

opinions

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people to wish for intervention regardless of the fact that it will come via US planes.

But there is an answer--and the elections in Serbia pointed to it. The hundreds of thousands who flocked to Panic's rallies in Belgrade did so because they wanted the war over. The 100,000 Serbs who have dodged the draft testify to the same feeling. Panic and his sponsor Kopic are themselves unscrupulous politicians. But they know hundreds of thousands of people are desperate for peace.

It is these masses alone who can stop the fighting.

Peace cannot be imposed by force from outside. It cannot be brokered by Western powers pursuing their own ends. None of these will address the economic collapse that preceded the war and has been completed by it.

None will cut through the hate that now exists.

Only the mass of ordinary people can stop the war as they grow sick of its consequences and realize their true interests lie in unity against the rulers that have used them. *Even the most rampant nationalism can give way to simple solidarity.*

The soldiers of the First World War saw that each Christmas in the trenches. And they saw it most gloriously in the revolts that ended the war.

Paula Cornwall
International Socialists

When apathy turns to anger

Many people despair of achieving socialism because they believe that

workers are too passive and apathetic to ever fight for real change. On the face of things there seems to be plenty of evidence to confirm this pessimistic prediction. For example, in the recent American election it was considered a great triumph when 54% of the electorate cast votes. Usually only about 50% of the population vote in presidential elections. How can you expect workers to transform society, the pessimists argue, if they are so apathetic that they do not even bother to vote? This argument is mistaken on a number of counts.

First it is dangerous to generalize from voter behaviour to what people might do in other circumstances. Voting in elections under capitalism is a profoundly passive exercise. Workers are not asked to decide on things that really matter to them - whether they have work, proper housing and health care, how to distribute society's wealth and so on.

Instead they are asked to choose between politicians who, regardless of their political stripes, cater to the interests of the wealthy and powerful. It is hardly surprising to find wide spread cynicism and apathy among workers regarding the political process. But there is a more important reason why such generalizations about workers' apathy are mistaken.

The dictionary defines apathy as indifference and indolence. But the majority of workers are not indifferent about the conditions of their lives. They may lack a sense of confidence that they can actually change their lives for the better. But that is

far from a permanent condition. Apathy can turn to anger very rapidly. We need to ask what causes this sense of powerlessness among workers and how can it be overcome?

Marx traced the apathy and alienation experienced under capitalism to what goes on in the workplace. The majority of workers have no control and very little autonomy at work. Marx pointed out that workers control neither the labour process itself, the things their labour produces nor their relations with other workers. Such conditions are bound to produce a deep sense of alienation and lack of control over the central activity which dominates people's lives.

Nor do workers leave these feelings of powerlessness behind when they leave work. People carry the experience of alienation with them into their social and family lives. These feelings can erupt into acts of blind violence in the home or even in mental breakdown. Most often they simply breed a sense of hopelessness and lack of confidence in the possibility that life could be better.

If this was the end of the story the pessimists would surely have a point. But as much as Marx recognized the reality of alienation he also saw that workers could overcome it through their own activity.

Capitalism dominates workers' lives. But workers are also forced to fight their bosses in order to hold onto what they have won in the past. Usually the class struggle between workers and capitalists can be kept within manageable bounds, providing bosses are willing to grant occasional concessions on wages and working conditions. But capitalism is also a system which breeds economic crises.

When profits are falling bosses are less willing to grant concessions. In fact, they often want workers to make concessions. They will demand that workers take lower wages and that governments spend less on social serv-

ices. They will try to turn the screw one extra turn in the hope that their profit levels will revive. But that extra turn of the screw can produce an explosion of anger among workers.

The class struggle then spills out into the open and workers begin to connect their own fight with that of other workers hundreds of miles away. What seemed impossible only days before - that workers share a common struggle - now becomes the common sense of millions. In moments like this, when masses of workers are thrown into struggle, they begin to change not just their circumstances but themselves. With each victory against their bosses they gain a new confidence in their own ability to take control of their lives.

All great revolutions have usually begun with struggles over some apparently minor aspect of life. In the Russian Revolution it was the price of bread which sparked demonstrations which eventually lead to the seizure of power by workers. There is strong evidence that we are entering a period which will see much greater levels of class struggle than in the recent past. Capitalism is caught in an intractable crisis from which there is little likelihood it can escape in a short term. In countries like Italy, Greece and Britain, workers have already been forced into struggle on a scale not seen in twenty years. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, many have lost faith in the ability of workers to change the world. A huge political vacuum has opened up as traditional working class parties have abandoned the ideas of socialism. In the great battles that lie ahead, that vacuum can be filled by the forces of the right. But it need not be if enough socialists remember that workers are not merely passive pawns in a game controlled from above. As apathy turns to anger and anger to action, those pessimists who crow about workers' apathy today may be forced to eat crow tomorrow.

Colin Moores, International Socialists

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The Canadians appeared to have a superior depth of analysis. "I believe this is principally because of our own experience with the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement," said Alex Boston, an Education/International Development student at Dalhousie, "but it may also suggest that Canada's education system is superior, especially when compared to that of the US. Our system is more public than the American one, but is threatened by the trend towards privatization inherent in NAFTA."

The Americans, for their part, appeared to be steering away from their imperialist past. But the task was not always easy - it would not have been for anyone. In plenary, one American recommended that we richer countries in the North buy fax machines for our brothers and sisters in the South. His remarks were translated, and a Mexican student replied, "if you like, we can give you the number."

Unfortunately, there was not a lot of cross-cultural dialogue. Due to the

large number of delegates (150), nametags were supplied. But there was no formal introduction where everybody was introduced. Being able to communicate in Spanish, I spent most of my time talking to Mexican youth. I was told the Mexicans had had an organizational meeting, with almost everybody in attendance, at 1:30 am Saturday morning. I only learned about that because someone happened to mention it. This is an example of the haphazard communication between the youth of our three countries.

The Mexicans met at 1:30 am while we slept. We met at 8:00 am while they slept. Over half of the American and Canadian delegates were vegetarians; two Mexicans were. People of different cultures have different ways of doing things. It was a good first meeting, but we must be careful not to step on each other's toes. I was impressed by the dedication of several people at the meeting. We have formed a continental youth network.