

RIOTS AGAINST IMF

AUSTERITY

There was hardly a month in 1983 when the rulers of several 'third world' countries weren't to be seen jetting around the globe in increasingly desperate attempts to raise money to help pay off their massive debts and to borrow even more to prevent their collapsing economies going immediately to the wall. As the year wore on with a series of re-scheduling of debts we were regaled with the sight of the IMF and the World Bank imposing conditions on their debtors of extreme economic stringency. The bourgeoisies of these nations were faced with the task of even further reducing the living standards of their poverty-stricken peoples to a level which would lead to social and political unrest.

The effects of the crisis of capitalism on the industrialised nations have been massive lay-offs, wage freezes and a general fall in the living standards of the working class. In the poverty-stricken marginal areas of world capitalism where the economies are at best only kept ticking over thanks to massive transfusions of capital the effect has been catastrophic. In areas where the majority of the population are living on or below starvation level, any further collapse means real starvation and death. When the bourgeois press presents us with images of starving children and statistics which show that people are dying in their hundreds every minute they fail to tell us that this is the reality and consequence of the capitalist crisis as it affects millions on the periphery of capitalism's world empire.

Thus the populations of these areas had no recourse but to fight back against the imposition of brutal IMF-inspired cuts and towards the end of the year the press was full of news of riots throughout the third world.

In Tunisia the government raised basic food prices and the price of petrol, setting off a wave of rioting which only ceased when Bourgiba managed to divert the peoples anger with the sacking of the minister responsible for imposing the rises. In neighbouring Morocco the same sort of increases in basic foodstuffs at the end of 1983 sparked off riots in Tetuan where 100 people were killed after 5000 troops surrounded the town. The rioting spread quickly to other cities in a country where 40% of the population lives permanently below the poverty line. In early 1984 the cities of Marrakesh, Agadir, Casablanca and Rabat saw violent rioting and looting which forced King Hassan to cancel the price rises for the moment.

Over on the other side of Africa the Sudan had, during 1983 been subjected to a succession of riots, army rebellions and massacres with open rebellion in the south of the country in the wake of the removal of subsidies on petrol and sugar ordered by the IMF.

But the effects of the IMF tactics were not found only in Africa. They were to be duplicated throughout the third world and especially spectacularly in that most debt ridden of continents - South America. In Surinam the I.M.F. demanded price and tax

increases of the leftist junta, despite the fact that similar actions in 1982 had led to huge strikes among the miners and the execution of many opposition figures. This time around 5000 employees of the Bauxite mines, who produce over 80% of Surinam's foreign earnings, struck in protest and occupied the mines. The government surrounded them with troops and only after a month of brutal repression did the the miners agree to go back to work.

Even the more industrialised of third world states are not immune and part of the urgency with which the leaders of Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil sought to reschedule their debt was their terror that the events of Morocco, Tunisia and Surinam would be duplicated in their countries. For while the rioting of dispossessed peasants, the marginal masses who congregate round the cities and the stricken petit bourgeoisie is relatively easily contained, as events in Iran and Nigeria show, the effect of the working class such as in Surinam, with their capacity for self organisation, was a far greater danger. The bourgeoisies of such as Mexico and Brazil were rightly afraid. In Brazil, for example with a foreign debt of \$94.9 billion in a country where half the population already earns less than a subsistence wage and massive permanent inflation, any social unrest in response to the austerity measures demanded by the bankers could mean catastrophe. As Brasil's Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider said:

" If economic policies are not altered, a social revolution is inevitable."

While such tactics as sacking ministers (in a rerun of the GOOD TSAR tactic), calling on the religious fervour of the peasants (as in Iran) or sheer brutal repression (as everywhere) may halt the uncoordinated attacks of the dispossessed masses, an assault on the living standards of the working class, as similar events in Poland so dramatically showed in 1980) is a much more dangerous affair.

The working class, because of the very conditions of its existence under capitalism, is the only force existing which has the necessary ability for self-organisation and the capacity to not only destroy capitalism, but to replace it with an entirely new mode of production - communism. The bourgeoisie are right to be worried.

Yet though they might isolate working class discontent in one country as in Surinam they cannot do so throughout the globe. For the crisis is not restricted to the third world. As it deepens it moves closer and closer to the heartland of world capitalism.

And in the heartlands the bourgeoisie's attempts to impose austerity are already provoking surges of class anger. As the crisis deepens and the attacks grow stronger so too must the response of workers until it leads to the overthrow of a system which cheerfully consigns millions to the grave in the name of profit.

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