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FOR SOCIALIST SELF MANAGEMENT

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AN END TO AN ERA - EXIT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA - AN INTERVIEW WITH JAN SLING

SOUTH AFRICA - AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STRIKES

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AN END OF AN ERA

The era of free collective bargaining is over. This changed aspect of our 'democratic way of life' poses three very important questions. Firstly is the old-style bureaucratic trade union method for round the table negotiations with the employers still valid for wage increases? Secondly, can the trade union bureaucrats justify their working existence as custodians for wage increases when the State is the principal arbiter which decides how much increase workers are entitled to? Thirdly, do some of the trade union bureaucrats still believe in the myth that politics must be kept out of trade unionism now that the right to strike is a crime punishable by fines and imprisonment? These questions, brought about by the evolution of events, are of tremendous importance to the mass of organised workers,

The traditional policy pursued by the trade-union bureaucrats, especially from the end of the second world war - whether consciously or unconsciously - of striving for sectional wage increases and of containing workers' struggles within sectional, narrow limits, is reformism par excellence. Today capitalism has no crumbs to throw to workers through these bureaucrats in order to justify their role as leaders in the eyes of workers. During the boom of the 'fifties and early 'sixties the employers were even capable of determining the balance of forces in the TUC and particular unions, by conceding sliding scale increases to a Carron or Cousins, thus enhancing the prestige of both personalities to their members. It was also even known for right-wingers of no dubious standing to have fought for wage increases for their members. But in the present phase of capitalist economic decay, the government and employers are in no position to diplomatically bolster a bureaucratic - although domestically useful - institution like the TUC. The government is pressing for open class collaboration with these leaders in order to prop up a decaying system.

The social democratic educational formation of these leaders is the principal brake to their actions. Being consumed by bourgeois ideology they can only mis-represent the working class in times of crisis. Their ideology, because it is incapable of transcending the limits laid down by the capitalist system, dictates to them the stultifying routine of confining the struggle within the arena laid down by this same enemy. Such futile exercises in routinism do not embrace the logical conception of bringing the entire working class into action to defend its standard of living. Thus sectional parochialism is the order of the day: those who are in an organisationally strong position to maintain their standard of living are not concerned with the weak sections. This attitude obviously gives the government the excuse of conceding to 'special cases', of conceding to those who have the power to topple it i.e. the power-men and the miners.

For to highlight the strength of the workers' organisations and to conceal its weaknesses, is very dangerous to the working class itself. To illustrate one example which will have profound consequences for the working class under phase 2-3 of the Government's policy is the miners' ballot. Here the NUM leadership did everything to sow defeatism so as to frighten the miners away from a general strike. Instinctively workers do not enter into struggle unless they know they are going to win, and from the antics of the NUM

leadership preceding the ballot the miners knew fully well that the prospects of victory, for them alone, were going to be dim. Recognising the fact that, a year ago they challenged the government's norm and won, this year their leaders, after a year of collaboration with the Coal Board on productivity deals, presented the challenge to the government's phase 2 policy in this way:

In keeping with the 1972 annual conference decision the national executive committee has rejected as unsatisfactory the Board's offer of increased wages and fringe benefits within the government's formula. Are you in favour of the NEC being given authority to call a national strike or other industrial action as necessary in support of our efforts to obtain a satisfactory response to the claim on behalf of all our members?

As is well known the result of the ballot was already anticipated by the government. If the questionnaire had been presented to the miners from the point of view of a national strike of all workers (isn't it a political question for the miners?) to defeat phase 2, by linking their struggle, as an integral segment, to the rest of the workers' struggle to defeat phase 2, because phase 2 is a carefully worked-out strategy of the State to lower the standard of living of all workers, to reduce all workers to the 'peasants of Europe,' then perhaps we would have been living in a different situation! What is revealed here is the subtle operation of the fifth column in the workers movement. Faced with a unified, concerted State strategy on the one hand, and the rising militancy of the working class on the other, these leaders are powerless to do anything but make left noises.

By stubbornly refusing to lead a coordinated struggle against the Tories, by giving the Tories the green-light to pursue their counter-working class policy, the TUC bureaucrats will interpret rank and file prudence, which came about as a result of their treachery, as declining militancy. And, of course the miners' no-strike ballot will be conceived by them as a justification for the resumption of tripartite talks with the government. But because of the crippling effect of phase 1 and 2 on collective bargaining and wages, the TUC bureaucracy will inevitably undergo strains which will manifest themselves in rapidly changing positions on issues of fundamental importance for the continued existence of both the workers' standard of living and their organisations.

Under phase 1 and 2 we have seen a marked decline in the purchasing power of the working class, which will continue down-slope as prices continue to rise. And as we enter into phase 3 the Tories will be more confident in dealing with the union bureaucrats who are completely bankrupt. Moderates of the Chapple and Jackson calibre, though already compromised with Tory policy, will inexorably settle for phase 3 piously hoping for a Labour victory at the next general elections, while the so-called lefts, led by Scanlon and Jones, will shift to wards a dialogue with the Tories on reforming this or that section of the Industrial Relations Act. Moreover, on the issue of the Common Market and non-recognition of its institutions, a complete somersault is imminent. Unquestionably this total somersault, this reversal of previous positions, though a feature of bureaucratism, is symptomatic of the double pressure on the TUC - working class and capitalist pressures. These bureaucrats are more afraid of working class action than the Tory offensive, they cling to constitutional fantasies and democratic myths in a situation that requires clear, dialectical

thinking. Result : helplessness!

In this unfolding period of sharpened class struggle it would be folly to underestimate the ideological pull the Tories have on these bureaucrats, especially those in the TUC Economic Committee. When one considers the only bourgeois prescription for endemic inflation in this epoch is lowering the standard of life of the people who produce wealth to a near-subsistence level, it is rather frightening to listen to the utterances of the TUC document Economic Policy and Collective Bargaining. Feather said " the General Council must go out of their way to turn this document (a mishmash of illusions) into a campaign that can be understood by the ordinary trade unionists (!) and the electorate. We must be seen to be working together with the Labour Party to create a voluntary policy for solving inflation after the next election."

The code of civilised behaviour prevents a rude answer to such nauseating twaddle, but we are sure, in so far as the Tories are concerned, Mr Feather seems to be acquiring the enhanced reputation of an indispensable court jester, because the teachers, dockers, water workers, car-workers, civil-servants, hospital workers, miners, steelmen, gas-workers, busmen, railwaymen, post-office workers and thousands of other workers and old-age pensioners do not need a campaign of tuition on economic policy: they feel and know it by their daily existence; the 'ordinary trade unionists and the electorate' are in a position to give Mr Feather and his General Council a very enlightening lecture on how to solve inflation! Also, on the other hand, the Tories do not need Feather's tuition on how to solve inflation. Furthermore, why wait for the next general election 'to create' a voluntary policy for solving inflation'? Why not solve inflation now? And so the question arises: what is it that Feather and his General Council are up to? Sheer hopelessness!

Political Economy creates and destroys the myth, and as collective bargaining comes to an end we see the social democratic defenders of our 'democratic tradition' hopelessly paralysed in face of this historical erosion. But as economic boom is the axis which allows reformist illusions, then it goes without saying that the very roots of these illusions are shattered in the process of a worsening economic situation. The idea that 'we will return to free collective bargaining under a next labour government' is wishful thinking, for any government, reformist or otherwise in this period of irreversible decline will have to super-exploit the workers in order to modernise industry so that it can compete in the international jungle. Thus we will not be returning to free collective bargaining but to the corporate State.

Theoretically the answer to these questions is not difficult - **Self-managed Socialism**. We have reached that over-ripe stage when a fundamental change in society is needed. This new era, this era of the gradual elimination of labour reformist influence, had opened splendid opportunities for the mass of workers whose determination and fighting spirit are still intact. Of course the immediate situation demands the construction of Workers' Councils at the point of production and the transformation of all sectional industrial battles into nation-wide political ones. It is the duty of the revolutionary left to adhere to this task.

The ninth national conference of the Institute of Workers' Control took place on the same weekend as the conference of the shop stewards' Liaison Committee. IWC militants meet, not as the representatives of this or that faction, but on the basis of their common interest in workers' control. The advantage of this is that people listen to each other more -as opposed to the Liaison Committee conference, where fists took over.

The framework of discussion in the IWC, which hinges on the common interest in workers' control, implies a redefinition of socialism on the basis of workers' control. But while the lack of faction-fights helps this redefinition, it could also be seen as a lack of clear political thinking. Thus one delegate could hold Czechoslovakia up as a model of socialism without the slightest noise of disapproval from a largely non-CP assembly; without anyone to point out that most of the political prisoners in Czechoslovakia are in fact workers who tried to make the same redefinition of socialism by their activities in the workers' councils in 1968 - 69.

Secondly, the lack of dogmatic, exclusive political attitudes in IWC discussions does not mean that there are no exclusive attitudes. The exclusiveness has simply been transferred from the political level to the 'industrial' level : workers' control ideas have been applied to separate industries, without the links being made between them and 'social control' (of society outside the factory) - i.e. all the things which call in question the very existence of capitalism. In other words, strongly exclusive (almost 'craft unionist') ideas of on-the-spot workers' control have led to a political soft centre.

There was a move away from this at the conference, where for the first time there was a full debate on self-management, a term which necessarily involves those questions of social control and the overthrow of capitalism. However, it was only a discussion, and it was only made possible by the working-class activity of the past months which has put these issues on the map.

The actual activities of the IWC may go on from this discussion, or they may well ignore it. The stress on building vertical links within the 'left' sections of the union bureaucracies and Labour Party may well be important : e.g. the suggestion in one conference paper that there should be an official in each of the major unions responsible for liaison with the workers' control movement. But it will get lost in these upper reaches if it does not at the same time extend its horizontal links with local groups at the base.

This kind of activity depends mainly on the initiative of militants at the base. No one is asking the IWC with its limited human resources and limited propaganda aims to lead a mass movement. It can, however, if it wants, provide a vital service to local groups. A new direction for the workers' movement, with clear aims, depends on the existence of local groups which cross the lines of party, occupation and social life/working life, and come together on the basis of the need to manage our own lives, collectively.

Part II

Before the war, conditions were quite different from what they have become since the scientific and technological revolution. The first world war and the economic depression, with its low wages and high unemployment, caused living standards to deteriorate; at the same time, industrial and political liberties were being destroyed. This was the period when the communist parties of the Third International became a major force in the workers' movement. Because their living standards were low, working people were more interested in the slogan of nationalisation than in control of their own workplaces; because of this and their lack of freedom, they easily tended to hand over the struggle to leaders and organisations of the Bolshevik kind, which acted, or claimed to act, on their behalf.

But today no mass revolutionary movement can or does exist under this kind of leadership. Self-management and socialist democracy were marginal issues before the war, but now they are indispensable in any revolutionary mobilisation. Self-management and socialist democracy are not only the essential basis for a future socialist society: they are also essential to the struggle here and now.

If we want further proof of this we need simply look at how the Russian Revolution has degenerated. If we want to avoid this kind of malignant bureaucratic growth, we have to guard against attempts by any organisation to substitute itself for the activity of the working people themselves.

The old kind of leadership is no longer enough to fight capitalism. This does not mean that capitalism has put an end to poverty. But the technological revolution and the improvement in education demands that a new revolutionary strategy should be worked out, and socialism brought up to date.

The same considerations also affect the underdeveloped countries. When a bureaucracy develops in a revolutionary society in the third world, it stifles all attempts to get out of the neo-colonial situation and develop the economy. Two classic examples of colonial revolution in the past generation have been Cuba and Algeria. In both these places, the workers for a time took the management of their activities into their own hands. (They proved the people wrong who say that self-management can't work in underdeveloped countries where workers are "backward"; besides which, the workers in underdeveloped countries often have traditional social institutions which can quite easily be adapted into systems of collective management.) But in both places those experiences have been aborted by a developing bureaucracy: Cuba is still plagued by all sorts of political and economic difficulties, and by its neo-colonial relationship with the Soviet Union; in Algeria too, both under Ben Bella's leadership and after his fall, the initiative of the masses was gradually stifled.

In the middle of a revolution, the armed struggle is the most important task; but even here the idea of self-determination for the masses should still be spread. It is an essential preparation for the country's struggle to develop away from its neo-colonial status once the revolution has been won.

In the East European countries dominated by the communist parties the crises get deeper and deeper. During the fifties the economy seemed to be fairly efficient, whatever the difficulties in production and distribution; the crises were mainly political. But in the last decade the bureaucracy has shown that it is incapable of running the economy. Investments yield less and less profit; the distortion between different branches of the economy gets bigger; productivity gets increasingly lower; the rate of growth in the USSR has fallen right off, and in Czechoslovakia there has been an actual fall in the amount of production. When these signs of economic crisis first appeared, most of the economists - and some party leaders - put the blame on over-centralised state planning. They tried to relax the tight control of state policy and, instead, to use the market - supply and demand - to regulate what was produced and what was consumed, and gave more independence to the firms.

But party leaders who backed these measures found themselves in conflict with the diehard conservative wing of the bureaucracy who wanted to retain their rigid control over the direction of the economy. And in this conflict, the supporters of the new system had no position of strength to argue their point from, since they had not bothered to rally the workers to their side - they were only interested in their own technocratic status. So the conflict between conservatives and reformers was "solved" with a compromise: reforms were put through here and there, but only at half-cock. So the economic crisis didn't go away, it simply sprang up again in new forms.

When the workers realised that the "reforms" had not achieved anything, they and the political militants closest to them began to look for other solutions. They came to realise that the bureaucracy didn't just stifle political expression, it stifled economic progress as well; that the "guardians" of socialism were, in fact, an obstacle on the road to socialism; that the only solution to the economic crisis lay in a socialist democracy, where the initiative of the working masses could be used in management. This is essentially what happened in Czechoslovakia, where the argument about economic reform went far beyond the discussion between conservative and liberal bureaucrats: it was taken up in practice by the working people, who set up workers' councils. This was the real reason for the intervention of Soviet troops, especially as the Soviet bureaucracy is under pressure inside the USSR because of the more and more alarming state of its own economy. This proves that Czechoslovakia was not an isolated case: the crisis is common to all the so-called "worker's states", and there is an emerging vanguard in eastern Europe which realises this.

The crisis of the so-called workers' states and the crisis of the capitalist countries are two aspects of the same crisis. In both societies there are organisations - unions, political parties, etc. - which claim to be workers' organisations. In both societies, these organisations want passive and obedient followers with all sense of initiative smothered. But in both societies, working people are questioning the right of these organisations to act in their place.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: THE FIGHT GOES ON

Interview with a Czech militant

The Czech militant interviewed below is Jan Sling (the son of Otto Sling, who was hung in the Slansky purge trials of 1952). Jan Sling was a member of the Czech CP from 1966 to April 1969. In January 1970 he was arrested for taking part in demonstrations against the Husak regime's political trials. In August 1971 the authorities asked him to leave the country. His commitment to the struggle did not stop there. He is one of the external members of the Czech opposition, supporting the major part of the opposition which is still inside Czechoslovakia, waging an ongoing battle for the anti-bureaucratic revolution and self-managed socialism, in the workplace and in general political activity.

1. What is the general situation in Czechoslovakia at the moment?

The background to the present situation is one of permanent economic and moral crisis. As far as the economic situation is concerned, the crisis is one of bad organisation and low productivity.

Salaries are based entirely on political considerations. The 'right' people, politically speaking, dominate. Directors of firms who have some technical ability and who protest are liable to get sacked. There have been close on 100,000 sackings since 1968.

Equipment is increasingly out of date and unproductive; although in terms of technology Czechoslovakia is an advanced country, this has only benefited its exports.

But low productivity is not simply the result of bad technical organisation. There is also an extremely low morale among the workers. Before 1968, in spite of all the mistakes and bureaucratic deformations, they felt that the factories were theirs. Now they realise that they are working for the Russians, and they no longer seek to use their spirit of initiative. And besides, their wages have been frozen.

2. What is the internal political situation in the regime?

There are internal conflicts within the bureaucracy. The principal conflict is between the ultra pro-Russians (the so-called 'ultra left') such as Bilak, and Husak's so-called 'moderate centre'. Moscow maintains its support for Husak,

but at the same time it encourages the conflict to ensure that Husak is dependent upon them. However, Moscow itself is not in unison on this issue, and Bilak's dogmatic wing is encouraged too, so that the conflict is preserved.

3. We have seen the political trials. Is this kind of repression still going on, and what are the responses to it?

Since 1969 there have been close on a thousand political trials. Some of those tried have been intellectuals, but these are the only ones which have publicised. The majority have been against workers' shop-floor delegates, representatives of workers' councils, etc..

International appeals and pressure are absolutely vital and necessary. Some of these comrades -- Sabata, Kyncel, Skutina, for example -- are very ill in prison and their lives are in danger.

4. Are these trials connected with an active internal opposition to the Husak regime?

There is continual resistance. The overwhelming part of it is communist and socialist. Only a minority of the resistance expresses itself publicly through petitions, etc. The major part is clandestine, using Samizdat-style tracts and newspapers. I must stress that most of the active opposition is inside the country and not outside.

As far as external organisations are concerned there is not a single fixed group, but left exiles are in permanent contact with each other. It is not necessary to create just another emigre organisation: our main concern is to struggle in Czechoslovakia. Some types of initiative that can be taken on the outside are very valuable: for example, the open letter which Jiri Pelikan wrote to Angela Davis, pointing out the links between the kind of oppression carried out by American and Soviet imperialisms. Secondly, we can stir up international pressure which, I repeat, is of the utmost importance -- we have, for example, launched an appeal against the imprisonment and ill-treatment of Sabata, Kyncel and Skutina. Thirdly, we wish to co-operate with as many left-wing organisations as possible. Perhaps we can give them a few lessons in unity.

5. The course of the political revolution in Czechoslovakia was blocked by the Russian invasion in August 1968. But in Poland, for example, the workers managed to dislodge Gomulka. What are your views on the revolution in the so-called "workers' states" of Eastern Europe?

The opposition in Poland and the East European countries is at different levels and to different degrees. Ultimately, our only hope lies in the general perspective of a united anti-stalinist opposition throughout the region. The common basis of this opposition is the fight for workers' power, for the direct organisation of production by the workers

themselves. That's what we mean by socialism. The power of decision must be taken from the hands of an elite and passed into the hands of the masses; truly democratic organs of government must replace the authority of the bureaucratic party.

6. Do you think that the 'leaders' of the Prague Spring, Dubcek and Smrkovsky, could be brought to trial?

The danger still exists. The regime intended to imprison our comrades but was stopped; this has been one of the main successes of the left-wing solidarity with our fight. The Prague regime decided that to arrest these communist leaders would create a bad impression abroad.

But these men personify the 1968 movement precisely because they have not abandoned their political position and because they still refuse to make the least compromise or self-criticism. They are still a threat to the stalinist leadership. If the left's international solidarity and support wanes, the future of these comrades is pretty grim.

7. What kind of programme, in your opinion, should the resistance work out?

All the opposition programmes ought to include these three points: (a.) Political and economic decision-making must be placed in the hands of democratically elected bodies such as workers' councils, parliament, etc.. The government must be answerable to democratically elected institutions and not to the party bureaucracy. (b.) Reform of the political structures implies a multi-party system based on social ownership of the means of production. Parties and workers' organisations will represent the various group interests in the socialist society. No party will have a monopoly of power, because power must rest with the people. An important way of ensuring this is the development of workers' councils as organs of direct democracy in the economic and political sphere.

8. Don't you think it's important for at least a section of this unified anti-stalinist opposition to explicitly call itself communist so that the word 'communist' should not become synonymous with bureaucracy and repression?

One of the consequences of stalinism has been the identification of communism with bureaucracy and repression. But stalinism was a distortion of the communist idea; those who oppose the return of stalinism in Czechoslovakia as the communists they are, are in fact underlining the aims of communism as it was originally conceived.

The communist opposition in Czechoslovakia is based on the extraordinary 14th Party Congress held in August 1968 in Prague, and on the action programme of the Czech communist party. It is absolutely clear,

throughout all these documents and all the activities of the socialist opposition, that the aim is to establish a socialist society as outlined in my answer to the previous question.

9. What is the social nature of the bureaucracy? Can it be described as a social class, when we remember how the 'Prague Spring' opened up distinctions within the bureaucracy?

The bureaucracy has, over the years, established itself as an independent social class. It has occupied all the key positions of power in society; but with time distinctions began to open up, and one part took up reform positions in 1968. One of the main jobs of the Husak regime has been to consolidate the bureaucracy as the supreme social grouping, absolutely independent of the elected organs of the state and party. While the bureaucracy in the 1960s were the children of workers or intellectuals, most of them now are the children of bureaucrats, with a distinct class consciousness. They know that if a change comes about they will lose their position, and consequently they are a conservative force which the government can rely on.

10. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia it became clearer than ever that the key to the anti-bureaucratic revolution is in the USSR. How would you analyse the development of the political situation in the USSR, with regard to the 'democratic opposition' and the recent shifts within the bureaucracy?

August 1968 proved that changes in Eastern Europe are impossible without the Soviet Union. Even so, there have still been minor shifts in the single-party system in Poland and Hungary; but these changes cannot replace stalinism, they can only improve it. If we want a real socialist society, this implies basic structural changes in the system; 1968 in Czechoslovakia showed that it is impossible for one country to make it on its own.

The Soviet Union has big problems -- economic stagnation, the loss of initiative in foreign policy, problems with non-Russian minorities, and many other difficulties. All this poses the need for a structural reform of the base of its society. I believe that this is what the Soviet opposition represents.

AN APPEAL AGAINST THE REPRESSION IN PRAGUE
FOR A FREE AND SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In Prague order and silence reigns. The Czechoslovak peoples pay for their adhesion to 'socialism with a human face' by a political repression proposed and supported by armed external intervention. Their legal

representatives have been eliminated; their CP purged of its true sons; their trade unions, workers' councils, cultural and popular organisations dismantled; and all intellectual life suppressed by an implacable censure.

Those who, despite all odds, continue a courageous struggle, are exposed or have already been victims of police persecution, of organised accusation, of physical and moral humiliation by political trials and imprisonment.

This regime, being alien to the principles of the Soviet revolution of 1917, has nothing to do with socialism, which presupposes a free and conscientious participation of the masses and individuals in the creation of their future. Moreover the regime has arrogated to itself the name of Socialism, thus putting doubt and discredit on the hopes which have inspired men throughout the world, thereby giving an easy, but unjustified alibi, to the defenders of the 'free world' with their system of exploitation, oppression and war.

If there is a major reason for us to show our solidarity with the people and socialist forces of Czechoslovakia, it is precisely because of the indivisible struggle we are leading against imperialism and for socialism.

We -- trade unionists, socialists, communists, progressives of all tendencies -- let us appeal to workers and democratic public opinion. Let us prevent the conspiracy of silence and the isolation of the Czechoslovak comrades. Let us support the efforts of the 'International Jury Against the New Trials in Prague' which has just begun.

- Demand the freeing of the imprisoned democrats and the respect of Czechoslovak legality.
- Demand the restoration of sovereignty and self-determination for the Czechoslovakian people.

It is necessary to act, here and everywhere, so as not to abandon the Czechoslovakian people and their representatives to bureaucratic repression, and to defend the ideal of real socialism.

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SOUTH AFRICA: ASSESSING THE STRIKES

By SOL

The significance of the strike-wave which has rocked the semi-fascist SA regime must be sought in the totality of the Southern African context. For SA is more than a trading partner, more than a lucrative investment outlet; it is the economic giant and major military power on the African

continent, and serves Imperialism as a main base for economic expansion on that continent. Imperialism's neo-colonialist involvement in Africa depends ultimately upon capitalism remaining firmly in the saddle in the white-dominated South. International capitalism needs more than the raw materials and economic wealth of Africa; it needs Africa's political allegiance in the global conflict with socialism, a conflict made no less crucial by the current rapprochement between Washington, Peking and the Kremlin. Today all of Southern Africa is ablaze with maturing guerilla struggles in Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia; while forces in Namibia, and the ex-protectorates are all challenging the continued domination of the white supremacists. This cordon sanitaire, so carefully constructed around the main imperialist base, is today facing a challenge of unprecedented proportions, which signifies a qualitative change in the political condition of the oppressed black majority and heralds the opening of a new period of struggle. The crisis rending Southern Africa is a crisis of rulership; the entire system is at stake. A socialist base in South Africa could provide the necessary social, political and economic support for all the embryonic socialist forces struggling against the neo-colonialist puppet regimes that imperialism planted in Africa when it 'granted' "independence". Despite the very significant progress made by those liberation forces now battling in imperialism's cordon sanitaire, the final blow will have to be struck inside the heart of the bastion itself. When the workers of South Africa initiated their recent (and on-going) strike action they not only flexed the muscles of that mighty proletariat, they also exacerbated the internal conflict in the ruling class, a conflict which, while it is not without its effects upon the workers of South Africa, is NOT a conflict in which they should become embroiled. The broader interests of international finance capital are today at variance with the narrow sectional class interests of the fascist wing of the South African government which represents a combination of local capital in the service of white supremacy and the racist white electorate, comprising the white workers in the main, bolstered by various petty bourgeois and middle class elements. It has long been the basic difference between these two fundamentally different political forces that has bedevilled the South African liberation movement. One struggle is that of the oppressed and exploited black majority seeking liberation from white domination and class exploitation, a struggle which must identify as its enemy not only the apartheid regime as represented by Vorster today but also the capitalist regime on which it rests, along with all its international imperialist class allies. The other struggle is one of sectional class interests between the white-supremacist extremists (who employ fascistic methods of rule) and the 'enlightened' interests of international and local finance capital who are willing to sacrifice what they call 'petty apartheid' in their attempt to rationalise the economic system for greater durability and sustained exploitation of both labor and capital resources, and who are therefore prepared to grant some political concessions to the black middle classes in a bid to head off the more basic conflict of the workers and peasants against the very capitalist system itself.

Let's set aside the minor detail of percentage wage increases (so obviously inadequate), set aside the name-calling of individual foreign investors and their hypocritical rationalisations about not knowing that their profits were derived from super-exploitation, set aside too the

antics of the liberal conscience with its crocodile tears shed for workers 6000 miles away while they remain blind to the exploitation on their own door-step.

From the Durban docks, a traditional centre of labour unrest (1500 workers dismissed in 1969; 2000 strikers out in Oct. 1972) the recent strike spread to a nearby brick works, then suddenly spread to various factories, expanded to encompass municipal workers, then leapt the city boundaries and finally encompassed the entire Durban-Pinetown-Hammarsdale industrial complex (the industrial heart of Natal). Labour unrest built up to a crescendo, reaching 100,000 workers out at its height. The strikes then spread into other major cities -- Johannesburg, Pretoria, etc. Workers in every conceivable employment were involved, except notably on the MINES. The strikes were more widespread than at any previous time in South African history. The determination of the strikers was without precedent. Their mood was without parallel, their militancy undeniable, their internal dynamism and degree of popular support (from the other black oppressed) without equal in South African history. For all these reasons the strikes continue in various places, flaring now here, now there, but the crest of the wave, which reached general strike proportions in the province of Natal, is over. South African labour relations can never be quite the same. Who are these workers who defy the might of the fascist state? What is their character? What is their social weight? What were the causes of this wave of strikes in the absence of trade unions and workers' organisations of any politically significant type?

The vast majority of the workers involved were MIGRATORY LABOURERS, mostly unskilled workers drawn in the main from the Bantustan of KwaZulu - a vast labour reserve on the rural outskirts of Natal. The wages they earn are barely sufficient to keep themselves alive, and leave very little if any money available to send back to their families in the Bantustan. These migrant labourers are indeed the prisoners of starvation, the wretched of the earth. They are constantly aware that for every job available, there are countless numbers of fellow labourers willing to work at whatever wages are offered, for those wages make the difference between death through starvation and their alternative of at least a partially satiated hunger. Yet in the face of all this the strike reached mammoth proportions. The immediate causes of the strike were variously given by some workers as the rise in transport costs, or the rise in food prices, etc. which indeed expresses the hub of the issue. The ever rising cost of living, the spiralling inflation that is endemic in the SA economy, has meant that those who came to work to earn enough to live on found their wages could not purchase even their meagre subsistence.

Not only were the capitalists raking off the super-profits of the workers' surplus-labour, they were not even paying enough to replace the labourer himself. With this overall picture must be combined the effects of one of the worst droughts even to cripple agriculture in South Africa, which meant not only a failed harvest (however meagre for the peasant-farmer), but also little seasonal employment for the migrant farm-labourers. It finally pushed the labourers into taking the one action that risked everything -- their jobs, the full repression of the fascist state -- and yet this was their only way of demonstrating the extremes of their plight, for by withholding their labour

they hoped to win some concessions. It was this elemental nature of the strikes that gave it the character of a brush fire. Yet no sooner had this happened, than the strikes changed in their character. Heartened by their numbers, sensing the popularity of their action among their fellow oppressed, the workers took courage and added another dimension to their action -- the public demonstration and street marches. These were once familiar political forms before the liberation organisations were banned or smashed. It was at this juncture that the police put a very firm brake upon the snow-balling political actions: street marches were dispersed, meetings were broken up, spokesmen were arrested. The police read the level of political consciousness fairly accurately and in their knowledge of the lack of organisation and absence of acknowledged leadership, they allowed the potentially explosive content to disperse itself. The authorities did not have to break the strikes: the one overriding factor that caused it, hunger, was also to break the strike. None of the workers could survive without pay, food, and the knowledge that tomorrow would be better than today. There was desperation but there was no co-ordinated action to lead the workers forward. This left them no choice but to accept the meagre concessions offered to them by an alarmed industry. The workers recognised their own weaknesses.

The first punitive actions taken by the authorities and Police came when strike action threatened any vital or essential industry or public service. For example, the authorities all combined to break the municipal workers' strike and force them back to work, for they could have paralysed the city. Similarly the authorities combined to bring a speedy end to the dock strike at the vital aluminium works at Richards Bay. Pay offers were combined with the ultimate threat of police action and mass dismissal and repatriation to the reserves. No unorganised force could withstand such a combined effort of all elements that comprise the fascist state machine. It should be recalled too that as soon as the workers conceived of the traditional sticks they carried as possible weapons, that is, when they threatened to use them against the police, they were forcibly disarmed. Finally, the numerical strength of the strikers was concentrated in pockets, although in overall effect it gave the appearance of general strike proportions in one province. The strikes had spread from one factory to the next where such factories were concentrated in streets or districts, for they spread by example. It should not be forgotten that the strikers were beginning to realise that to be effective at all it was their numbers that counted. To this end they went from one factory to the next calling their fellow workers out on strike. Significant too were the meetings of solidarity that were held in the townships, locations and most important in the rural reserves. But just as this element was beginning to grow in significance it was brought to a halt for it represented the expansion of the strike into political fields of activity. Hastily the Bantustan authorities tried to intervene as spokesmen for the workers in the towns and for the vast reservoir of unemployed in the rural districts. Such an alliance-in-action between the urban worker, the migrant labourer and the land-less peasant could have signalled the birth of a force the authorities could not hope to defeat by simply outflanking them. The South African workers have learnt from past experience that to withdraw into the reserves is to abandon their stranglehold on the towns.

Over the ten long years when all liberation organisations were outlawed

and circumscribed a heavy toll was taken of the militant forces. A whole new generation has come to maturity since then. The experience of the old combined with the enthusiasm and determination of the new forces (which have learnt how to live under fascist conditions) can only bear fruit after many mass activities of the nature we have just witnessed. In the countryside the landless peasantry (who are also the migratory labourers of the urban areas) have learnt new methods of organisation and have developed a greater degree of combativity than we have seen in the towns. However it is significant that the strikers were wary and refused to elect spokesmen to negotiate wage concessions when the authorities called for 'leaders' with whom they could speak. It is significant that the workers turned their backs upon the white trade unions and the government sponsored works committees and demanded instead that wage negotiations be conducted before the entire labour force on strike and in the absence of the ever-watching police forces. But although this showed great advancement it also reflected the basic lack of independent organisation. Industries built on foreign investment were the most exposed by the strike because the workers' actions could be tolerated longer in this sphere than in essential local industries and public services, and they have joined their voices to that of the white trade unions in demanding the creation of black trade unions. So far the workers have shown a remarkable independence in recognising that such unions are no more than show pieces, for they will not be allowed to engage in collective bargaining, recognising that these unions will serve as brake upon their actions by containing them within the system. Already the Government has legislated to create bogus workers' committees, and no doubt some form of compromise may be arrived at over controlled trade union activity.

It is precisely here that the basic weakness lies. The workers came out in mass strike but they did not act with any appreciable degree of class consciousness. This is not surprising remembering the fascist conditions that pertain in South Africa; but it is vital that the potential strength of the black workers is not confused with the real position as it is today. This potential will be realised only when a degree of organisation and co-ordination is achieved INDEPENDENT of any government created machinery and the white trade unions. Such independent workers' organisations must take on a clear political character from the very outset. The State will not concede any such demand. Such organisations will only grow out of the struggle for liberation itself. The fragmented underground political cells that exist inside South Africa must take on a new form of combativity to meet the requirements of the awakening consciousness of the workers and landless peasantry. The political organisations that are mushrooming among the oppressed during this period of ferment must be employed as a springboard, and everything must be done to pin this springboard firmly among the masses. The oppressed have discovered that the mighty white giant has clay feet. But the fascist system in South Africa will not give way with the first push it receives.

Although it is rent by its own internal economic, political and social contradictions and is under pressure from its international underwriters to make concessions which could shore up the faltering system, it will not voluntarily concede anything of significance. Percentage increases in the wage packets of the black workers will buy the fascists extra time and the cost will be borne by the finance-capital underwriters of the apartheid

system. Changes will be made only in order that the system remain the same. Undoubtedly there are certain sections among the international-underwriters who seem quite willing (verbally at least) to dismantle certain sections of the fascist superstructure and bring it in line with a more rationalised economic base, and who are thus prepared to consider concessions in the social, educational and vocational fields that this requires. Such changes are NOT BASIC or fundamental to even the apartheid system, let alone the capitalist economy, and such promises are made without reckoning with the white electorate who put the Vorster regime in power. Fortunately the black majority are NOT deceived by this. They have lived all their lives outside the body politic; and being outside, they measure the system in more concrete terms than do those who are ensnared in its ideological trappings. The oppressed black majority in South Africa are in an almost classic colonial relationship to their own ruling class and view all events from this position. From that vantage point the antics of the British investors appear for what they are: manoeuvrings by the imperialist partners of the local white dictators. Certainly there are secondary differences among these partners over how the lucrative business of 'Apartheid Super-Profits Incorporated,' should be made. The oppressed should recognise and exploit those differences but they are not for one moment forget that both partners are the class enemy.

Because the apartheid system is so closely inter-linked with the British economy and international capitalism in general, it is necessary that we indicate the nature of this relationship and why they are putting the pressure on. The economic and political pressure that Britain and other capitalist countries with heavy investment in South Africa is today bringing to bear on the Vorster apartheid regime is a direct consequence of the economic difficulties in these imperial countries. The anti-apartheid cover with which this is being so conveniently cloaked, giving rise to some of the most shameless humbug and unparallelled hypocrisy since the liberals launched the campaign to abolish slavery over a century ago, should in no way blind us to the crucial economic issues at stake.

Here we need only recall that there are over 500 British companies in South Africa providing more than 60% of that country's foreign investment valued at over £2000 m earning an average return of 12% per annum, to appreciate the enormity of the British stake in the Apartheid system. But it is not all: by 1968 SA's balance of payments deficit partly financed by the inflow of foreign capital, but such capital by 1968 SA was reporting R844 million in foreign holdings by West European countries (EEC) outside the sterling Area, while the US holds over 15% of the total foreign investments. Not only is SA's balance of payments deficit partly financed by the inflow of foreign capital, but such capital by 1970 was financing nearly 15% of all domestic investment in SA. The continued flow of foreign investment is crucial to SA economy. Capital imports finance the irreplaceable imports of crucial manufactured goods, especially machinery. Despite SA's policy of rapid and forced industrialisation and deliberate import-substitution to lessen her dependence upon overseas trade, she is still NOT a fully industrialised country and her exports remain the traditional colonial ones of raw materials and food. By 1968 it was the EEC countries that had replaced Britain as the main source of SA imports: diversification of SA's primary investment with the entire capitalist world has only made her dependence more irreversible. Even before Britain entered the

EEC there was already a large switch from her investment in the sterling area to investment in Europe. New direct investment by British companies in SA fell from more than £ 50m in 1970 to £21.3m in 1971, while Britain's direct investment in the EEC rose from £70.9m to £244m in the same period. To this we need only add that since the renewed dollar crisis which plunged the entire capitalist money order into disarray, the South African Rand (traditionally part of the sterling area) has linked itself to the £ and it becomes clear that the vicissitudes of the entire capitalist world have its effects upon SA. A situation, we may add, that the oppressed black majority is only beginning to be aware of. But when the British establishment press crusades against apartheid in SA they add to the consciousness of the oppressed in spite of them selves. Just as the strike action by the Swedish dockers made the SA stevedores aware of the value of international labour solidarity.

Birmingham Conference on Women's Liberation and Socialism

On March 17th and 18th 300 women attended a conference for socialists in the British Women's Liberation Movement called by a group of non-aligned Marxist women in the Birmingham Women's liberation group. The themes of the conference were " Developing a Strategy for Revolutionary Socialists in the Women's Movement" and "Capitalism, Sexism and the Family"

The conference showed very clearly both the strengths and the weaknesses of the socialist current within the women's liberation movement; strengths because the discussion was remarkably unsectarian; weaknesses because it became obvious by the end of the weekend that socialists in the movement are still very far from an agreed analysis of the specific character of women's oppression and are consequently unable to work out an adequate strategy for changing it.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the weekend was to demonstrate that socialists in the women's movement can be sisters even if they disagree and even if they have to show a good deal of mutual forbearance. However most of us are still too unsure of the theoretical ground we stand on to see whether our sisterhood will stand the test of deeply felt disagreement over such issues as the economic function of housewives, the place and character of domestic labour in the total productive cycle and whether it is important to try to reach housewives and help them organise, or whether, because housewives are isolated, we ought to concentrate on women who work outside the home. There were also many questions raised about whether the four demands articulated three years ago - Equal pay, Equal education and job opportunities, 24 hour child-care facilities, Free contraception and freedom to choose abortion - are 'reformist' or together make up 'key areas of struggle' to take the movement forward.

The most fully aired disagreements at the weekend were probably over those arising from the discussion on Saturday of Maria Rosa Dalla Costa's article in the pamphlet 'The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community' (Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1972) This raised important theoretical and practical issues about the status of housework done in the home in the economic reproduction of the labour force and the relationship between 'reproduction' and 'production' in the whole productive cycle. It also raises anew the whole

question of the relationship between 'infrastructure' and 'superstructure'. It is often argued that the family as an institution is an element of the 'superstructure', part of the 'ideological sphere' and 'superstructure'. It is often argued that the family as an institution is an element of the superstructure, part of the 'ideological sphere', whereas the work of Margaret Benston, Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, Selma James and others suggests that the material basis for the specific oppression and exploitation of women as a group different from other groups, rests on the material contribution they make to capital in producing and reproducing the labour force. There were also deep disagreements about the demands that ought to be posed in relation to housework - 'wages for housework' being posed against 'socialisation of housework'. A lot of work still has to be done to decide whether these are indeed contradictory or complementary demands appropriate to different stages and aspects of women's struggle against their isolated and unpaid labour in the home.

On Saturday was also discussed a critique by Ros Delmar of Engels' Origin of the Family'. She felt that Engels work was too narrowly based on an economic evolutionist position and tended to ignore the importance of ideology (especially psychology) as a force in itself. The issues here also remained unresolved by the discussion.

On Sunday morning various women from existing left political groups discussed the difficulties of their position in the women's movement and the way it affected their work in their own groups and the working class movement because of the sexism that still exists among male militants and revolutionaries, (there were women from 2 different Maoist groups, IS, IMG, and the Communist Party, those from the two latter were the most open).

Sunday afternoon began with a discussion of problems relating to a strategy towards the family and passed on to consider the possibilities of a continuing association between women who are socialists in the women's movement. It was impossible to consider a structured form of association because there were so many different tendencies and groups represented.