Communist Party support for the bankrupt minority Christian Democrat government. The opposition of the masses to this policy was heralded in the wave of student strikes in January, aimed both against government education policy and the CI support for the government. In Spain the destruction of Francoism is being actively prevented by the CI-dominated Democratic Convention's attempts to "reform" the Francoist state of Juan Carlos.

In all these countries the formulation of the Transitional Programme remains true - "The Popular Front and fascism are the two last resorts of imperialism". The working class throughout Europe are too strong to allow a fascist victory. So the only course open to imperialism is the Popular Front, midwifed by the Soviet bureaucracy. On this class collaborationist policy all factions of the Stalinist apparatus, "Euro-Communist" and otherwise, are agreed. At this stage this policy forms the greatest threat to the working class. The Popular Front policy takes many forms, but its content is the defence of the institutions of bourgeois order - the army officer corps in Portugal, the Christian Democrat government in Italy, the Fifth Republic in France.

In the other countries of Europe the crisis is less developed. But it continues to mature. In England the Social Contract is under severe strain and the Devolution question raises the whole issue of the institutions of the state. Belgium has just been wracked by the most serious strike since 1963. The Dutch state has been shaken by scandal within the monarchy itself. In Ireland, the open support of the trade union leadership for the government is only postponing the

offensive of the working class, while the continued paralysis of imperialist rule in the North prepares a profound explosion, which will link the national struggle of the Irish people with the struggle of the working class in both Ireland and Britain for socialism.

The social and political revolutions meet in Germany. There the great German proletariat, cradle of the world working class movement, has been split by imperialism and the Kremlin bureaucracy, a split enforced by the presence of NATO and Kremlin troops on German soil. In East Germany the main party of the German working class was crushed by the reactionary Stalinist apparatus imposed on them by Soviet tanks. But the action of the German working class threatens this arrangement. In the West the Schmidt government is continually threatened by strike action from the working class in opposition to the ravages of inflation. In the East the Biermann affair has demonstrated the weakness of the bureaucracy and has raised the question of German unity for both governments. The right of free travel for all Germans in their own country, the rights of trade union independence and free political association and expression, including the organisation of the Social Democratic Party in the East, as well as the demands of the working class to defend their living standards, raise the question of the destruction of the imperialist/Kremlin bureaucracy carve-up of Europe in the interests of bourgeois order after the war. Thus in any challenge to the Berlin wall the social and political revolution in the whole of Europe, the demand for a United Socialist States of Europe is raised.

National and democratic questions challenge the political institutions of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy throughout Europe. The break-up of Francoism is accompanied by the resurgence of nationalist movements in the Basque and Catalan provinces. The Irish national question threatens the whole British constitution. The countries of Eastern Europe are economically plundered and politically oppressed by the Soviet Union, and the question of political independence is raised whenever the bureaucracy is challenged. Opposition to national oppression is a central component of the political revolution itself in the Soviet Union, in the Ukraine, among the Crimean Tartars, for example. And again in Germany the question of national unity and independence lies at the heart of the revolutionary process, which directly challenges both imperialism and the bureaucracy.

Europe was the terrain on which world order was established after the war by imperialism and Stalinism. The crushing of the European proletariat which rose against Hitler and fascism and against its own bourgeois masters was carried out by the bureaucracy in the interests of imperialism, and supported by the bureaucracy when done by imperialism. This facilitated the establishment of the frontiers which divide Europe and its working class, frontiers made permanent in the Helsinki Agreement, on the continent where the labour movement was born and where the first workers' state was created. Any challenge to the political institutions, to the frontiers thus created, threaten the whole of world order. Everywhere in Europe these institutions are being challenged and threatened by the upsurge of the working class. The Socialist United States of Europe is the only answer to national oppression, to the stranglehold of the bureaucracy, to the domination of capital. The Socialist United States of Europe incorporates democratic demands, the demands of the working class against capitalism, and the demands of the political revolution. This demand concentrates the challenge to the counter-revolutionary Holy Alliance where the process of proletarian revolution is most mature - in Europe.

5. THE CRISIS OF WORKING CLASS ORGANISATIONS

The alliance with imperialism, consecrated most recently in the Helsinki Agreement, places the Communist Parties in the forefront of the defence of bourgeois order. In order to play this role each Communist Party must develop its policy in close liaison with its own bourgeoisie and its policy, under pressure of imperialism. These policies frequently demand secondary differences with the policy of the dominant element in the Russian CP. But they occur within the overall framework of opposition to the proletarian revolution. This is the link between all parties of the Stalinist apparatus. Yet these differences aggravate contradictions within that bureaucracy and intensify its crisis. Thus the pressure of imperialism hastens the disintegration of the bureaucracy both within the Soviet Union, through the growth of restorationist tendencies, and in the development of "Eurocommunist" tendencies in the Communist Parties.

The CPs in the workers' movement act as agents of the bureaucracy. Outside of this role there is no basis for their existence. A departure from this position could only pave the way for the disintegration of the CPs. The link between all the Communist Parties and the Kremlin exists in their support for Popular Frontism, for counter-revolution.

But the pressure of imperialism and the internal contradictions within the bureaucracy lead to the disintegration of the Stalinist apparatus. Within the Soviet Union will emerge tendencies opposed to imperialism and therefore to the policies of the bureaucracy. To defend the gains of October and to oppose imperialism these tendencies must break with the bureaucracy. This process will be profoundly affected by the course of the class struggle itself and by the intervention of the Trotskyist organisations.

The openly counter-revolutionary role of the CPs, the policy of the Kremlin, the open dissension between the CPs and the Kremlin, all tend to reinforce social-democracy against the Kremlin. The links of social democracy with the political institutions of capitalism, and with the defence of its democratic elements, draws the working class to it as a focus for their struggle for power. Social Democracy has long and direct links with imperialism which have moulded its apparatus as a bourgeois apparatus in the workers' movement. This apparatus cannot be broken from imperialism. The contradictions between this apparatus and the working class are acute, and in many instances the signs exist of the emergence of tendencies in social democracy as well as in Stalinism which will seek the road to a break with the bourgeoisie and therefore to the revolution. Again the intervention of Trotskyists is crucial.

In both the case of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of the social-democratic apparatus, the main element in their crisis is the offensive of the working class against both imperialism and the bureaucracy.

In every backward country the links between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism have become closer since the war. The limited resistance put up by the national bourgeoisie in the pre-war period has given way to open collaboration with imperialism, often under the tutelage of Stalinism. The aspirations of the oppressed masses for land, democracy and national independence are cynically sacrificed. These masses will not cease to struggle. From within the ranks of petty-bourgeois nationalist organisations will emerge tendencies seeking full independence from imperialism, which can only be achieved under the leadership of the working class, directed by the revolutionary party. These forces can also be won to the Fourth International.

The crises of Stalinism, social democracy and petty bourgeois nationalism brought about by the offensive of the working class, which cannot be

contained within those organisations, will, in the absence of broadly-based organisations of the Fourth International, bring about the resurgence of centrism. Centrism vacillates between reformism and Marxism in a general sense, but centrist currents are themselves differentiated. Certain centrist currents are maintained by their leaders on the basis of an opportunist compromise between elements of a Marxist programme and of a reformist one, as an obstacle to building of a revolutionary party. Others represent the grasping of advanced sections of the working class for the revolutionary programme of Marxism, in the course of their break with reformism or Stalinism. Centrism is essentially transitory: if it does not go the whole way in breaking with reformism to grasp the programme of the Fourth International, it will ossify and eventually become an appendage to what it attempted to repudiate. The intervention of Trotskyists is crucial to the evolution of centrism in the direction of Marxism: through such intervention on the basis of discussion, not ultimatums, in emerging centrist currents, new, vital forces will be won to the Fourth International, to assist in its rebuilding.

The generalised crisis of imperialism and the bureaucracy, the offensive of the working class, the resultant ferment within the organisations of the working class and petty-bourgeois nationalism, create the conditions where the Fourth International can be built through the perspective of an Open Conference, open to all tendencies on the basis of "independence from imperialism and the bureaucracy, from bourgeois nationalism in order to carry on in common the struggle for the building of a new International on new foundations". (Resolution of the IB of the OCFI on the Tasks of the Organising Committee, Dec. '76.) The OCFI, of course, holds that this International must be the Fourth International, and the new foundations the Transitional Programme, but we do not offer this as an ultimatum. As part of the work for the Open Conference, the OCFI will hold conferences in Latin America and Europe to discuss the problems of Latin American and European revolution.

6. THE CRISIS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The existence of the United Secretariat claiming to be the Fourth International poses serious problems for the OCFI and its perspective.

The USec has a historical organisational continuity with the Fourth International and claims to adhere to its programme. The programme and organisational principles of the Fourth International were violated by the Pabloite leadership of the International Secretariat in 1952/53, causing a crisis in the Fourth International, a dispersal of its forces and its destruction as an active leading centre. The reunification without discussion in 1963 did not overcome these problems. The dispersal of the forces of Trotskyism, and the existence within the ranks of what claims to be the Fourth International of tendencies and political positions alien to Trotskyism remain.

The International Committee, founded in 1963, was set up to oppose the violation of the Trotskyist programme and organisational principles by the Pabloite leadership of the International Secretariat. But the International Committee was not the Fourth International, and proved incapable either of promoting a full discussion on the problems which led to the split or of centralising the forces of Trotskyism, and in 1963 a substantial section of the IC, led by the SWP, split to reunify with the IS, forming the United Secretariat. The International Committee, its scope and discussion further limited, finally disintegrated through the splitting activity of the SLL, and the Trotskyist forces around it, and the organisations outside it who were fighting for the Transitional Programme regrouped in the OCFI in 1972.

The USec continued from 1963 as an organisation based on contradictions.

On the one hand it held an organisational continuity with the Fourth International; it claimed adherence to the Transitional Programme and it contained Trotskyist organisations and tendencies within it. It thus attracted many elements moving towards Trotskyism. On the other hand, the orientation of the leadership of the International Secretariat in 1951/53 and its political consequences in relation to the German revolution of 1953, and the anti-democratic expulsion of the French majority, were never repudiated by the reunified leadership, and the old leadership of the ISec continued to politically and organisationally dominate the USec. The USec thus remained a liquidationist centre, in practice frequently deflecting militants from the Transitional Programme and the fight to build independent revolutionary parties of the working class, parties of the Fourth International.

These contradictions expressed themselves in the differences which arose within the USec in 1969. The Lonin-Trotsky faction, led by the SWI, initiated a defence of the Transitional Programme against the liquidationist positions of the leadership expressed in the policies of guerrillaism, new vanguardism, etc. The Trotskyist history, programme and tendencies within the USec revolted against the revisionist positions which had their roots in the orientation of 51/53 and its organisational and political consequences.

The position of the SWI in the history of the Fourth International, its defence of the political independence of the American working class for 40 years, its adherence to the Transitional Programme, characterise it as a Trotskyist organisation. The 1963 reunification, the capitulation of the SWI to new vanguardism, many adaptations to the petty-bourgeoisie, threatened the Trotskyist character of the SWI.

The International Committee continued to disintegrate after 1972. The SLL lost its proletarian core with the Thomett split of 1974, and travelled further along the road of abandonment of the Transitional Programme with the cessation of the production of an openly Trotskyist organ. The main prop of the IC outside Britain, Tim Wohlforth of the American Workers' League, split with Healy to rejoin the SWI, thus repudiating twelve years of his political career, including his struggle against the 1963 reunification. The SLL slid further from Trotskyism in their unwarranted assault on the SWI through their allegations against Hansen and Novack, thus indirectly aiding US imperialism at the time when the SWI was exposing the CIA.

The foundation of the OCRFI on the basis of a perspective for the rebuilding of the Fourth International through the Open Conference provided a framework for the consolidation and extension of the gains of the IC. The OCRFI was founded in 1972 of heterogeneous elements, some of which had formerly been associated with, and members of, the IC, and some of which had groped towards Trotskyism in isolation. This permitted the attempted disruption of the OCRFI by Varga in 1973, which failed. Through political discussion the OCRFI grew more homogeneous. Gains were made particularly in Latin America with the admission of new organisations and the strengthening and consolidation of existing ones, in opposition to the vacillations of the sections of the USec.

This discussion within the USec takes place within the context of the imminence of the proletarian revolution. Each impetus given to this revolution - the Bolivian revolution of 1971, the Portuguese revolution of 1974, the development of the political revolution in Europe - fuels this discussion. All the central Programmatic elements of the Fourth International are raised in this discussion - Popular Frontism, the leadership of the working class in the revolution, and its independence, the role of the Fourth International itself, and its programme.

7. FOR THE REBUILDING OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Conditions have never been more favourable for the rebuilding of the Fourth International. On the basis of the current conjuncture of the class struggle, of the linked crisis of imperialism and the bureaucracy, of the discussion thus generated within the working class and anti-imperialist movements, and particularly within the ranks of those claiming adherence to the Fourth International, the OCRFI seeks the broadest possible discussion, without preconditions. Since 1973 we have sought the opening of discussions with the USec, confident that we can contribute to the discussion currently taking place within the USec; that, whatever the starting point of the discussion, all the issues disputed within the Fourth International since 1951 will be raised. We note with satisfaction that the discussion has now begun in a public way, with the discussion of Ernest Mandel's "25 Theses on the World Revolution".

In Ireland the conditions are becoming favourable for the building of a section of the OCRFI. The disintegration of petty bourgeois nationalism, which has already produced the 1970 Republican split, the IRSP and the ISI, will give rise to the further development of centrist currents. The Labour Party apparatus will conflict with that section of the working class which supports it, and which will attempt to use it to express politically its demands, leading, with the intervention of the Trotskyists, to a split in a centrist direction. The IMS split from the CI is the beginning, not the end, of the crisis of Stalinism in Ireland.

The LWR must contribute to this discussion internationally but, more importantly, introduce into the discussion of all the tendencies in Ireland breaking from reformism and nationalism the elements of the need for the political independence of the working class and the leadership by the working class of the national struggle, opposition to Stalinism, the perspective of a United Socialist States of Europe and the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International. Through this we must fight for an Open International Conference of revolutionary militants and organisations among Irish militants.

This discussion forms a central part of the work for the Open Conference, for the rebuilding of the Fourth International, the necessity for which arises out of the rapidly developing world proletarian revolution.

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In the document of our last conference entitled "Political Crisis of the Bourgeoisie we said:

"The crisis of the Irish bourgeoisie is set within the framework of the world crisis of imperialism and the Kremlin bureaucracy based on the world wide strength of the working class and the growing contradictions within imperialism itself.

"The crisis is expressed not only at the level of economic dislocation - inflation and recession - but also at a

political level, calling into question state institutions in many countries. The bourgeoisie no longer can rule in the old way and the burden of maintaining capitalist order falls more and more on the shoulders of the bourgeois workers' parties."

As those lines were being written the first stages of the European socialist revolution were taking place in Portugal. Despite the blows delivered to the Portuguese revolution by the Stalinists and Social Democrats in turn, the political crisis of the European bourgeoisie and the Stalinist bureaucracies continues to deepen. Deep crises of bourgeois rule exist - Spain and Italy. The institutions of the French Fifth Republic are under threat. The victorious mass strike in Ireland and the subsequent freeing of imprisoned workers is but the highest expression of the crisis of the Kremlin and satellite bureaucracies. In Germany itself the re-election of the Schmidt government was immediately followed by a governmental crisis and the cracks in the East German bureaucracy were laid bare by the Biermann affair. The growing support for the Czech Charter '77 movement throughout Eastern Europe underlines the crisis of the bureaucracies.

The Helsinki Agreement set the seal on the counter-revolutionary haly alliance between imperialism and the Kremlin bureaucracy. They jointly expressed their determination to maintain the status quo in Europe, to beat back the proletarian revolution, making permanent the division of Europe and its working class.

In Britain and Ireland the key role in buttressing state institutions has been played by social democracy. This has been facilitated by major economic concessions to Britain by the French and German bourgeoisies, at the behest of American imperialism. The Irish bourgeoisie has benefitted from this, and also from continued loans from international financial agencies, despite the near bankruptcy of the government.

In the documents of the last conference we underestimated the ability of the Labour Party and particularly of the trade union bureaucracies to hold back the working class. The coalition presided over four years of unemployment, redundancies, wage restraint and collaboration with British imperialism, principally by attacking democratic rights. It is important to understand why this coalition survived. The action of the international bourgeoisie in economically buttressing up Ireland and Britain for fear of deepening the European socialist revolution, in full swing in Portugal, was a key factor. The strength of the British and Irish working classes forced France and Germany in particular to compound their own economic crisis in order to stave off a deepening of the political crisis of the European bourgeoisie. This was effected in part through the EEC, one of the main purposes for which it was designed. Another key factor was the ability of British social democracy and the trade union apparatuses to persuade and threaten the working class into accepting sacrifices. This had direct effects in Ireland through the constraints placed on British based unions, north and south, and indirectly through the lowering of the expectations of the 26-county workers. The lack of a mass revolutionary tendency in the working class movements of Britain and Ireland and the role of the Stalinists in supporting the union apparatus deprived the working class of a weapon to resist. In addition, the 26 county working class, being mostly young and having no experience of sustained all-out resistance by the state to industrial pressure and no experience of fighting in conditions of economic recession, went through a period of hesitancy and searching for new methods of struggle. Now the working class, having learned by experience that wage restraint and unemployment are not temporary, as the union leaders promised, are beginning to wage a determined fight back.

We are seeing the initial stages of a wave of strikes. This determination will be fuelled by the struggle of the British and six-county working class against the Social Contract, already begun. In these conditions the coalition, even if it had been re-elected, could not have long survived. During the period of industrial peace new layers of working class militants have become involved in union branches and this is giving a new edge to the growing pressure of the working class on the trade union apparatuses.

Stalinism

In Britain and Ireland, Stalinism, having but a small mass base, plays a secondary but crucial role in the interests of capitalism. Through its influence in the trade unions and the left wing of social democracy it disrupts the fight against the main labour bureaucracies, continually diverting working class opposition into class collaborationist paths, prefiguring Popular Frontist solutions. The Kremlin bureaucracy has played a direct role in minimising the dislocation of the British and Irish states by imposing a world wide ban on the supply of arms to the Provisional IRA.

While the IRA campaign shows no way forward for the working class, the military struggle, drawing on the support of the Catholic ghettos, has contributed to the political crises of the British and Irish bourgeoisie and their states. Their inability to stamp out the campaign militarily and the pressure the campaign exerts on the British Army has led to differences among the ruling class about how to deal with the situation. The IRA is nevertheless among the worst-armed guerrilla movements in the world, because of the joint opposition of imperialism, the Kremlin and indeed the Chinese bureaucracy to the struggle for a united Ireland. They all fear that a defeat for British imperialism in Ireland and the blows to capitalism in Ireland and Britain that it would entail would deepen the process of the European socialist revolution which threatens to put an end to the rule of capitalism and the bureaucracy in Europe.

In the six counties, where social democracy is particularly weak, the CPI, hand-in-hand with the leadership of the Northern Committee of the ICTU, plays a crucial role in protecting partition and British rule. Through the "Better Life for All" campaign and the Peace movement, they openly defend British troops and attempt to divert mass discontent into support for a new Stormont. They particularly oppose any suggestion of a movement towards a united Ireland in practice. Recently they have blocked a move towards an all Ireland campaign in the unions against unemployment.

In all factions of the nationalist movement they attempt to win militants to the politics of class collaboration and seek to block the development of centrist currents searching for a revolutionary road.

The split-away Euro-Stalinists of the Irish Marxist Society vigorously advocate coalition with existing capitalist parties, as yet fearing the popular front. They act as the right wing of the Liaison of the Labour Left, support the wage restraint policies of the ICTU leaders, and attempt to link up with the ex-Labour elements of the SDLP in support of the British government's policies of power-sharing in the north.

The Official Sinn Fein, committed to Stalinism and having its own links with the Kremlin, and increasingly with the Euro-Stalinists, have moved far to the right. They espouse the crudest pro-partitionist policy together with support for continued membership of the EEC.

Increasingly in the unions they act as stout defenders of the ICTU leaders. The only obstacle to complete rapprochement with the Euro-Stalinists and their Irish representatives now seems to be the political careerism of its leaders, linked to the de-classed urban petit bourgeois composition of its leading circles.

The Trade Unions

The action of the coalition government in reducing real living standards and attacking democratic rights, faced with the basic strength of the working class, has engendered a growing crisis in the main trade unions. Open divisions exist in the leadership of the IT&GWU and the WUI. The resurgence of industrial militancy will strengthen the left bureaucrats and the trade union leadership will increasingly have to present a left face, seeking new forms of class collaboration.

Despite the relative quiescence of the working class over the last four years, the institutions of class collaboration have been placed under increasing strain. The Employer-Labour Conference is increasingly inadequate from the point of view of both government and union leaders. Recently it has been shown to be increasingly irrelevant by the determination of building workers to be paid their increases above the terms of the National Wages Agreement. The NWA itself is coming under increasing pressure and even the union leaders agree that a new NWA of the same type as the last is impossible. The Labour Court and the conciliation and arbitration systems in the public service have been issuing perverse recommendations and non-recommendations under pressure from the government, thus undermining the channels through which the bureaucracies maintain industrial peace. In the north, the Northern ICTU leaders were forced to withdraw from the Northern Development Council due to the inability of the government to make adequate concessions in the prevention of redundancies and unemployment. In the south, the different pressures on the government - the FUE, the IRA and the union leaders - have made it impossible for the NESB to continue producing agreed reports.

Crisis of Imperialism

The analysis of the crisis of imperialist rule in Ireland presented in our last conference documents retains all its validity today and has been supported by events. The strength of the British and Irish working class is the key element in that crisis. This makes it impossible for British imperialism to resolve the crisis by naked force in the old colonial fashion. It is impossible for them to accede to Loyalist demands for a restoration of Orange rule, for fear of provoking the Catholic working class of the whole island and precipitating the downfall of the 26-county state which is crucial to the continuation of imperialist domination. The fate of the recent Loyalist strike bears this out and shows as well that large sections of the Protestant working class are not prepared to support a Loyalist coup. Neither will Britain voluntarily withdraw, because no arrangement can be found which would not quickly lead to the dismantling of capitalist state institutions in the whole island. Such a withdrawal would deal a further blow to the monarchy, the cornerstone of the British state, and exacerbate centrifugal tendencies in the rest of the UK. Hence Britain is seeking some arrangement similar to the power-sharing executive which maintains partition, the British presence and the 26-county state. In this, under different guises and differences notwithstanding, it has the support of all the main capitalist parties in the island, as well as the labour bureaucracies. The key exceptions to this are the fragments of the old Unionist party. Their mass support is based on the

continuation and reinforcement of the caste system, without which, they believe, a united Ireland cannot be prevented. The UWC strike demonstrated the lengths to which they were prepared to go to prevent power-sharing. While the British government is prepared to deal stern blows to the Loyalists, as it did in the recent UAC strike, they are not prepared to decisively extirpate Loyalism, as this would destroy all caste-based parties and undermine the main mass opposition to a united Ireland. Only mass action, led by the working class, can do this, and a victory for such a mobilisation would make a partitionist solution impossible. The Official Unionist Party are prepared slowly to exert pressure on the British government to restore some of their patronage through the restoration of key functions to local government, but such concessions would further undermine the position of the SDLI among the Catholic masses.

Continued direct rule, and the absence of parliamentary politics, is undermining the position of the SDLI and the attendant military repression is becoming more and more provocative to the Catholic masses. Resistance is again growing after a period of relative quiescence. The return of a Tory government under its present leadership would intensify the military repression and pose a threat to the collaborationist policy of the Dublin government.

The Protestant Working Class

History has made the whole Irish working class backward politically, but the Protestant working class in the North - with the failure of the 1798 bourgeois revolution - has never fully escaped from the most malignant form of backwardness: support for the colonial power and its monarchy. The British administration, and after it the Stormont government, maintained and reinforced this by a system of caste privileges. Gains made by the British working class after the war, the introduction of large foreign monopoly firms in the 50s and 60s, the rundown of traditional Northern industry and the concessions which the British government was forced to make to the Catholic masses are tending to erode this position. This is providing, on the one hand, significant mass support for extreme right-wing gangs (the UDA and UVF) and, on the other hand, taken together with the economic crisis (pay restraint, unemployment, cuts) is giving rise to increased political and tradeunion activity among the Protestant workers. The massive votes for the Unionist politicians and the refusal of Protestant workers to break from the ICTU, despite the promptings of extreme Loyalists and the rump NILP, expresses the contradiction in the position of the Protestant working class. The significant development of new trades councils, uniting Catholic and Protestant workers, and all affiliated to the ICTU, sometimes to meet the need for defence against assassinations, and the emergence of the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee to consider the question of political representation of the Northern working class, are very positive developments. It will require a severe dislocation of the stranglehold of the labour bureaucracies in Britain and Ireland to bring those contradictions to a head.

The attacks on the Protestant working class and their organisations by the Loyalists during the recent putsch will deepen the divisions among the Protestant working class. The struggle of the Protestant workers themselves, reinforced by the offensive of the British and 26-county workers, will further strain the loyalty of the Protestant workers to the Unionist parties and create more favourable conditions for the struggle for an all-Ireland Labour Party.

Crisis of the Southern Bourgeoisie

In an attempt to make possible some form of partitionist power-sharing solution, the Southern bourgeoisie are attempting to modify their form of rule. On the one hand they have, through the Coalition government, introduced many repressive laws to be used against Republicans immediately and later against the whole working class. On the other hand, they seek to bring about constitutional changes to eliminate any claim to a united Ireland and free their hands in order to bring in even more repressive measures against Republicans, thus making inter-state cooperation more acceptable to the Unionist parties. Partly for the same reason and also because of internal mass pressure in the South on questions such as the right to contraception, divorce, abortion, multi-denominational or secular schools, some sections of the Southern bourgeoisie are prepared to put a greater distance between the 26-county state and the Catholic church. These questions are provoking a crisis in the two main bourgeois parties, and could at any time provoke a governmental crisis as church/state integration is a cornerstone of the 26-county state.

The extent of state repression against Republicans and open collaboration with Britain which involved modification of the Southern state (CJ Bill and Emergency Powers Act), together with proposals to drop the claim to a united Ireland from the Constitution has already provoked a festering constitutional crisis, involving divisions between parliament, the judiciary and the presidency, resulting in the resignation of President O'Dalaigh.

The basis of the hold of the capitalist Fianna Fail party on half the working class and the majority of the small farmers is its alleged commitment to a united Ireland. They believe that this commitment, however dishonoured, must be retained in order to prevent the emergence of a strong independent workers' party, which would pose a threat to the fragile 26-county state. In addition, sections of the judiciary believe that the introduction of such severe repressive laws and large scale police thuggery at this time will undermine respect for state institutions among the masses, making these institutions less effective against the working class. This explains the restriction placed on the most recent repressive measures by the judiciary and their reference to the Supreme Court by the Fianna Fail president, O'Dalaigh. Anger over this by the majority of Fine Gael and the O'Brien wing of the Labour Party led to O'Dalaigh's resignation. Mass pressure on the government itself forced them to go ahead with the Strasbourg case against Britain, thus straining Anglo-Irish relations.

Fianna Fail is the only single party through which the bourgeoisie can rule alone. Already the mobilisation of the masses on the national question when they were in office before led to a split (the "Arms Crisis"). Deep differences still exist within the party, centring on the national question. The direct links which it forged with monopoly capitalism while in power, combined with the explosiveness of present social and national contradictions, prevented it from using the old populism when in opposition. In addition, the majority Lynch/Colley wing is highly compromised on the national question. Church/State relations will cause further divisions within the party. The Blaney faction and the Maughey faction are biding their time. These contradictions have been heightened by the election victory of Fianna Fail.

Nationalist Movement

The erosion of the petit bourgeois layers of the population, the increased specific weight of the working class, and the impossibility of solving the national question on a capitalist basis has created deep divisions within the petty bourgeois nationalist movement. Only the reactionary positions of the Labour and trade union bureaucracies on national and democratic questions maintains their support at its present level, particularly in the North. The Official Sinn Fein have become a partitionist movement. The growing offensive of the masses and the revolutionary implications of a united Ireland will cause further splits among the Provisionals, whose leadership have time and again shown their fear of mass mobilisation, defending, instead, exemplary guerilla activity and hunger strikes. Increasingly, petty bourgeois movements have to choose between the working class and the bourgeoisie. This will give rise to further centrist currents (such as the split from the IRSP) on the one hand, and greater compromise on the national question along the lines of the Dail Uladh proposal on the part of the most right wing factions, even perhaps leading to participation in a partition government under British auspices. The petty bourgeois layers of the Irish population are still large by European standards and, despite the age structure of the small farmers, cannot be ignored.

Economic Crisis

Despite any short-term minor upturns due to concessions made by American and European capitalism to the British and Irish bourgeoisies, the economic crisis will continue to deepen, feeding the political crisis. Indeed the minor upturn predicted for the rest of this year can only strengthen the wages offensive of the working class. Real unemployment will continue to grow. Capitalism in crisis is incapable of providing a future for youth. This will lead to a radicalisation in the neighbourhoods, the schools and the universities, which will go much deeper than the radicalisation of the 60s. However, it would be totally wrong to say, as do the Militant tendency, that the working class offensive on wages and jobs will submerge the national question. Indeed, the colonial structure of the country and partition are a major obstacle to the development of the economy and the creation of jobs. When bourgeois democratic tasks remain to be completed, it is inevitable that new explosions will occur, centring on the national question.

The economic and political crisis in Europe will further strain relations between the EEC partners, each putting its national interests first. The masses, in the struggle for jobs and wages in Ireland, increasingly will come into conflict with EEC structures. Relations between Britain and Ireland will inevitably be increasingly strained, further feeding a mobilisation on the national question.

Developments in the Unions and the Labour Party

The growing offensive of the working class, linked to the offensive in Britain, will not confine itself to wages and unemployment alone, but will also be expressed in a sharpened fight for democratic rights, national unity, personal liberties and against clerical interference. This will place the forms of the state rule of the bourgeoisie, North and South, under increasing strain. The crisis in the mass bourgeois parties will be a key factor in opening the way for a struggle for the political independence of the working class and an all-Ireland Labour Party.

The fall of the Coalition and the changing balance of forces in the unions against the bureaucracy must inevitably push the Labour Party to the left, even if this means defection to the bourgeois parties of

some of its present leaders. Nevertheless, the period immediately after the fall of the Coalition will be a period of great danger for militants, with the right wing leaders attempting desperately to hold back the tide of opposition to coalitionism.

In the unions, the growing participation by young militants and rank and file members in meetings will continue and expand as the fight against wage restraint builds up.

In Britain, the blows dealt by the miners to Heath have led to the emergence in the Tory party of a leadership whose policies in the immediate sense are out of line with the strategy of the big monopolies. If, due to the right-wing policies of the Labour government, it proves impossible to avert the early coming to power of a Thatcher-led government, the political crisis in Britain and Ireland may be further compounded. An aggressive military policy in the six counties could further undermine the basis of the collaborationist policy of the 26-county government and the explosion of major class battles in Britain could further turn the scales against the British and Irish labour and trade union apparatuses, which are interlinked.

Popular Front

The fall of the Coalition and the crisis in the capitalist parties will lead to a period of parliamentary instability. But in the context of the level the political crisis has reached in Europe and given the fragility of the 26-county state, such a period must be short-lived. The bourgeoisie will be forced to depend directly on the labour apparatuses to maintain the capitalist state, this time not in the form of a right wing coalition, but in the form of a popular front or a left coalition. But the bourgeoisie and the Stalinist and labour apparatuses will be very reluctant to attempt a popular frontist solution, as they are in Italy today.

In Irish conditions, a popular frontist solution must have at its centre the maintenance of partition in whatever form. In the North, it would require some form of power-sharing arrangement involving the leadership of the trade unions, including the Stalinists, and of at least a faction of the Provos. The Loyalists would have to be severely crushed to make it possible. But one particular problem for the bourgeoisie in Irish conditions is the absence of a significant mass base for Stalinism. Stalinism always acts as the main hatchet-man for the popular front against the working class, using its links with the October Revolution and illusions among the masses about its continued devotion to overthrowing capitalism. In Irish circumstances, the popular front, a deadly danger to the working class, has particular dangers for the bourgeoisie. The labour apparatuses, without the services of a mass Stalinist party, may be unable to maintain it against the working class. For this reason, other variants of bourgeois rule with a populist flavour may emerge prior to a popular front. Even though the working class can severely dislocate the bureaucracies - a revolutionary explosion without a revolutionary party - these bureaucracies can and will re-establish their hegemony unless the Fourth International is rebuilt.

OUR TASKS

The 1975 Conference of the LWR marked a consolidation of the cadre, coming from a long struggle to maintain and develop political positions arrived at over years of practical work. The period up to the 1975 Conference was marked by protracted and often bitter political debate within the organisation on a number of crucial points. This period of internal debate was ended at the cost of some members. The task of the 1975 Conference was one both of clarifying a political perspective and also initiating a building programme.

As a result of an examination of the history of the LWR, which is rich in experience of the underlying problems of revolutionary leadership in Ireland and which is the central pin of the struggle for Trotskyism, a major tactical turn was undertaken. A careful study was made of Trotsky's writings, from the period when the Trotskyist forces were small groupings, and when the problem of influencing great events in the class struggle was on the agenda. The LWR, accepting the formulation of the OCRFI that the proletarian revolution has commenced in Europe, believes this is precisely our task. We have drawn lessons from the Trotsky writings of the 1934-35 period and from discussions within the OCRFI. In particular we pay attention to the remarks of Trotsky that,

"A revolutionary organisation does not mean a paper and its readers. One can write and read revolutionary articles day in and day out and still remain in reality outside of the revolutionary movement. One can give the labour organisations good advice - from the sidelines. That is something. But that still does not make a revolutionary organisation."

In making a tactical turn towards the mass organisations of the working class in Ireland the LWR in no way renounces its political programme or its traditions. Again, as Trotsky said,

"...We have nothing to renounce. We merely admit honestly that our organisation is too weak to establish for itself a practical independent role in the struggles that are looming ahead of us."

The LWR believes that a deep-going process of political discussion and polarisation, under the pressure of the class struggle, will take place in the trade unions and the Labour Party, the only organisation able to call itself a party of the working masses in Ireland.

We disagree fundamentally with the perspective of the Militant tendency, which is to transform the social democracy into a revolutionary force. The social democratic apparatus as such is a counter-revolutionary force, through and through. The polarisation along class lines which takes place within the ranks of the social democracy leads not to the transformation of base metal into gold, of the 2nd International to the Fourth, but only to a split in the class struggle forces in a leftward direction. The particular conjunction of circumstances which produces the split, and the size and programmatic basis of the organisations which result are not decided in advance.

The LWR does not stand aside from developments in the mass movement which intensify the crisis of the apparatus and enable the heightening of political discussion.

Of equal importance to the work of the LWR since 1975 has been the transformation of the organ of the League from a monthly paper to a bi-monthly theoretical magazine. The post-1971 work of the League had centred on the effort of producing a monthly newspaper and an intervention in the rank and file struggle against the National Wage Agreements and in various ad hoc campaigns, like the Shop Stewards' Committee. In the early 1970s this milieu was not inconsiderable.

The perspective that this current could grow over into a centrist development large enough to bypass a struggle within the reformist Labour Party led to the involvement of supporters of the LWR in the Socialist Labour Alliance. The rapid collapse of the SLA and the equally rapid demise of the Dublin Shop Stewards' Committee as a real force proved in practice the weakness of the "centrist alternative" perspective and showed inversely the continuing importance of the Labour Party to developments in the workers' movement.

By the end of 1974 the organisational work of the LWR had suffered badly. The Shop Stewards' Committee, whose importance was in reality as the embryo of an episodic campaign against Wage Agreements, and not as a new pole in the working class, passed into oblivion, remaining only as a glimmer in the heads of leftists. After the election of the Coalition government and as the crisis in the North found no solution, the working class, in all 32 counties, turned away from ad hoc groupings. The very scope of the problems it faces have tended to instill a sense of caution. All the problems posed the need for a workers' government but no way towards this, on the scale of the whole class, was immediately available.

Illusions in parliamentary methods are difficult to find in the North, where the road to a workers' government is not seen in terms of a turn to the Irish Labour Party. The levels of consciousness, organisational expression and necessary immediate demands of the working class, are conditioned and affected by Partition. The ending of Partition is the central task of a workers' government, yet the existence of the border has dislocated the life of the working class on all levels and renders the struggle for a unified workers' movement necessary as the first step towards a workers' government. Without a revolutionary nucleus, capable of raising the call for a unified mass movement, North and South of the border simultaneously, the unions fall into the hands of Protestant reaction in the North and prey to the pro-imperialism of such as Cruise O'Brien in the South.

As the new period of pressing unemployment, inflation and intensification of labour unfolded, the working class awoke to the changing conditions but slowly. Without an influential revolutionary analysis its consciousness has lagged behind events; yet this lag is not without its limits. The 'quiet period' is now at an end. A rolling strike wave, expressing the pent-up feelings of months of suppressed anxiety over wages, conditions and redundancy, is clearly unfolding. These strikes are sometimes official, often not. The union leaders, prior to the election, attempted to stifle the wave. With the advent of Fianna Fail to office and the evidence of massive unrest over the 'Social Contract' in Britain, they are now hedging on the future of Wage Agreements. As yet no major strike, challenging the state mechanisms, has occurred, but things are sliding inexorably in that direction. A period of 'working through' the relations between the working class and its organisations is taking place.

The Provisionals have been in continuous crisis since Operation Motorman some time ago. They have entered a period of programmatic uncertainty produced by their clear inability to force the British out of the North. They have been into and out of a ceasefire to little effect and their military tactics become ever more anarchistic. This

crisis will be prolonged by the crisis of leadership within the working class itself. No other alternative to the petty bourgeois activism of the Provisionals exists outside of a revolutionary working class, able to surpass 'exemplary terror' as a method of struggle, able to offer a programme incorporating the unity of the nation. This fundamental development must wait on events, it does not depend on the propaganda or journalism of small revolutionary groups.

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The tactical turn to the mass organisations undertaken by the LWR is not based on empirical considerations, since in no measure can we see any major changes within their ranks which would bring immediate recruits into the Trotskyist movement. This period is not a reproduction of the late 1960s. Objectively the crisis of capitalism is far deeper, the boom has disappeared, the stakes in the class struggle are higher, the crisis in the North is overwhelming. But the period of Coalition government in the 26 counties, the collapse of the civil rights movement, the sectarian mistakes of the SLA, the National Wage Agreements and the UWC strike, had their effects as well. The working class must smash through the bureaucratic apparatus, must thrust aside its temporary setbacks.

We believe the students are on the edge of a new upsurge and that this too will find its reflection in the working class, but again, our turn is not based on a 'waiting game', to try and catch a layer of youth around ourselves. Rather we base our work on a long term estimation of the central role of the Labour Party in the development of the working class. It will both be a place for workers to focus their aspirations for government and the chief block, in the form of its bourgeois apparatus, to those aspirations. As we said in the 1975 document, 'the problem of the political independence of the workers' movement, the struggle against the influence of Fianna Fail, and the need to express trade union demands at governmental level, raise once more the role of the Labour Party'.

The strategy of the LWR has always been the building of an independent revolutionary party in Ireland. Within this framework tactical changes, organisational expression, are possible and necessary. We must root the LWR in the working class, and take part in its struggles, not from the sidelines, but in active participation day by day. An implantation in the unions is the bedrock of our work, but the questions of workers' government will arise also within the mass political parties of the working class, in Ireland, as in other European countries. Developments such as the Browne-Merrigan campaign are an integral part of the polarisation within the mass parties, and a left wing will crystallize which has importance as a forum for political discussion, and which will attract, in the first instance, many militants who will lay the basis of a revolutionary party, in a break with the apparatus and outlook of reformism. This is the perspective of the LWR. It anticipates events and requires flexible application. It is a grave mistake to 'speed up' events by actions which merely serve to isolate the work of the Trotskyists from mass movements. On the other hand it is vital to express the approach of the Transitional Programme, which is a programme not of passive comment but of active intervention and leadership.

The development of the Browne-Merrigan campaign is a healthy one, compared to the clique which was Liaison before the election. The rapid accumulation of over 200 supporters in the Dublin area is

a reaffirmation of the potential for an organised left in the Labour Party. Despite having no clear perspective, no elaborated platform, the personages of Browne and Merrigan, seen as oppositionists to the bankrupt coalition apparatus, act as a focus for the left. The election has thrown both the Irish Marxist Society and the Militant into the arms of the bureaucratic apparatus and into position as its left cover.

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The magazine of the LWR will continue to appear at two-monthly intervals, dealing with basic problems of the class struggle on a theoretical level. Over the past year it has voiced the only serious opposition to the economic positions of the various shades of Irish Stalinism and the main platform of support for political freedom in Eastern Europe.

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The LWR will undertake a programme of theoretical work over the next year along the following lines:

- A. The relation between the workers' movement and the struggle against imperialism.
- B. How to pose the question of a workers' government in a divided country.
- C. The tactics of the fight for a Constituent Assembly.

We will publish, in pamphlet form, an analysis of the past ten years of class struggle, work on which is already under way.

We will distribute the discussions between the OCREI and the USFI on the problems of the Fourth International, among those seeking to be revolutionaries.

We will examine the historical experience of Trotskyists in working within social democracy.

Politically, our work in the coming period will centre on the following demands:

- End partition, for a 32 county Constituent Assembly!
- British out of the 6 counties!
- Against repression - for democratic rights!
- Against a coalition approach by the Labour Party - forward to the workers' government!
- Down with wage agreements!
- For a 32 county Labour Party!
- Defend jobs, nationalise threatened industries!
- For trade union control of economic planning!

We do not see this as an abstract 'shopping list', any one or more of these demands could become the focus of the actual course of class struggle at a given moment, and the emphasis within the 6 counties is always on removing British rule.

The most immediately pressing issue, which concentrates the struggle

for democratic rights and against imperialism, and raises the question of political independence for the working class, is the fight against repression.

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The Labour Party apparatus is on a collision course with the working class, and under the influence of that section of the trade union bureaucracy which is more receptive to the urban proletariat, the apparatus is at present trying to postpone an internal crisis. However, the present orientation and structure of the Labour Party, even given a passing glance at the 1969 policy documents, will not survive without modifications.

The key to the breakup of the present apparatus lies in the links between trade unions and the Labour Party. Although the first result of closer links will no doubt be simply the presence of union bureaucrats on Labour Party committees once a full, organic, link is built at local level, the pressure of the unions on the ground cannot but make itself felt.

In the unions we must promote discussion on the relation between the unions and the Labour Party. In union branches we must call for full union participation in Labour Party constituency councils.

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A key question in the unions remains work to motivate a real campaign against unemployment, which the union leaders sought to avoid while the Coalition was in power. Under a Fianna Fail government which promises job creation it is vital once more for militants to raise the question of trade union control of job creation, planning and finance. All attempts to pull in the unions as an adjunct to the Fianna Fail 'plan' must be resisted. Once more we must press in the unions for an all-Ireland demonstration against unemployment. We will circulate the position of the LWR in a document taking up the economic struggles of the working class.

We believe that the universities and colleges are prime areas for our work and that the continuing latent crisis within USI will produce, in the not distant future, a layer of student leaders breaking with Stalinism and nationalism in a revolutionary direction. The absence of a reformist youth movement accentuates this crisis and opens the way for an intervention among students over the coming academic year. We will republish and fight around the 'Crisis in Education' pamphlet.

We must also turn to the most oppressed section of the working class - women - basing our work on the existing limited interest in women's problems in the labour movement. We will work in the trade unions for the ending of discrimination against women in the area of social welfare, for equal pay and for democratic rights such as the right to divorce, contraception and abortion.

Through all this, the key element in our work in the next period is the building of the LWR, and its transformation from a nucleus into an organisation.

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