

Notes on Theory No 3

The capitalist class, through its exploitation of the working class, is handsomely rewarded with wealth, power and prestige, while the working class is plagued with insecurity, poverty and miserable living conditions.

Private property - the private ownership of mines, factories, and land, gives the capitalist class which owns, power over the classes which do not own private property. It enables those who own not only to live without working, but also to determine whether the non-owners shall work and under what conditions. Understandably then, there is a perpetual conflict between the two classes.

Now there must be some method whereby this set of property relations - so advantageous to a few and so disadvantageous to many - is maintained. There must be something with power to see to it that this system of social and economic domination by the capitalists over the workers is preserved. This is the state. It is the function of the state to uphold the system of oppression and exploitation.

Some people have separated the state into two parts. These two parts co-operate with each

other. One is called the Repressive State Apparatus - this includes the police, the army and the courts. The other is called the Ideological State Apparatus - the educational system, the newspapers T.V., etc. We can see how the two aspects of the state work together. For example, when oppressed students question the gutter education that is forced on them, the police or army are called in.

The state pushes the ideas of the capitalists. These are ideas like private property, competition, obedience to authority, etc. This is done through the schools and the media. When this fails, the police, army and courts are called to do the job.

The class that rules economically, that is, those who own the means of production - the capitalists, also rule politically - they control the state.

But we can ask the question: If the machinery of the state is controlled by the capitalist class and functions in their interest, then

why is it that laws which favour the workers sometimes get passed? It is true that a few decisions made by the Industrial Council (part of the state machinery in South Africa) favour workers over capitalists. This is because the state acts on behalf of the workers and against the capitalists when it is forced to do so. It will yield on particular points of conflict because pressure from the working class is so great that concessions MUST be made, or 'law and order' will be endangered, or worse still (from the point of view of the ruling class), revolution may ensue.

The important point to remember is that whatever concessions are won in such periods are confined to the existing property relations. The framework of the capitalist system itself is left untouched. It is always within that framework that concessions are made. The aim of the ruling class is to YIELD A PART IN ORDER TO SAVE THE WHOLE.



THE STATE