

RTL-Redraft of first seven paragraphs

We are confronted by a seemingly paradoxical situation. The RCLB is in crisis. It is floundering, attempting to establish itself on a new footing. There is a danger of disintegration, if not liquidationism. Yet the situation for revolutionaries in Britain is excellent. Lenin and Stalin showed decisively how the imperialist chain snaps at its weakest links. From this we can deduce (and this is borne out by practice) that revolutionary opportunities occur, not only in places where imperialism is weakest, but at times when it is weakest, in periods of crisis, not boom.

This analysis is amply borne out by the situation in Britain today. The "you've never had it so good" boom is now nothing but a dim and receding memory. Britain has been worse hit than most of the major imperialist countries by the general crisis of imperialism; this is the result of a cumulative relative decline going back a long way. Industrial heartlands like the West Midlands are consequently becoming unemployment blackspots. Indeed, the effects of this crisis are so deep and far reaching that Britain's post-war social-democratic consensus is collapsing. The capitalist class has launched an economic and political assault on the working class and oppressed, an assault which is leading inevitably to fascism and/or war.

The Spirit of the Age

British imperialism's crisis is intimately connected with the general crisis of world imperialism. This crisis is not merely another cyclical one; it is structural-an earthquake is taking place in the Third World which is shaking all the old power and economic relations in the world. The Second World imperialist countries are caught in a squeeze between the rising movements for national independence and liberation and the two imperialist superpowers, who seek to dominate the entire globe. As imperialists, ~~the~~ Britain and other Second World imperialist powers cannot choose to align themselves with the very forces which most fundamentally challenge the whole imperialist order, nor do they find it easy to maintain any room for manoeuvre between the superpowers. The western powers are therefore increasingly closing ranks with US imperialism (albeit on a less unequal basis than during the immediate post-WW2 period), in order to contend with the Soviet social-imperialists and to oppose the Third World countries' struggles for independence and development and the people's struggles for democracy, liberation and socialism.

Against the forces of reaction stand the peoples of the world. Their struggle is stamped with the identity of the working class as the only class able to gather around itself the rest of the working masses in their struggle for self-assertion. There is a new spirit abroad; the spirit of the age is one of rebellion and self-assertion.

The main forces in the world challenging the imperialist system are the national liberation movements. British imperialism has suffered many blows at their hands, so that its ability to overcome domestic problems (through colonial exploitation is being steadily reduced. Its very existence is now coming under threat:

- a). In the Third World, British imperialism is losing ground to the rising forces of independence and liberation, and to imperialist rivals.
- b). The Irish national liberation struggle has inflicted successive defeats on British imperialism, especially in the last few years. This threatens the whole political order in Britain
- c). There is a sizeable number of national minority people in Britain, largely of ~~native~~ Third World origin. Not only were they nationally oppressed in their countries of origin, but they face continuing national oppression in Britain, particularly the black and Irish national minorities. These national minority peoples are overwhelmingly working class, so that even the national struggles of the peoples as a whole have a strong proletarian tinge to them. The national minority peoples strongly identify with the struggles for self-assertion of the oppressed peoples and nations and have few illusions about the nature of British

imperialism. The black and Irish working class, suffering as they do a double oppression-class and national, constitute a potent revolutionary vanguard force within both the national minority communities and the working class as a whole.

d). As British imperialism's power crumbles, it is desperately trying to revive its strength by intensified exploitation within Britain, which in turn necessitates increased repression. The hold of opportunism on the majority working class is weakening, and its most oppressed elements are beginning to break loose and make common cause with British imperialism's other victims.

These factors combined mean that we are at the beginning of a period of sharpening class and national struggle within the imperialist heartland.

Defend Democratic Rights!

For British imperialism, even mere survival necessitates the pauperisation of the working class, and not only the suppression of resistance, but its ~~pre-emption~~ pre-emption, as far as possible. It must combine economic and political terrorism, and so attempt to deny the oppressed the power to resist even as it perpetrates the robbery that calls forth the impulse to resist.

At present, Thatcherism best meets British imperialism's needs. The bourgeoisie seeks to drive down the value of labour power in Britain to levels where-given Britain's relative technological advantage over the Third World, costs of production comparable to those in the dependent industrialized countries of the Third World can be reproduced in Britain itself, and rates of profit kept up; at the same time, massively increased state racism and chauvinism are used to keep the national minorities in a relatively super-exploited position and stir up a nationalist "consensus" behind the conquest of world markets; all this amounting to creating a south Korean situation within the British state itself, transplanting into the metropolis also the pauperisation which had been pushed into the Third World.

The trend towards fascism involves both an ideological offensive by the bourgeoisie and an attack on existing bourgeois democratic rights. To carry this through, Thatcher does not need to score a victory over the established labour movement, since the latter's mode of operation has long been within the boundaries defined by the capitalist system, and it has anticipated the bourgeoisie's offensive by defeating itself. A struggle for democratic rights is needed of a kind^{or} which the established labour movement has no equipment. An understanding of the tasks and methods for achieving those tasks will not arise spontaneously, but can only be injected from outside.

Purely economic struggle could never take the working class beyond the confines of the capitalist system, but with the structural crisis of world imperialism, the main form of class struggle is on a new, increasingly political basis. In the context of the trend towards fascism, there can be no going back to an imperialist "golden age" of domestic stability and growing prosperity, an order which rested upon the exploitation and oppression of the Third World; the key task is to unfold a struggle for democracy of a superior, forward-looking character. This struggle involves the tenacious defence of the existing bourgeois democratic rights which the oppressed can use to their own advantage; at the same time, it means building the alternative ideology of struggle, self-reliance and independence and the alternative nuclei in the political field of a new people's democracy.

There is a growing potential for real changes in the majority working class, and the national minorities can introduce and are introducing a new philosophy of struggle which readily appeals to all that is healthiest in that majority. During the boom years, they "never had it so good" anyway, and their experience has been that of a long struggle against racism and super-exploitation. For the most part, their demands are not formally socialist in character, but, being directly linked with the world-wide movement of the Third World, they are essentially democratic demands which look forward to the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism.

In the life and death struggle against the British imperialist offensive, the working class cannot begin to make real progress unless it takes the first steps towards constituting itself as a class for itself, with conscious-

ness of its role within the world system of production.

But the "labour movement" and "left" in this country almost invariably failed to try to develop this consciousness. Overwhelmingly, they have accepted the logic of imperialism; while the labour aristocracy has been fully integrated into the imperialist exploitative system and worked heart and soul to promote it, even the "left wing" forces, whether the CPGB during the inter-war period, or the petty bourgeois "socialist" trends which developed in the post-World War II boom, never fundamentally broke with the perspective of "class struggle" as a tit for tat between the metropolitan proletariat and bourgeoisie for the sharing out (or perhaps, "revolutionary seizure") of a cake which was really the produce of the Third World toilers. Given this perspective, a really revolutionary movement could not be advanced one iota.

The current crisis has thrown the organized "working class movement" ranging from the trade union bureaucracy to the petty-bourgeois "socialists" into panic and disarray; it is the crisis of a world system which they are either integrated into or at best have no critical understanding of. But, at the same time, the crisis has created the basis for the first real, fundamental change towards a revolutionary movement, because the struggling national forces within the British state in their consciousness and in their practice are exposing in a crystal clear way the realities of the world system and of the bourgeois order in Britain.

Continue with RTL section on "Newly Emerging Forces."

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