

Workers' Liberty

Independence for Kosova!



● Yugoslav army out of Kosova ● Arm the Kosovars
● No trust in NATO bombs or troops

The left and the unions ● The Third International ● Post-modernism ● Cliff's "legacy"

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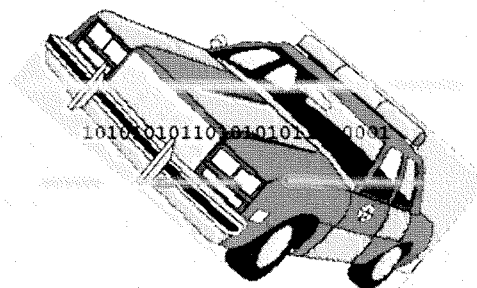


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Who will save the Kosovars?

"An individual, a group, a party or a class that is capable of 'objectively' picking its nose while it watches men drunk with blood, and incited from above, massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive.

"On the other hand, a party or a class that rises up against every abominable action wherever it has occurred, as vigorously and unhesitatingly as a living organism reacts to protect its eyes when they are threatened with external injury — such a party or class is sound at heart."

L D Trotsky, February 1913 [On the Balkan Atrocities]

"The socialist who aids directly or indirectly in perpetuating the privileged position of one nation at the expense of another, who accommodates himself to colonial slavery, who draws a line of distinction between races and colours in the question of human rights, who helps the bourgeoisie of the metropolis to maintain its rule over the colonies... instead of aiding the armed uprising of the colonies; such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet."

L D Trotsky, *Manifesto of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International*, August 1920.

ON the evening of Wednesday 24 March NATO launched the first of a still continuing series of air strikes in the rump Yugoslav state. Their stated reason was to put a stop to the Serb chauvinist drive against ethnic Albanians, who form 90% of Kosova's people. The immediate consequence of the bombing was an enormous escalation of the Serb drive against the Kosovars. With the demonic energy of starved wild beasts released from a cave, Milosevic's ethnic cleansers attacked the Kosovars.

Within a week, more than half of Kosova's two million ethnic Albanians had been uprooted or killed. In Kosova's capital 200,000 people were driven out at gun point, and Pristina became a ghost town.

It almost beggars belief that the consequences of its bombing offensive were not anticipated by NATO. For NATO continues to oppose self-determination for the Kosovars. NATO remains committed to the Rambouillet Agreement. Under this, Kosova remains in the Serb state, with Serbian policemen to maintain "security", and 1,500 Serb soldiers on its borders. NATO is "intervening" from the skies to control the "internal" affairs of a state, "Yugoslavia" (Serbia), whose stability it considers essential and to whose continued possession of Kosova it has solemnly committed itself!

This is what Clinton said in a speech broadcast to the Serbian people: "The NATO allies support the Serbian people to maintain Kosova as part of your country." This could commit eventual occupation forces to repress the Kosovars! They fear that independence for the Kosovars will encourage others to secede

from their Balkan states and thus whip up a new storm of instability. This makes NATO as much of an enemy of Kosovan independence as Milosevic, and a potential partner of Milosevic's in a deal at the Kosovar's expense.

But NATO will not kill and disperse 90% of the population of Kosova. For the Kosovars, the immediate difference between NATO and Milosevic and between autonomy [even in a truncated Kosova] and being killed or driven out of Kosova is no small one: it is a matter of life and death — death for an unknowable number of persons and for the Kosovar ethnic Albanian people as an entity.

EVERYTHING NATO has so far done suggests blundering incoherence and political and military incompetence. Clinton and Blair deal in gesture politics. They may well, even after so much experience of him, have misunderstood and underestimated what the serious Serb chauvinist and "nation builder" Milosevic would do. Clinton and Blair and the people around them are politicians for whom *principles* are carefully crafted soundbites and catch phrases; *commitment* is working hard to get elected and, once elected, saying and doing anything it takes to win high office; *historical perspective* is thinking of the next election; and *action* is mimicry and gesture. They combine pursuit of state interest and high politics with pseudo-democratic gestures and Palmerstonian poses, not, like the mid-nineteenth century Prime Minister Palmerston, with gunboats, but with rockets and bomber planes. They possess (not quite) godlike technology and power that allows them to make war without the political liability of high casualties on their side. These are people from whose mouths the words of the much-quoted US general in Vietnam, who "had to destroy the city in order to save it", would flow smoothly and in whose consciences it would sit easily and cause little self-doubt.

The crudity of their tools is a pointer to the crude botching and butchering of the political solution they may produce in the final deal with Milosevic. Alchemists, amateurs, witch doctors of world government, they throw bombs at the Serbs, most of whom don't know the scale of Serbia's slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Kosova. They do not, as consistent democrats would, ally or seek to ally with either the Serbs or Kosovar people; they do not seek to facilitate self-emancipation of either Kosovars or Serbs. The Rambouillet Agreement provides for dispossessing the Kosovars of the arms they have and their submission to Serb armed forces. They refuse to arm the Kosovars. They deploy a crude and savage weapon, bombing for the wrong political goals, at best, the Balkan status quo, at worst a carve-up Kosova deal with Milosevic. The Serbian economy may be thrown back decades.

Yet, though it is necessary, it is not enough to say this and similarly true things about those who are now intervening in the affairs of the Yugoslav state, and their tactics and goals.

There can be no reasonable doubt that though the bombing gave him his cover, Milosevic had long planned and was already carrying out a "cleansing" offensive against the Kosovars, and would, bombing or no bombing, have found occasion to escalate it. The idea that sustained bombing of Serbia can't affect what happens in Kosova is self-evident nonsense. The question is whether by the time it takes effect, there'll be any Kosovars left in Kosova, except the 10% of the population that is Serb.

But from what point of view is it possible to oppose NATO and, in fact, side with Serbia? Those who shout "stop the war" mean stop only one part of the war: for Milosevic will not listen and obediently stop his war against the Kosovars. Those who give this a "revolutionary" gloss by talking of the socialist duty of "defeatism" are primarily defeatists in relation to the Kosovars. They are the heralds and allies of Serbian triumphalism. If this is

The Balkan wars

L EON Trotsky was a war correspondent during the Balkan Wars, shortly before the outbreak, in 1914, of World War One. He witnessed the terrible national antagonisms that led to massacre and counter-massacre. He described the basic situation as follows:

"This peninsula, richly endowed by nature, is senselessly split up into little bits; people and goods moving about in it constantly coming up against the prickly hedges of state frontiers, and this cutting of nations and states into many strips renders impossible the formation of a single Balkan market, which could provide the basis for a great development of Balkan industry and culture. On top of all this is the exhausting militarism that has come into being in order to keep the Balkans divided.

"The only way out of the national and state chaos and the bloody confusion of Balkan life is a union of all the peoples of the peninsula in a single economic and political entity, on the basis of national autonomy of the constituent parts. Only within the framework of a single Balkan state can [the people] be united in a single national-cultural community, enjoying at the same time the advantages of a Balkan common market.

"State unity of the Balkan Peninsula can be achieved in two ways: either from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of the weaker ones — this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism; or from below, through the peoples themselves coming together — this is the road of revolution, the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties and unfurling the banner of a Balkan federal republic."

Only details have changed. He then, following in the wake of the Balkan socialists whose programme he quotes above, defined the alternatives.

"To free ourselves from particularism and narrowness; to abolish frontiers that divide people who are in part identical in language and culture, in part economically bound up together; finally, to sweep away forms of foreign domination both direct and indirect that deprive the people of their right to determine their destiny for themselves.' It was these negative expressions that the first congress of the Social Democratic parties and groups of south-eastern Europe formulated its program when it met in Belgrade January 7-9, 1910. The positive programme that follows from this is: a Balkan federal republic."

an inter-imperialist war, then Serbia represents an expansionary dark ages tribalist imperialism and NATO modern civilisation, intervening not to conquer Serbia but, as would-be world policemen, to stop the wiping out of the Kosovars. There is even some reason to think that US and British liberal "gesture politics" has led to action that the NATO establishment would not otherwise have taken.

MANY points of view merge to make up the anti-war movement. They twine and combine to reinforce each other.*

1. Pacifism — war is never justified. The inglorious conclusion is: leave the Kosovars to their fate. They have an urge to minimise the horror of Serbia's genocide. In effect, most of them wind up to one degree or another as Serbia's apologists. Their anti-war effort is one of Serbia's military assets.

2. Stalinist and quasi Stalinist attitudes. "Yugoslavia" is "progressive", it has a "workers' state tradition", Milosevic calls himself a socialist. This point of view draws on old reflexes and instincts of loyalty to the USSR and its bloc: the Kosovars *should be dealt with as harshly as necessary*. This is a hard, blinkered, unteachable pro-Serbia element.

3. Anti-Germanism, overlapping Little Englandism and hostility to European unity. Tony Benn embodies this viewpoint especially. This view mixes reminiscences of World War II with resentment of Germany's renewal.

4. "Anti-imperialism" — against one side only. Here it is to side with the Dark Ages Serb ethnic imperialism. In fact it is not anti-imperialism at all but sectarian anti-capitalism. "Imperialism" inheres in advance capitalism, and therefore in NATO, irrespective of its policy or the policy of its opponent. The truly imperialist element in NATO's attitude to the Kosovars if it comes out in an attempt to enforce a deal with Milosevic at the expense of the Kosovars will have the support of the "anti-imperialists".

5. Anti-Americanism. Socialists have no reason to support the pretensions of the US, or NATO, to be the world's cop. But the anti-Americanism tapped into by the "peace campaign" is an old stagnant pool left behind by the Stalinist flood tide: it is the negative fossil imprint of blocism, after the Stalinist bloc has disappeared! It is deprived of any sense except incoherent anti-capitalism.

6. Insular indifference to the fate of the Kosovars.

*The reader will find all of these elements and more in the SWP pamphlet, *Stop the War*. (Unsigned, it is reputed to be the work of the shameless academic Alex Calinicos). This is surely a classic of its kind. It is full of misrepresentation of reality, of lies of omission and lies by arranging facts so as to prevent the reader putting them in their proper relationship to each other, hiding the important things in the clutter. It minimises the enormity of Serbia's drive against the Kosovars, presenting such things as an everyday affairs in the world, rooting and building their own hypocrisy now, on the foundations of the habitual hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, which of course they denounce. It quibbles pedantically: is this "genocide"? It shouts down straw men, piously insisting that this is not another holocaust (by the way, who worth listening to has argued that it is?) or Milosevic another Hitler. They use detailed comparisons of Hitler's factory-style slaughter with Milosevic in a way that can only be intended to minimise what is happening in Kosova and "exonerate" Milosevic. A classic piece of work, in the Stalinist tradition — the sort of thing George Orwell analysed in *Politics and the English Language*. The SWP has a chameleon history of adopting attitudes and positions and "aspects" of other tendencies and traditions. For example, its notion of the revolutionary party was pioneered in Britain by the Healyite WRP. It is now, it seems, moving into CP territory. This campaign seems to be somebody's brainstorm, based on the delusion that, with pamphlets like this, and *Socialist Worker's* coverage, you can lie a big anti-war movement into existence. It is eerily like, but infinitely worse than, the strange events of 1992, when, amidst general working class defeat and the lowest level of industrial militancy in decades the SWP briefly reacted to an upswing of public indignation — a lot of it middle class, some of it Tory — at the Tory government's treatment of the remaining coal miners by calling for an all-out general strike to bring down the government!



The mixing together of these elements in a broad "peace movement" to "stop the war" (that is, leave Serbia a free hand) creates immense confusion. It works like too much booze against rational discussion.

One of two things: either Kosova and the fate of the Kosovars is the central issue here, or NATO's bombing is. If the Kosovars and the Serbian attempt to kill or drive out 90% of the

people of Kosova are central, then NATO must be seen in relation to them, not the other way round.

We say that the axial issue is Kosova! The Kosovars have the right to make any alliance they can get, with NATO or with the devil, to save themselves from destruction? But the left does not have to and should not follow them and mimic them.

The left should not extend political credence and credit to NATO. We cannot do anything other than condemn Milosevic and want his defeat. Such defeat will not lead to the subjugation of the Serbs: Milosevic's victory will lead to the annihilation of the Kosovars. That alone is enough to determine our attitude. One did not have to positively support the North Vietnamese regime to be pleased that in 1978 they invaded Cambodia and stamped out the murderous Khmer Rouge regime. Or need to be a supporter of the Indira Ghandi's regime in India to be glad that India invaded the former East Pakistan in 1971 and put an end to the genocidal drive of the West Pakistanis against the Begalis.

To say stop bombing now, without demanding Yugoslavian (Serbian) troops out of Kosova, the arming of the Kosovars and independence for Kosova is to give up on the Kosovars. If bombing stops will the ethnic cleansing stop? The opposite is likely to be true — it will escalate. We say arm the Kosovars!

Nobody should trust NATO politicians, or NATO bombs and troops. Socialists should not take political responsibility for them or advise them on what to do next: it is to misunderstand both reality and the responsibilities of socialists for us to urge positive measures — troops, for example — on NATO. If they land troops it will be for their own reasons and not ours.

13.4.99

The story of Yugoslavia

SERBIA was on the side of the victors in World War One. Yugoslavia after 1918 was a small Serbian Empire. In World War II, the conquering Nazis set up a separate state of the Catholic Croats. Of the one and a half million Serbs in that territory, half were killed by gangs of Croats who at gunpoint forcibly converted those they did not kill to Catholicism.

The Titoite Stalinists won control of Yugoslavia in a bitter war on two fronts — against the German occupiers and the Chetnick Serbian monarchists. Under the slogan "brotherhood and unity" the post-war Yugoslavian state became a federation of Six Republics. It was at first a full scale totalitarian Stalinist state and then, from the '50s, a looser, authoritarian one-party, more "liberal" Stalinist state, topped by a centralised state bureaucracy.

In 1974, a new Constitution gave the Six Republics and two provinces (Kosova and Vojvodina) a lot of autonomy. Simultaneously "nationalists" were purged from the central "Yugoslav" apparatus in order to strengthen its capacity to resist tendencies towards separation.

In 1980, President Tito died. In the '80s Yugoslavia went into deep economic crisis. There was chronic mass unemployment, high inflation, falling living standards, heavy foreign debt. Movement in favour of market economics accelerated. Unrest spread. By 1981 Kosova was under martial law.

In 1986 the trumpet blast for a full-scale revival of Serb chauvinism was sounded by the Serbian Academy

of Arts and Sciences. In a "memorandum", the academicians argued that Yugoslavia politics had long been dominated by an anti-Serb conspiracy. The Serbs should have primacy!

Late in 1988 there were strikes against worsening conditions throughout Yugoslavia. Milosevic organised a campaign of mass nationalist demonstrations in Serbia. Milosevic's Serb nationalist demagoguery in favour of the Serb minority in Kosova inflamed the situation, but won him Serb support. Kosova, hundreds of years ago the Serb heartland, has a special emotional significance for Serb nationalists.

In January 1990, the Yugoslav "Communist" Party collapsed. There were multi-party elections in the various Republics. In August 1990 Serb "autonomous regions" were created in Croatia and Bosnia. Serbia and the Federal Army prepared for war.

In May 1991 the Federal Presidency collapsed and in June Slovenia and Croatia declared themselves independent. A major war now began in Croatia. Horrors like those that Trotsky had described in his pre-1914 war correspondence now once more engulfed the peoples. In 1992 a UN-sponsored cease fire in Croatia left Serbia in control of a third of the country. Now Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence and war broke out there. A long and terrible process of slaughtering, moving and concentrating the peoples began. By 1995, ethnic sifting and separation in Bosnia was complete. In September 1995, NATO bombed Serbia. At the end of 1995 the Dayton Peace Accord was signed.

Then it was Kosova's turn.



Kosova at NUT Conference

Friday April 2. Arrive at the NUT Conference in Brighton expecting a lively and constructive weekend. Teachers are deeply angry about the Green Paper proposals for performance related pay. Yet it is hard to think about anything but the unfolding crisis in Kosova. The previous week I had been to an involved discussion on the issue. This conflict is not reducible to the well-worn slogans — “the main enemy is at home”, “stop the war”, etc.

Politics starts immediately with a Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) meeting. The main issue is, rightly, the Green Paper, but I am approached by some comrades who hope to put the war on Conference agenda. This process requires a petition to suspend standing orders, with 200 signatures. That wins the right to argue on the conference floor for a debate. Two thirds of the delegates must then vote for the suspension. The motion I am shown heavily condemns the war, but my main concern is that it advocates Kosovan rights. It does, but in too low and too subordinate a key.

Later that night. I am preoccupied with the tactics required to fight the Green Paper. I am running between two left meetings (STA and CDFU, Campaign for a Democratic, Fighting Union) arguing the case for insisting that the dispute cannot be ended by the General Secretary and that any agreement be put to a Special Conference. When I get to the second STA meeting, it is obvious that things have moved on considerably on Kosova. The chair announces that the SWP are very keen to push for a discussion and would like this to be a joint effort. They only have one condition: there must be no mention of self-determination for Kosova! A WL comrade moves an amendment, to support independence for Kosova. It is seconded by a Socialist Party comrade and supported by Socialist Outlook.

The leading figure in the STA, Bernard Regan, argues three equally ridiculous propositions: that we must give way to the SWP here, that their tactical judgement might be right; that we might get broader support without reference to Kosovar rights; that independence was different from self-determination: who are we to say what the Kosovars want? He was really saying that the Stalinists on the NEC, and their supporters in Conference, would be less likely to support a motion which championed the Kosovars. The meeting, not very big by that time, voted against including support for Kosovan independence.

Saturday April 3. Despite the enormity of the bread and butter issues this year, the war debate ripples on. One of our comrades asked the SWP's most senior NUT person why they had insisted on dropping self-determination

for Kosova from the motion. Up until this week, he assured her, it was their position to support Kosovar rights. However, that was now an abstraction: the Kosovars had been driven out; there was no Kosova to speak of and probably never would be. It was chilling in its frankness. It sits very awkwardly with the SWP's support for the Arab Palestinians' “right” to all of present day Israel. I suspect the real motive, as ever with the SWP, is organisational rather than political. It cannot have escaped their attention that the anti-war protests, such as they are, consist overwhelmingly of Serb chauvinists and old Stalinists and fellow travellers who think the break-up of Yugoslavia is (a) a terrible thing and (b) all the fault of Germany and western imperialism. Support for the Kosovars doesn't go down well with this audience and that's a far more important consideration than the rights of a faraway people of whom the SWPers know nothing.

“The Kosovars had been driven out; there was no Kosova and never would be again, the leading SWPer said.”

Meanwhile, the London-based clique at the head of the STA have got themselves all het up about an insult thrown at their beloved leader by WL's Industrial Organiser, who said to Regan, privately, that his position was “chetrnik”. The incredible preciousness of this — we are routinely called “unionists”, “pro-imperialists”, etc. — leads me to conclude that a smokescreen is being created to avoid proper discussion of the substantial issues.

Sunday April 4. Every so often something happens to reassure you that you have got things right. This morning I am given a leaflet which reminds me why I wanted nothing to do with a broad coalition of all those opposed to this war. The leaflet has a number of bold headlines. The third catches my eye: “Stay out of Serbia's civil war”. Incensed, I go back to the woman. “What exactly is Serbia's civil war?”, I ask. Puzzlement and an answer which amounts to “you must have seen the news”. Of course I have, but why does she describe what is going on as a civil war? How would I describe it, she asks? As a war of conquest and genocide by Serb imperialists, I suggest. She searches the leaflet for some reference to Kosovar rights like she would be pleased to find it, and then gives up, declaring that she cannot defend it.

Feeling a bit unsatisfied with her lack of fight, I tackle her colleague, someone I know will defend it, one Hank “the tank” Roberts,

NUT Secretary in Brent. Hank believes no state should be needlessly divided up by nationalists: he is against Wales separating from England and, when I press him, against Kurds separating from Turkey or Iraq. A hopeless case. I come away more convinced than ever that no left worth the name would support an anti-war campaign on the same basis as these people, the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

Later that night. The SWP insist that they should have the speeches moving and seconding the suspension (and the motion if it is discussed), reneging on a prior agreement with the STA. The STA cave in. We, WL, decide to produce a special bulletin on the issue for the next day as (a) the international debate is held then and (b) we have a fringe meeting on the subject. The normal arrangement at this conference has been that we provide paper and, as long as it doesn't upset their schedule, the STA print our bulletins. This time they, or at least one individual, refuse to print the bulletin because it criticises them. The really depressing thing is that no-one seems to find this sort of thing shocking any more.

Monday April 5. The attempt to suspend standing orders fails to get a two thirds majority. Would it have been more likely with support for the Kosovars? I think so. There is no way of knowing and, in any case, that isn't the point. Immediately after encouraging the conference not to allow time to discuss it, the leadership take up 15 minutes of debating time with a statement on Kosova by the Deputy General Secretary, Steve Sinnot — bland, empty, delivered in a tone appropriate to a report on the union's budget.

Later that evening. At the SWP fringe meeting on Kosova, Alex Callinicos adds to the sense of unreality by questioning whether it really is reasonable to describe what is happening to the Kosovar Albanians as “massacres”, “mass murder” or “genocide” or whether these are just the lies of western imperialism. Hearing this I remember the earlier argument, that there is no Kosova left, as everyone has been driven out. What exactly has forced these people to such a desperate state that they would leave home in their thousands?

Is a left which sees this genocide and yet fails to place the rights of the Kosovars at the centre of their concerns a left worth having? This weekend I have looked, not for the first time, at many of my fellow socialists and thought: if this was all there was on the left I would want no part of it. It is not only a matter of the left we have, but of the left we can and will rebuild!

Patrick Murphy

The left and the Serb-Kosova conflict

By John Nihill

THREE people around a table in a back-street pub between Kings Cross and Euston stations. They have come from the Friends Meeting House on Euston Road, where Tony Benn MP, the one-time bishop Bruce Kent, the journalist Paul Foot and others have spoken against NATO's bombing of Serbia. The three are old college friends who have not seen each other in a long while.

Tony: That was a hell of a meeting, eh? It's many years since we've had an overflow meeting like that! Footsie and Bruce Kent were in great form. And Benn is fantastic!

Kate: I thought it was a dreadful meeting, Alice in Wonderland stuff — the Kosovars were scarcely mentioned. Nobody said clearly that the great crime now is Serbia's genocidal war on the Kosovars. Nobody talked about them or their rights. A man from outer space dropping in on that meeting would get a radically false picture of what's been happening in the Balkans. At the overflow meeting Alex Callinicos, one of your leading SWP comrades, Tony, blamed NATO for what's happening to the Kosovars! Even if the bombing of Serbia was useful to Slobadon Milosevic in launching the "ethnic cleansing", to put the main blame on NATO is bonkers. Because Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939 we blame Britain for the Holocaust? I was a bit surprised that you haven't gone the whole hog and called for "NATO out of Kosova!" instead of calling for the withdrawal of the real occupying army, Serbia's.

Tony: That would be plain stupid: NATO is not in Kosova. Your problem is that you're soft on imperialism!

Kate: Your problem is that you are siding with Serbia-Yugoslavia!

Linda: Actually, Kate, on the way to the pub I rang Stan in Glasgow, where there was an anti-war demonstration this evening. The SWPers there were chanting "NATO out of Kosova!"

Kate: Yes? Then I'm incapable of imagining a viable bit of reductio ad absurdum that isn't instantly overtaken by reality: these days the so-called "left" is satire-proof.

Tony: Obviously they were anticipating events.

Kate: Everyone knows that the Scots left is more advanced than the English!

Tony: Look: "the main enemy is at home!" — as in Luxemburg's and Liebknecht's slogan in World War 1. We don't live in Yugoslavia or Kosova: we live in a NATO country that is bombing Serbia. Our job is to oppose this Government and this war. We



can't affect events in Kosova; we can maybe, effect what Britain does. We can organise the youth — there could be a big anti-war movement, like that against the Vietnam war.

Linda: I think, Kate, that you are just soft on NATO and imperialism. The bombing is a crime against humanity! Any bombing would be. We can give a lead to thousands of people angered by it. There are tremendous opportunities for the left in this situation!

Tony: "NATO out of the Balkans" makes sense in that perspective!

Kate: This is the politics of the lunatic asylum! Naturally, we neither trust NATO nor give it support: we must warn people that NATO has backed Serbia's grip on Kosova since the current Yugoslav crisis started in 1988, remind them of how NATO maintained an arms embargo to stop the Bosniacs defending themselves against Serb "ethnic cleansing" and how murderous the supposed "safe havens" there proved for the Bosniacs, and warn them that NATO is likely to rat on the Kosovars now too. We must expose the cynical big power interests behind the NATO action and point out that it is not arming the Kosovars so that they can defend themselves. NATO has been consistently against Kosovan self-determination, and even more so the independence they clearly now want. No trust in NATO, bombs or troops! But the greatest crime being perpetrated now is not NATO bombing, but the mass murder and the driving out of the ethnic Albanians by the Serb state and its Kosovar-Serb accomplices. Already, more than half the Kosovars have been killed or driven out. To "forget" about that is a political crime. Our first and foremost responsibility is to side with the Kosovars. To side with the Serbs beggars belief! Yet that is clearly what concentrating on denouncing NATO comes down to.

Tony: The main enemy is at home!

Liebknecht knew...

Kate: So you think this, like the First and Second World wars, is a war between imperialist camps?

Tony: No, it is not, obviously. Yugoslavia is not an imperialist country.

Linda: I'm not even sure it is a capitalist country.

Tony: Britain and NATO are imperialist powers and that's deci-

sive. The enemy is at home. When they make war we oppose it. The details don't matter! We ally with anyone who agrees with that all-defining point.

Kate: We are on a point of principle opposed to everything the Western European powers do? If what Serbia is doing in Kosova is not imperialism, what is it? When Serbia first seized Kosova in 1913, Trotsky described Serbia's role as imperialist. Even if you choose to say that Serbia's role in Kosova is something other than imperialist, why and on what principle is that something — call it what you like — a lesser evil than imperialism. We are — in principle? — opposed to all war?

Tony: What should we do? Back NATO? Back the bombing?

Kate: We must maintain, or rather develop, the working class as an independent political force. Right now that means making the left consistently independent. It can't mean siding with the Serbian state. It can't mean ignoring the issues in dispute! It can't mean pretending that the Kosovars don't exist — or that they don't matter!

Tony: You can't be more independent than when you flatly oppose your "own" government's war drive!

Kate: Depends. If you make a principle of saying "yes" when they say "no" and "no" when they say "yes", then you aren't independent at all — you are only a negative reflection of whatever the ruling class policy is.

Independence consists first of all in making an independent working-class analysis and judgement. You abandon that duty if you define yourself always by mechanically inverting what the ruling class is and does. You become utterly dependent; the independence your "oppositionism" seems to give you is entirely an illusion! You can't always say "yes" to their "no" and "no" to their "yes".

Tony: So what in what NATO is doing do you say "yes" to?

Kate: Put like that — nothing! The old cry of the Marxist movement "not a person, not a penny for this system" is our basic approach. We are "the party of intransigent opposition". Within that fundamental approach we examine the issues honestly and concretely. As Old Labour right-wingers like Denis Healy and some of the Tories have pointed out, the bombing can't possibly achieve its stated objectives, stopping the genocidal drive against the Kosovars. For some, the conclusion is that ground forces too are needed.

Tony: You advocate ground forces? You'd support their deployment? You'd give political credence and trust to NATO — in Britain, to the Blair Government! That is surrender to imperialism! I'd rather support Serbia than Blair and NATO!

Kate: We shouldn't support or give credence to any of them. But neither do we give support or credence to their opponents — who in this case are worse, tribalist butchers out of the Dark Ages! We should build the so-called "Third Camp" of the working class and the oppressed.

In the first place, now, that means an honest appraisal of the issues. You can't honestly appraise anything if you start out with the belief that you must negate, invert, your own ruling class policy, turn their policy inside out, support its opposite, give aid and comfort to its enemies — to a Slobodan Milosevic or Saddam Hussein — because they are its enemies, no matter what they are or what they do.

Linda: The first thing is to organise a broad coalition against the war...

Kate: No — the first thing is to work out what's going on! Otherwise the "Marxists" will — as at tonight's meeting — wind up in an incoherent rotten coalition with pacifists like Bruce Kent, anti-Germans like Tony Benn, still fighting World War 2, and Stalinists like the *Morning Star* and Arthur Scargill! The real pioneers of the attitude your organisation now takes, Tony, is the Stalinist *Morning Star*, which reports everything from Slobodan Milosevic's point of view.

Linda: It is not the first time, you know, that Germans have bombed Serbia!

Kate: No: and you think that sort of rhetoric can decide the question, eh? What is NATO's policy?

Linda: They want to carve up the Balkan peninsula into tiny and impotent states, so they can dominate them: divide and rule! They fear that a big Yugoslavia would not be biddable. They resent the fact that Milosevic still calls himself a socialist. They fear what the Socialist Labour Party's paper called "the workers' state tradition" in Serbia-Yugoslavia. They deliberately broke up Yugoslavia: German recognition of the Croatian secession was the first blow. They are aggressors, inter-

fering in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia. Kosova is an internal Yugoslav affair! Yugoslavia has a right to defend its sovereignty and integrity.

Tony: In isolation, we might sympathise with the Kosovars: now they are playing into the hands of imperialism and reaction.

Kate: The politics of the madhouse! Of course the big capitalist powers want stability in the Balkans so that capitalism can thrive there. Everything else you've said is nonsense. There are about 10 million Serbs in Yugoslavia. The EU would feel threatened by a bigger, concentrated Serb population in a larger territory? Why? How? War is politics by other means: what has been the big bourgeoisie's policy in Europe in the last half-century? To unite Europe. It is more united now than at any time in the last 1,500 years. The EU wants stability on its borders; of course capitalists want to exploit the Balkans and that is their central quarrel with Milosevic: the great de-stabilising force in the region throughout the '90s has been Serb chauvinism. In fact, all the big Western powers strongly favoured maintaining the Yugoslav federation until they began to see it as plainly unviable in 1990-91. They supported Milosevic when he suppressed autonomy in Kosova. Germany started urging EU recognition of Croatia only after more than 90% of Croatia's people had voted in a referendum to secede: the recognition itself came only after Serbia had invaded the newly-independent Croatia. Germany, the EU and the USA want states as big as possible and as stable as possible in the Balkans. They object to Milosevic not because he is a regional "strong man", and certainly not because he is any sort of a socialist, but because he is an erratic, unreliable and destructive strong man, cynically playing with plans for a Greater Serbia which cannot succeed. The idea that they need in the Balkans tiny impotent states makes no sense here. The capitalist powers do not need to physically conquer Yugoslavia to attain their basic capitalist goals: occupation would be expensive and risky. Short of a socialist revolution or a retreat to siege economics the Balkan states will naturally become fringe states of the EU — as Croatia and Slovenia already have.

Linda: The "Yugoslav" (Serbian) regime still calls itself socialist. It has a "workers' state tradition".

Kate: And NATO needs to go to war over that? Using its economic strength, European capitalism could quickly and peacefully put paid to any remnants of Stalinism in Yugoslavia. If Stalinism represents a "workers' state tradition", Milosevic is surely in that tradition, and adding to it! The idea that Europe and America are now waging a war of imperialist conquest is preposterous! Of course they are policing the Balkans, but...

Tony: They are establishing the right to

bomb who they like, where they like, when they like. Capitalist world policemen! Why should we accept that? It will be used against the working class and socialists, too.

Kate: We should not accept it; but to side positively with the Belgrade regime against it is to commit moral and political suicide. An historical analogy: Britain abolished the slave trade — not slavery, but the international trade in slaves — in 1808. On the high seas the powerful British navy enforced the ban against all nations. It was 30 years later before they abolished slavery in their own territory. The cotton industry, the leading technological power of the industrial revolution, continued until the 1860s to depend on US cotton grown by slaves, who were normally worked to death in less than a decade. What replaced the slave trade in the US was special slave-breeding stud farms for the provision of slaves. Certainly Britain used the abolition of the slave trade to assert its incontestable control of the high seas. The British navy would "rule the waves" until after World War II. And of course they were hypocrites, continuing to have slavery in their prosperous West Indies colonies while suppressing the slave trade. Britain was at war with revolutionary France and, briefly, in 1812, with the revolutionary USA. Yet Britain did suppress the slave trade. Was that good or bad? Me, I'm glad, whatever their motives, that they stopped the slaving ships!

Tony: But NATO is an imperialist power!

Kate: NATO represents advanced capitalism! What specifically is its "imperialist" goal in the Balkans? Alright, they want stability in the Balkans so that capital can be safe there. If, in pursuit of that, they stop, or even limit, the slaughter and uprooting of the Kosovars, I'll be glad of it. I won't forget who they are and what they represent — and I'll not trust them or preach trust in them. But I'll be glad.

Tony: You'll be glad that European capitalism is strong enough to prevent chaos on its borderlands? That is a conservative policy. Chaos is the midwife of revolution!

Kate: Out of ethnic war, tribal wars, akin to wars of the Dark Ages, can come nothing but blood and bitterness and working class division. They can help generate revolution? Not our revolution! The working class must make that revolution: working class unity across the national divides is necessary. These wars — and of course, the Serbs in certain areas have been, and may again be, victims too — poison the working class. That is why a programme of consistent democracy is essential to the working class of the whole region: self-determination, a Balkan federation of the peoples, full rights for all the regional minorities, and absolute equality of rights for all. That is a basis for working class unity to fight for socialism!

Linda: You look to European capitalism to create the best conditions for the Balkan

working class to advance? In World War I, defence of "gallant Serbia" and poor little Belgium were the excuse on one side, and the need to defeat Tsarism on the other: you can't go by the local issues! You must take in world politics. Whatever about the little local issues, the decisive thing is to be defeatist towards our own government and its allies.

Kate: Forget the "little local issue?" It depends! Do you know that Lenin during World War I wrote that if an event like the savagely repressive German occupation of Belgium could be taken in isolation from the fact that, taken as a whole, the war *was* a war between two imperialist cartels to re-divide the world, then socialists would favour action even by capitalist states to redress the wrong done to the Belgians? Of course, in practice, the German invasion of Belgium and Northern France could not be taken in isolation.

Tony: Exactly! Neither can this.

Kate: So it is a case now of two imperialist cartels whose conflict overshadows the "little local issue" of destroying the Kosovar people? You side with one of them!

Tony: You are too literal!

Kate: Be as free and unliteral as you like: explain!

Tony: This is NATO self-aggrandisement: that is decisive, not the Kosovars. To focus on arming the Kosovars or independence for Kosova is to play into NATO's hands. As Alex Callinicos said in *Socialist Worker*, a big Albania will also destabilise the region: "An Albanian national army, hardened by war and enjoying mass support in refugee camps throughout the Balkans, could threaten the integrity of half a dozen states throughout the region."

Kate: Well, for all your talk of being the most vehement against everything the big powers do, there you echo the fundamental thread of their policy for the last 11 years: the smaller nations in ex-Yugoslavia should above all settle down, be quiet, not demand too much, and not cause trouble (and Milosevic should not provoke them quite so sorely that trouble becomes unavoidable). And it is, I'm sorry, as imperialistic, as disdainful of the rights of the oppressed peoples, as any argument you will find on any side in this whole affair. So much for your anti-imperialism!

In fact, the reason for your focus on denouncing NATO is not that this is a conflict of two imperialist blocs, a conflict within and by which the local issues are shaped

and defined and overshadowed for us. It is that you are always defeatist towards advanced capitalism, whatever the issues. This is a pre-Marx attitude to capitalism — a prehistoric sectarianism that in practice here leads you to support Dark Ages Serbian imperialism!

Tony: You are saying capitalism can be progressive?

Kate: In so far as socialism is objectively possible, and measured against that, capitalism is utterly reactionary. But capitalism possesses the world: it has not stopped developing and not everything it does is reactionary or regressive. In its own exploitative, bureaucratic way it has more or less united Europe. If NATO stops genocide in Kosova, I will be pleased. I won't give it credit in advance for the best imaginable outcome of its intervention, or forget its record, or give it my support instead of promoting the "third camp" of independent working class politics. I will not change my basic assessment of NATO. And only a political idiot or an historical illiterate would tell the Kosovars they can trust NATO not to do a deal with Slobodan Milosevic at their expense.

Linda: So why don't you join those advocating NATO ground troops?

Kate: Because NATO will do what it does according to the perceived needs of the big capitalists and their governments. Socialists should not take responsibility for these decisions, or rely on them. The idea that we can tell the great capitalist powers to act as we, a united working class led by genuine socialists, would act in Kosova is the idea that bourgeois regimes can substitute for the working class, or that the limited and sometimes inadvertent and always twisted "good things" it does will only happen if we will it, "call" for it, prefigure it in our slogans. It is a fantasy of directing affairs, rooted in our real weakness. I understand the psychology that calls on the capitalist powers to do what we are too weak to do: it is the same psychology that led so many would-be Trotskyists to develop delusions in the Stalinist parties and bureaucratic states. Watching the agony of the Kosovar people naturally leads some to shout out "instructions" to the rulers: essentially it is an ineffective cry of protest and, logically, a belief in word magic. It is like the shouts of the mother who from a distance helplessly watches her child stepping out in front of a speeding car. It is a call for saviours from on high. Its only effect is to express our real weakness and add to it a political confusion — about what our role must be and what revolutionary socialist politics is — that will keep us weak. They will not influence events one way or the other — at best they will put a better propagandist gloss on what NATO would do anyway and win some socialists to support NATO. You anti-NATO pro-Serbs are the mirror-image twins of those

The reality in Kosova

By Irfan Ramaxhiku

I AM a Kosovan refugee. I left Kosova several years ago. I did not leave because I wanted to, but because I was forced to leave by the Serbian authorities.

I am and always was in favour of a peaceful solution, but I think it is time that the world should respond. Thank God it has finally reacted.

I am sorry for what is happening in Serbia to ordinary people, but that is a result of Milosevic and his government's behaviour. I agree with President Ibrahim Rugova, who all of the time has been trying to find a peaceful solution but the reaction of the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities was to shut down educational institutions and throw people out of their jobs — even though they were claiming all the time that they were for a peaceful solution as well.

But they carried on killing people, burning their houses, emptying villages and carrying out ethnic cleansing.

I see extracts from the Serbian news on televisions in this country and listen to Serbian news on the

radio. They claim that the Serbian authorities are innocent. But what about ethnic cleansing, rape, murder, and the destruction of everything that is Albanian?

If the Serbian authorities are innocent, why did they burn my house? Why did they force my family and my relatives to flee from Kosova? The Serbian police killed my friend and his 12 year old son in their own home. This is not the behaviour of innocent people. Milosevic should be put on trial as a war criminal.

I repeat: I do not like to see the bombing, but tell me how else you can stop the paramilitary forces and the police continuing with their ethnic cleansing, massacres, rape and genocide.

It is a fact that we already have over a million refugees who have been forced to flee from Kosova in recent years and particularly in the last two weeks. It is not true that they are fleeing as a result of NATO bombing. They are fleeing from the aggression of the Serbian authorities.

who call on NATO — two sides of the same coin. You both represent aspects of the disintegration of socialism and of the lack of an independent working class outlook. We must recreate and rebuild a working class socialism against both these currents. We won't do it by calling on NATO — or Stalinist formations — to do what we are too weak to do.

Tony: Being pro-NATO is working class socialism?

Kate: Pro-Serbia now is anti-imperialist?

Tony: Well, actually it is!

Kate: But you didn't protest when I argued that this is not an inter-imperialist war. That this is not a war in which the "little local issues" cannot guide your orientation. Serbia-Kosova is the issue in this war. The proper critique of NATO is that it is not a reliable tool to stop genocide, and, indeed, that by cynical power-politics over the last 11 or so years, and by incompetence or indifference, it has so far helped Milosevic in his barbarous drive against the Kosovars.

Tony: It does not have to be an inter-imperialist war. It is an imperialist war. NATO is imperialism. The main enemy is at home. We must be defeatists.

Kate: And never mind the Kosovars?

Tony: They have virtually disappeared anyway as an entity. To go on about "Independence for Kosova" is to make propaganda for NATO's war effort.

Kate: But this is a war between two imperialisms.

Tony: Backward Serbia is an imperialist state? It is the equal of the NATO powers? You need to say that to excuse your pro-NATO stand! When are you going to join up and do your bit for "gallant little Kosova"?

Kate: No, they are not equal: but Serbia is a primitive and backward ethno-imperialist state. It does not operate by the export of capital but by the export of people; not by the seizure of colonies and peoples for exploitation but by the seizure of territory to be cleared of its population and "planted" with Serbs. This is imperialism, too. This was the general pattern of Russian imperialism in the 19th century and up to 1917.

Before the Second World War Trotsky regarded Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as imperialist states because within them Czechs and Serbs oppressed a number of national minorities. Imperialism in history is not just monopoly capitalism or Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism. There are many others. History knows many different forms of imperialism. Serb imperialism is Dark Ages imperialism. It is reactionary compared to advanced capitalism! That is one reason why the pro-Serb left is absurd, as well as disgracefully indifferent to the Kosovars.

Tony: So you support the "progressive" imperialism against the "Dark Ages imperialism"?

Kate: No, but I don't oppose western imperialism by supporting the Dark Ages

imperialism. I'm not a negative fetishist. I don't "defend" Milosevic and his imperialism against NATO. I had thought your SWP support for Saddam Hussein was the lowest you could go: but even the Butcher Saddam doesn't quite measure up to the purposefully and relentlessly genocidal Slobodan Milosevic.

Tony: I'd thought that your support of Israel against the Arabs was the lowest you could go: I too was wrong.

Kate: We support the Palestinian Arabs' right to a fully independent state, side by side with Israel. I find an interesting contrast between your attitude to the Palestinian Arabs and the Israeli Jews on one side and to the Kosovars on the other. Of two million Kosovars, well over a million have been killed or driven out. The process continues. You don't seem too bothered. Your leaders — the unspeakable Callinicos at the SWP's National Union of Teachers Conference fringe meeting, for example — publicly encourage their audience to treat the truth about the fate of the Kosovars as imperialist war propaganda.

Fifty years ago, five Arab states invaded the Jewish territory, Israel. Some of them were officered by British soldiers. *All* of them were clients of Britain, carrying out British policy. The Israelis beat them back, and against all the odds — including a British and American embargo on arms for the Israelis — won. If the Jews had lost they would have been driven out or killed or forced to accept a restored British protectorate. In the course of the war 700,000 Arabs were driven out or fled; not many fewer Jews were soon driven to Israel out of the Arab countries. We say: two states in Palestine. You are to this day prepared to support even a Saddam Hussein if he will wipe out the Jewish state. You take your moral stand on the fate of the Palestinians who were expelled or who fled, and their descendants. Yet the Kosovars — who are still being killed and driven out even as we speak — seem to mean nothing to you. And you take offence when we say you have a specifically hostile attitude to the Jews!

Everything is arbitrary, subjective, governed by calculations of organisational advantage — when not subject to the operation of obscure "principles" rooted not in politics but in Tony Cliff's psyche!

Tony: Tony Cliff at least is not on the side of the British Government!

Kate: Neither am I. I am on the side of independent working class politics: consistent democracy, working class unity across the national and communal divides — and socialism.

Tony: The central slogan has to be "Stop the War"/"Stop the Bombing". That's the way to build a movement against the Government and NATO.

Kate: No. The central slogan has to come from our independent democratic-socialist immediate programmatic position and our

working class historical perspective: consistent democracy — "Independence for Kosova" and the slogans that express it concretely, "Yugoslav army out of Kosova; Arm the Kosovars."

Tony: And NATO?

Kate: "No trust in NATO bombs or troops". That politically is what needs to be said: we can't be armchair generals about the details; we should not make pro-Serb state propaganda.

Tony: You have to be concrete.

Kate: Yes! The problem with your slogans is that they ignore the real central question, the Kosovars; you reflect Serb state propaganda and make pro-Serb state propaganda. You judge the war on its details not on its politics. Marxists don't orientate according to who fired the first shot or on specific military details, but on the politics of the war. We would not let such "details" as incidental war atrocities decide us against Serbia if the overall political character of the war were different. Demands for or against specific military actions can easily become foolish amateur generalship and they can also be politically disorientating. We do not derive our attitude from this or that incident or tactic on either side, but from an overall assessment of the politics of the situation. Any support or appearance of support for genocidal Serb imperialism should be ruled out. The absence in your slogans and propaganda of any defence of the Kosovars is the greatest obscenity on the "left" since the Stalinists whipped up widespread support for the Moscow Trials!

Tony: Are you against the NATO bombing of Serbia?

Kate: Bombing, despite what they claim, is a crude weapon. Inevitably innocent Serbs will suffer and die. Of course we are against the bombing! Of course we are against war. But we are, before anything else, against Yugoslav troops in Kosova. To go on as you do against NATO bombing and not to call for Yugoslav troops out of Kosova is crude pro-Serbian state propaganda. If it is "anti-imperialism", it is grotesquely selective anti-imperialism. If it is a protest against the general horrors of war, again it is grotesquely selective, because of your silence about the greatest horrors here. Selective anti-imperialism, selective pacifism, all justified by catchpenny "build-a-broad-movement" opportunism — that's not socialism!

Tony: You echo the bourgeoisie!

Kate: To say the opposite of what they say, always — that is the rule of working class politics? Independent judgement according to our programme and perspectives — that is our rule. In the most profound and self-destructive sense you "echo" them. In politics you *are* them, turned inside out!

The national question in Yugoslavia

By Barry Finger

THE independent Stalinist regime of Tito retains an allure for broad swathes of the left, not only for a championing a form of "workers' management", now generally discredited as largely fraudulent, but also for having pioneered a resolution to the thorny national question on a progressive basis.

That this should continue to find some resonance at this late date is truly remarkable, given the rapidity with which the old Yugoslav state federation unraveled and given the revival of the particularly ugly form of Serbian chauvinism which has kept the region in turmoil for the past decade. A more accurate perspective would reveal that the resurgence of all kinds of separatist movements — from republican nationalism to Serbian semi-fascism — was nourished and exacerbated by the bureaucratic political and social monopoly of Titoite Stalinism which officially recognised nationality as the only possible and legitimate source of difference in Yugoslavia.

Post-war Yugoslavia consisted of several southern Slavic nations and as many as 15 Slavic and non-Slav national minorities. Unitary in its original structure, but officially described as a federal state consisting of six republics and two autonomous regions incorporated into the Serbian republic, early Titoite politics emphasised greater centralisation and subordination to the federal party and state leadership.

The problem of national equality, in the 1953 constitution, de-emphasised the autonomy of the republics and officially looked forward to the merger of cultures into a single Yugoslav melting pot, where peoples were severed from their pasts. Minorities were pressed to assimilate into the dominant national culture. Paramount in these considerations remained the concern that the political regime would be imperiled if national tensions increased, which was precisely the inevitable result of such heavy-handed maneuverings.

Later when the first inevitable signs of discontent finally erupted,

Tito shelved this crude attempt at national amalgamation and discovered the virtues of "divide and conquer". The various national groups were set against one another so that the aspiration of the one served to frustrate that of the others. This controlled release of national aspirations operated to deflect hostility from the social system and its ruling class, redirecting it towards other ethnic populations. It therefore served to atomise and harmlessly diffuse opposition from below.

The Croatian bureaucracy in the late 1960s, for instance, was pitted against the Serbians, with Tito and a few federal leaders reserving for themselves the role of impartial judge. Croatian nationalists were consequently eliminated in the early 1970s, balanced by an even more sweeping removal of their Serbian opponents. Both local leaderships were invariably and predictably replaced by minor and more obedient bureaucrats. This rule by manipulation necessarily bred the universal suspicion that each nationality was indirectly ruled by whatever national bureaucracy temporarily had the ear of Tito and the federal regime.

The Tito regime, in any case, could not answer national pressures with an extension of democracy. Yet without democracy, real national reconciliation and the individual motivation needed for true socialist planning were quite simply inconceivable. It instead kept national hostilities simmering by extending the market and by increasing the powers of the republics without democratising the party/state.

These reforms themselves, perceived as a capitulation to the more wealthy republics of Croatia and Slovenia, reversed the modestly redistributive tendencies that had previously characterised federal investment, development and allocation policies. Bureaucratic decentralisation transferred control over the surplus from the centre into the hands of the constituent republican bureaucracies. These mechanisms had the divisive effect of enhancing

inequalities thereby arousing suspicions that certain wealthier nations were officially sanctioned by these arrangements. The local Stalinist autocrats that rose to the fore pursuant to these reforms were merely miniatures of their socially narrow and culturally stifling federal counterparts.

With the 1974 Constitution these developments were codified insofar as the only recognised source of distinction among Party leaders was now based on their alleged defence of local ethnic economic and social interests. Leaders required nationalist support as a counterweight to federal pressures, but had to tread lightly in invoking nationalist ardour without provoking ethnic unrest. Favour with Tito for any clique remained tethered to its demonstrated and "unique" abilities to keep nationalist passions under control.

The shift in bureaucratic power did not and could not promote a broader understanding among nations and greater solidarity. Indeed, there were no federal — any more than there were democratic — institutions where workers of different nationalities could meaningfully participate in developing mutual confidences based on the pursuit of common interests. As the party became more and more confederal, the repressive powers of the centre could no longer, with the demise of Tito, contain the centrifugal forces which Yugoslav Stalinism had unleashed.



Tito

Will the Good Friday Agreement collapse?

A YEAR ago the Good Friday Agreement was signed in Belfast with much ballyhoo. Billed as it was as a successful once-and-for-all peace settlement it was presented as another great achievement for Tony Blair. All that remained, seemingly, was to set up the structures agreed upon. Now the Agreement is once again in crisis. This time there may be no "compromise" or "break-through" to rescue these tortuous, long-drawn-out negotiations to allow the Government to continue to pretend that they accomplished something worthwhile last year.

This year's Good Friday — 2 April 1999 — was a particularly important deadline: all the parties involved had to form a multi-party Executive. The stumbling block is that the IRA refuses to disarm, to "decommission". Certainly they will continue to take that stance until after Sinn Fein is let into the government. Yet David Trimble could not agree to share power with Sinn Fein without prior IRA decommissioning without losing members of his Assembly party, without whom he could not work the Agreement.

On the night before the Good Friday 1999 deadline a joint "declaration" between Ireland's Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair was read out on the steps of Hillsborough Castle. The declaration extends the timescale for the formation of a multi-party Executive, applying maximum "diplomatic" pressure. It repeats the statement that power would be devolved "in a matter of weeks" — as if by repeating enough

times "we will succeed, the Agreement will go through" the Agreement will, as if by magic, succeed. The declaration says that Sinn Fein has a right to be in the multi-party government but also says that Trimble is right to insist that he cannot sell a government with Sinn-Fein to his party unless there is some sign of decommissioning. Therefore Sinn Fein is "obligated" to make the IRA do *something* which Gerry Adams has repeatedly said he can't deliver. The declaration asks for a collective act of "reconciliation" in the course of which some arms would be "put beyond use". "Put beyond use" is the key phrase here. Trimble's Unionists had accepted the Agreement on the basis of an actual hand-over of weapons.

Perhaps Blair and Ahern genuinely hoped they could force the IRA to move if the Loyalist paramilitaries made some simultaneous gesture — a kind of "I'll show you mine, if you show me yours" pact. In effect, it puts Sinn Fein and the IRA on notice that unless they go through some of the motions of decommissioning — which the Provos say would be, and be seen as, an "act of surrender" and which they will not do — an attempt may be made to go ahead with the power-sharing Executive without them. That would depend on two things. First, the SDLP risking a coalition with Trimble for which they might have to pay dearly in the next election in Nationalist votes lost to Sinn Fein (and Gerry Adams has already put Sinn Fein on a war footing for the upcoming local and European elections). It also depends on Trimble's party holding together. The Bad Thursday "announcement" was probably meat to alibi the SDLP and put the blame on the IRA for Sinn Fein's exclusion. It created uproar in Trimble's camp because it seemed to be asking the IRA for the merest token of disarmament.

Fortunately, for Blair's image-makers, the war in the Balkans has overshadowed events in Northern Ireland and little has been said in the British media about what may be the start of collapse for the Good Friday Agreement.

The day after the declaration, Sinn Fein — taking their lead from the IRA —

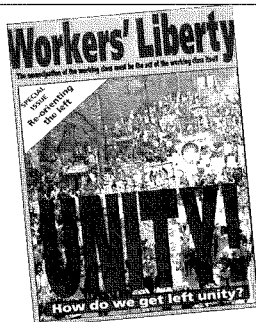


spoke out against the "Hillsborough declaration" saying that it represented a "massive change" to the Belfast Agreement. They argued that the pressure to decommission was all on their side, that there was never any "obligation" or "pre-condition" for the Provisionals to disarm before Sinn Fein could take a seat in the new government and therefore this new declaration had been drafted in Unionist terms. Gerry Adams repeated these points — to reassure the IRA — in speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising — while at the same time saying he *would* go back to the negotiating table.

On Thursday 8 April the UVF and Red Hand Commando said they would not be handing over any weapons *even if* the IRA decommissioned. Trimble's majority in the Protestant camp has depended on the UVF/PUP's two Assembly members. Talks will restart on Tuesday 13 April with the two sides presently digging themselves into more and more entrenched positions.

As the marching season begins clashes between the two communities, individual acts of communal violence — beatings, shootings, forced exiles — are likely to escalate. Portadown may again be the flashpoint. Because the Good Friday Agreement maintains the artificial partition of Ireland all the desperate juggling-style exercises in diplomacy are likely to founder. The alternative remains the same: Irish workers, Protestant and Catholic, should unite and insist on a consistently democratic solution instead of the Good Friday Agreement — a federal united Ireland, with autonomy for the Protestant majority areas.

Rosalind Robson



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A letter from Israel: Netanyahu out!

BASICALLY, the main thing which we feel needs to be done in these elections is TO GET RID OF NETANYAHU.

For one thing: the last three years would look rosy compared with what Netanyahu might do if he gets a second term. Of course we know that whoever replaces him, Barak or Mordechai, will be far away from what we would really like to see at the helm. There are some supposedly radical leftists who take the position that "it doesn't matter because there is no difference between Netanyahu and Barak". The Organisation for Democratic Action (they were once Trotskyites, and publish *Challenge*) are the main supporters of this position. They were very much discredited when in 1996 they called for casting a blank vote: as you know, the Netanyahu victory was by a very narrow margin, so these blank votes could really have been the decisive factor! Still, the ODA comes up with more or less the same idea also in these elections...

Discounting the blank vote, there is still the option of an independent left-wing candidate, who would try to make a good showing in the first round of voting for prime minister and then (assuming it is a responsible person) support the main anti-Netanyahu candidate in the decisive second round (the kind of position which is common in the French Left). However, the main parties of the Israeli left, Meretz and Hadash, decided not to field a PM candidate, and also the idea of a common candidate of the Arab population failed — due especially to the tense situation between Hadash and the Islamic movement, which are the two main forces among the Arabs in Israel.

(Paradoxically, in the Israeli conditions the Islamists are part of "the left", representing — a large part of — an oppressed ethnic minority. And it is the position about the Palestinian issue which defines being "left" in Israel.

In practice the only Arab candidate to present himself is Knesset Member Azmi Bishara. I like him, he is a brilliant academic and is the one who introduced into Israeli politics the concept "Israel — the state of all its citizens", which has especially a good impact among the Jewish left, but he represents only a minor faction of the Arabs and I am afraid he will not make a very impressive electoral showing.

Anyway, whatever happens in the first round of voting, in the second round we will have to support Barak or Mordechai — who-

ever of them gets the better result in the first round and makes it into the second.

As to the relative merits and de-merits of Barak and Mordechai, here are some of the arguments which are going around: Barak represents a well-established party, with some prominent doves in its leadership, one of whom — Shlomo Ben Ami — is also the only genuine social democrat to have any significant position in the present Israeli politics. (If Barak becomes Prime Minister there might develop something like the Schroeder/Lafontaine situation in Germany.) Mordechai is representative of an amorphous jury-rigged Centre Party, and he had been Netanyahu's Defence Minister until two months ago.

Against these arguments, there are two which for me are decisive: first, Mordechai has a much better chance than Barak of defeating Netanyahu, for the simple reason that he can take away traditional Likud voters who are very unlikely to vote for Barak or any other Labour candidate — and also Mordechai can get all of Barak's voters, if he is the one who makes it to the second round.

The second argument — with which not everybody agrees — is that Mordechai as Prime Minister may find it more easy to make concessions in peace negotiations. He had been consistently a moderate force during his years in the Netanyahu cabinet, before Wye pushing for such an agreement and even threatening to resign if it is not achieved; he pushed for implantation of Wye, after it was signed. A few weeks ago, when Netanyahu contemplated a large-scale bombing of Lebanon, Mordechai came out in public against any such plan; he met in Amman with Naif Hawatmeh of the hitherto-rejectionist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine... I don't know if Mordechai is genuinely more dovish than Barak, but he has less of a need to prove that he is "not a leftist". Barak does feel very strongly such a need, which makes him declare again and again that he is for the annexation of "some of" the settlements (he is giving a long list of particular settlements); that he is for "United Jerusalem Forever"; that he is absolutely against the '67 borders... Of course I don't delude myself that Mordechai has our positions on these issues, but he seems to be more flexible.

Anyway, this is the position more or less. We are all very tired of this long drawn out elections campaign, in the course of



Benyamin Netanyahu: "A strong leader for a strong people."

which the settlers have a practically free hand to take over lands and extend the settlements... It seems Arafat will agree to delay the Declaration of Independence which was due on 4 May, but the new government will be faced with an urgent need to take a position (and make concessions!) about the Palestinians — and also about Syria and Lebanon. Lebanon is one issue where grassroots pressure — especially the very effective movement of soldiers' parents — succeeded in effecting the big parties' elections campaign (Barak already pledged to "bring back the boys within a year" if elected).

Finally, I should mention the new Workers' Party. It is certainly a welcome idea, since for many years workers in Israel had practically nobody to represent them (unless you count the Communists, but very few of the Jewish workers support them). Certainly, the Labour Party does not even pretend to be a workers' party, and indeed Barak — taking his cue from Blair — is making an effort to altogether change the party's name...

The problem is that at the moment the Workers' Party does not seem a very big success. If it does badly at the polls, this may discredit the whole idea for many years, and also weaken the Histadrut's negotiating position in future labour disputes. At the moment the Israeli economy is largely paralysed by a public sector general strike — but this is a different issue...

What do you feel about the Kosova situation? Are you also torn between disgust at the butchery of Milosevic and disgust at the arrogance and hypocrisy of "the free world"? We decided not to participate in the Communist vigil which was scheduled outside the US Embassy in Tel-Aviv — which does not mean that we like what the Americans are doing.

Enough for now, Adam Keller

Adam Keller is editor of *The Other Israel*

Toward a realignment of Israeli politics

By Eric Lee

THE only issue that seems to matter in the current Israeli elections, and in Israeli politics in general, is the conflict with the Arabs. The hundred years war between the Jewish settlers in Palestine and the local Arab population, still unresolved, towers over all other issues.

For many on the Israeli left it is the only issue. While previous generations of leftists made the occasional reference to social justice and equality, for several decades now the difference between left and right in Israel has been defined, as Amos Oz put it, as a question of geography. Leftists were prepared to concede more territory (to the Palestinians or Syria) than rightists were. One was more leftist if one was prepared to cede more territory. A person like myself, who was prepared to cede all of the Golan Heights to Syria in the context of a peace settlement, would be considered "far left" because of that position.

This is a slight over-simplification, because there is one other issue which has in recent years awakened some passion in the country — the struggle between secular and religious Jews. Secular Jews have grown increasingly defensive and fearful of the power of the religious parties — ironically at a time when the power of those parties is in sharp decline. I say that because the wave of immigration which brought in some one million Jews from the former Soviet Union immensely strengthened the secular camp. Very few of those Jews are religious. If the religious parties have been more vociferous and aggressive than in the past, it is perhaps because they are fighting a rear-guard action, knowing that their days as holders of the balance of power are numbered.

A very small section of the Israeli left, too small to even be represented in the Knesset, has latched on to a kind of third-world-vanguardism, seeing in the local Arab population a substitute for the revolutionary proletariat. Unfortunately, the "Israeli Arabs" (meaning, Palestinians living under Israeli rule since 1948, who have accepted Israeli citizenship) don't seem willing to fit this role, and divide their votes among Islamic fundamentalists, hack politicians from the various Zionist parties (including the religious and right wing ones), and Stalinists.

For more than 20 years now, Israeli politics has been locked into paralysis by

the split between a "right" and "left" who argue about geography. Whenever the issue is posed before Israeli voters, some — understandably — will vote for candidates and parties willing to take risks for peace, while others — understandably — fear terrorism and the next war and are unwilling to take those risks. Among Jewish voters, the clear majority fall into the latter category.

For those who care about peace, who want to see a resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (meaning an independent Palestinian state), and between Israel and Syria (meaning an Israeli withdrawal, in the context of a peace treaty), the only way out is going to be a realignment of Israeli politics. Instead of voters focusing on their hopes or fears about peace — their views on "geography" — were they to cast their votes according to social class, we might see the Gordian knot finally slashed open.

Like so many countries in which war and peace or ethnic rivalries play such decisive roles, in Israel social class has simply not been the most important or even a significant factor in voting. That is not to say that there are no class parties. Indeed, there are even several parties that could be legitimately called workers' parties. Unfortunately these are all headed up by various kinds of charlatans and have been misleading their followers — usually in the direction of collaboration with the most anti-worker parties around, such as Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud.

"Shas" — the Sepharic Torah Guardians party — is a textbook example of false consciousness. It is undoubtedly a party of working class and poor people. It maintains a network of schools, day care centres and other social institutions in the poorest neighbourhoods. Its politicians talk endlessly about the suffering of the country's poor, the problem of unemployment, and so on. But the party is lead not by trade unionists and certainly not by socialists, but by extreme orthodox rabbis.

The same may be said about the Arab parties, and in particular Islamic fundamentalism, which leads the poorest of the poor into a political dead end.

Not all of the misleaders of the Jewish and Arab working class are religious. David Levy, himself a former construction worker living in the impoverished

town of Beit Shean, for many years led working people to support the Likud, even while the Likud was pursuing the most vicious anti-worker policies (and destroying any hope of peace with the Arabs). Levy eventually broke with the Likud, and with only a very small following left he eventually linked up to Ehud Barak and the Labour Party. Any attempt to portray this as a historic reconciliation between the middle-class-led Labour Party and the mass of the Jewish working class is ridiculous, though this is certainly how things are being portrayed by Labour.

Faced with this problem of false consciousness, with a working class (both Jewish and Arab) misled into supporting nationalist and religious charlatans — and the prospect of peace diminishing year by year — the only hope is a politics based on social class. To put it as bluntly as possible, the only way to woo working class voters away from Shas, David Levy, the Likud and other misleaders is to offer them a class alternative that speaks about the real issues which concern them: unemployment, health care, schools, etc.

The formation early in 1999 of an independent workers party headed up by Amir Peretz, the leader of an increasingly combative trade union movement, could therefore be seen as an event of historic importance.

For several years now, leaders of some of the more important works councils have been calling for such a party to be created. Interestingly, some of those leaders have been Likud supporters, disillusioned with the Netanyahu government and its openly anti-worker policies. Though they have shown a combative spirit, they are not necessarily infused with revolutionary class consciousness. Some tend to see the workers as just another special interest needing its own political voice, like farmers and pensioners, and have no broad social vision.

Peretz inherited from his predecessor, Haim Ramon, a decimated Histadrut labour federation. It was twice destroyed, first by an ossified bureaucracy associated with the Labour Party, later by Ramon's "reformist" insurgency which managed to drive more than one million workers outside of the unions and bankrupt the federation. Things got so bad that the Histadrut was unable to pay its own employees, and began selling off the fed-

eration's remaining assets to cover its massive debt. Some of the trade unions affiliated to the Histadrut now talk openly about seceding — grabbing whatever assets they can before Peretz sells them off. Some critics of the Histadrut leader claim he is deliberately neglecting the trade union's concerns while pursuing a political career at the head of his own little party. (Peretz has replied that if all he wanted was a seat in the Knesset, it would have been easiest to have remained in the Labour Party.) Recently a group of pensioners publicly accused Peretz of using Histadrut funds to back the new party, claiming that he had returned to the old, corrupt Labour Party way of using the trade unions as a cash cow for political activities.

But proof of Peretz's effectiveness as a workers' leader may be found in the public sector general strike which took place at the end of March 1999. For four days, 500,000 workers shut down all public services in the country. Though Netanyahu denounced the

Histradrut for holding the government "hostage", polls showed over 40% of the population supporting the strike. In the end, the government backed down and the workers received a 4.8% wage increase — substantially more than the Treasury had said it could pay.

Peretz has been quick to use the strike weapon in the past, once even shutting down the country's main airport for several hours in order to get a Histadrut official freed from jail.

Peretz launched "Am Echad" — one people — several weeks ago, but as I write these words, less than six weeks before the election, there is no sign of the party getting off the ground. There has been a virtual media blackout, with much more attention devoted to the party of cosmetics millionairess and former model Penina Rosenblum than to the new workers party. Public opinion polls focus only on the "major" parties, and thus we have no indication of how many seats in the Knesset the new party might win. (Seats are won by proportional representation.)

But it is not only a media blackout which is the problem here. Reports from

the ground indicate that the party is having difficulty getting organised, and its presence is not being felt in the neighbourhoods and in the factories.

What matters is what happens after the election. If Netanyahu wins — and this is certainly possible — we are likely to see a rapid deterioration of the situation with a likelihood of war with Syria and the Palestinians. In that situation, the Israeli left will be paralysed, particularly if Syrian tanks cross the 1973

continued to cast their votes for a party which offered them nothing but demagoguery.

If Barak does come to power, he will need a strong left (what Israelis call a "social left") in the Knesset and in the country to keep him in line and to prevent a repetition of the mistakes of the Rabin-Peres years. If for no other reason than to prevent the Likud from coming to power again, the Labour Party has an interest in at least moderating its own rhetoric about the free market and mod-

ernisation. Voices such as those of Professor Shlomo Ben Ami — the most popular leader in the party today — have called for a return to the party's social democratic roots, with more attention paid to issues like unemployment and poverty. Though he would certainly disagree with this, I think that nothing would ensure the success of Ben Ami's vision more than a powerful independent workers' party which has made its election slogan:

"Return Israel to the

workers!"

Israel's new two-tier election system allows voters to cast one ballot for the party of their choice (and there are more than 30, the largest number ever) and another for their favoured candidate for Prime Minister. Thus left-wing voters can safely give their support for Ehud Barak, assuming that he will be less likely to lead the country into war, while voting for one of the more openly left-wing parties — including Am Echad, Meretz and the Communists — for the Knesset.

The first round of voting takes place on 17 May — this will be the occasion for the election of the new Knesset, and it will be most interesting to see what happens to the workers party at this stage. The voting for Prime Minister will likely go into a second round, to be held two weeks later, at which point all the internal left bickering about whether a Centre Party candidate would be stronger, or whether an Arab candidate was the most important thing — all that becomes irrelevant. As the polls now show, it will be Barak against Netanyahu in that second round. There will be no third choice. For Israel's left, it should be clear what to do.



Labour's Ehud Barak visits Rabbi Yosef, supreme authority of the Shas, during the Jewish holiday: a lesser evil?

ceasefire lines.

If Barak wins, which currently seems likely (but by no means certain), one can safely be optimistic about the chances for progress in peace talks with the Palestinians and Syria. After all, Barak's mentor, Yitzhak Rabin, went quite far in this direction, apparently agreeing in principle to an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights — something most Israelis would have thought impossible at the time.

But Rabin and Shimon Peres also pursued a social and economic policy of "modernisation" — meaning adapting Israel's economy to the new reality of globalization. They supported privatisation, "flexible" labour laws and so on. As the economy boomed, thanks both to the successful peace process and the massive wave of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union, social inequality and poverty grew as well.

Hundreds of thousands of new immigrants who voted for Rabin in 1992 turned their backs on the Labour Party in 1996, having received nothing in return for their support. And the poor, who had long been supporting the rightist Likud,

Do we need a rank and file movement?

A debate between Gerry Bates and Greg Tucker

Gerry Bates

ONE of the key lessons of history is that the ability of working class people to defend themselves successfully, to advance their interests, let alone to create a society based on their needs and the needs of the whole of humanity is blocked by, held back by, the official trade union leadership — what Marxists call the trade union bureaucracy. The revival of an effective socialist movement in Britain and internationally requires that we remove the bureaucracy as an obstacle.

There are certain ambiguous, potentially progressive elements in some of the things the bureaucracy do: for instance the unionisation drive that they plan to do on the basis of the recent legislation. But fundamentally they are a block. They are a caste, a privileged section of the class that sit on top of the class holding it back.

The working class does not need the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy needs the working class to give it a push up into the corridors of power, to the lifestyle of expensive cars, huge lunch accounts and silk ties, suits and the prospect of ending your life in the House of Lords while your industry's being privatised and people are living on peanuts.

The bureaucracy are the central, strategic obstacle facing the British working class. You can say, I say it bluntly, that a very large part of a revolution in a country like Britain or any of the other advanced capitalist countries is a revolution inside the working class, inside its organisations — the smashing and the breaking of the power of the bureaucracy so that the workers themselves run their own organisations and can turn them from defensive bodies that fight over wages and conditions into a fighting force contending for working class control in industry and the in the whole of society.

That is the basic Marxist critique of the trade union bureaucracy; that is also an explanation of why you need a broad-based trade union rank and file movement. Now, a rank and file movement is not just a collection of Marxists. The idea of a rank and file movement is

that it's a united front in action in the trade unions.

In a workplace or an industry you might find one out of a thousand, or maybe just one out of ten thousand, people who might right now be prepared to sign up to an entire Marxist programme and an entire Marxist critique of capitalism, an understanding of Stalinism, an understanding of the place of democracy in the struggle for socialism. But in every workplace you will find dozens, not just one in a thousand but one in a hundred, maybe even one in ten, workers who think the union should fight back more effectively over wages, over hours, who think the union should be democratic, that it should be turned outwards, that it should be a fighting instrument for them.

Now, the idea of the rank and file movement is for the Marxists to organise not just themselves in the unions, but that much broader layer of class conscious working-class activists — and to turn them into a force, a mighty lever that can completely transform the unions, that can break the power of the bureaucracy, that won't just hold them to account, but will replace them. A movement that will operate around the old slogan of the Clyde workers' committee: "If the leadership won't lead, then the rank and file must."

In other words, a body which is capable of not just fighting for positions in the unions, not just fighting to transform the unions, but capable, if necessary, at a certain stage, of creating new, more democratic, more appropriate forms of working class organisation. Marxists and the tradition that we're from have not always said you must entirely restrict your industrial sphere of activity to the existing unions. We quite rightly supported things like the breakaway blue union on the docks in the '50s. Our comrades played a leading role in the building of the New Unions at the end of the last century, which in some parts took the form of creating new unions, and in other parts took the form of taking existing unions and filling their shells with life. We are not trade union loyalists, in the narrow sense. We are working class loyalists! At times you have to make a choice, and the fundamental choice is to be a working class loyalist.

Now, I also think the fight to build a

unified rank and file movement across the unions can be of immense political importance given the stage that we are now in.

I mean the changes in the Labour Party. The Labour Party is no longer the centre of most working class people's political universe. It is transforming itself into something other than a workers' party, even though as a workers' party it existed within the system and never challenged it. Quite clearly it is changing itself into something else.

The subordination of the trade union leaders to that Labour Party, their willingness to accept any crumbs that it offers — and mostly they are crumbs — for them and not for their members is creating a particularly explosive conditions in the unions.

We are seeing things that are not supposed to have happened in the last year or two, for instance, the election of Dave Rix, a relatively unknown, relatively young train driver from Yorkshire, to replace Lew Adams, a TV personality you know, long time union leader and absolutely useless. In ASLEF, after the result, if you asked, no-one would admit to having voted for Lew Adams. A General Secretary completely disowned by his members. There's a vitally important election coming up in the National Union of Teachers this summer and a real possibility that the socialist Christine Blower, who's been involved with us in the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws will beat Doug McAvoy. So, there are beginnings, there are instabilities. There is a huge gap between what the trade union leadership are prepared to demand of the Labour Government and fight the Labour Government on, and the expectations that people elected the Labour Government on. That creates something for socialists to act and work on.

One of the things *Workers' Liberty* must argue for in the next period, and we would very much like to hear the views of comrades here from *Socialist Outlook* and from the rest of the left, is for the idea of a single, united, rank and file movement across the unions.

A rank and file movement that has one branch in every different union, that's democratic, that's based on the structures of the unions, that has an

* Gerry Bates is a supporter of *Workers' Liberty*; Greg Tucker is a supporter of *Socialist Outlook*

industrial programme, that focuses on the basic bread and butter issues of wages, of shorter hours, but also focuses on the question of democracy in the particular industry, of workers' control. A movement that focuses on the question of genuine union democracy, of trade union rights, of full employment of rebuilding the welfare state. That holds that up and judges the Labour Party and their union's relations with the Labour Party on that basis. Which is committed to reintroducing the basic ideas of socialism at the point of production. Because that's the decisive thing.

The hold of the bureaucracy is not just that of a machine. It is not only a bureaucratic machine on top of the working class. It also infects people's consciousness, their idea of what is possible.

So, for instance, one of the most militant sections of the class today is in the post office. Yet you have a leadership that says we can't have a shorter working week unless we self-finance it. Self-finance it? Postal workers create a million pounds worth of profit every day for the state, but the state still says a reduction in your working time and an increase in your wages has got to be self-financing. So we need a rank and file movement that starts to challenge those kinds of ideas, that will see bringing socialist ideas to the unions not as a question of injecting something alien from outside into the unions, but which draws out the class-struggle socialist logic of the demands and the aspirations of working class people.

I want to focus on the key thing. We should be supporting and building the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws, in all the unions. That's a vitally important campaign, because it's a political standard of class interests, of effective trade unionism, by which to measure New Labour and measure the bureaucrats' subservience to New Labour. However, that campaign on its own will not be enough, without a cross trade union, industrial rank and file movement. We could look at the possibility of, say, a group of workers like the tube workers, or someone who is involved in the forefront of the struggle for working class rights against this Government. People who would have

authority to try and pull together a meeting of lefts from different unions and stewards committees. The rest of the socialist left should be co-operating around such a project. The left is ghettoised and Balkanised. In the National Union of Teachers you have two rank and file groups; in the rail union, the RMT, you have a thing which used to be a rank and file movement but never dared call itself a rank and file movement. In the

Marxism. That, I think, should be the basic perspective of the left, the revolutionary left, in the unions: single-minded focus on the idea of building a new socialist opposition in the unions, one rooted in the rank and file. I hope that comrades like Greg and organisations like *Socialist Outlook*, and other organisations like the Socialist Party and the SWP, with whom we've started to collaborate around ideas like a united left slate in the

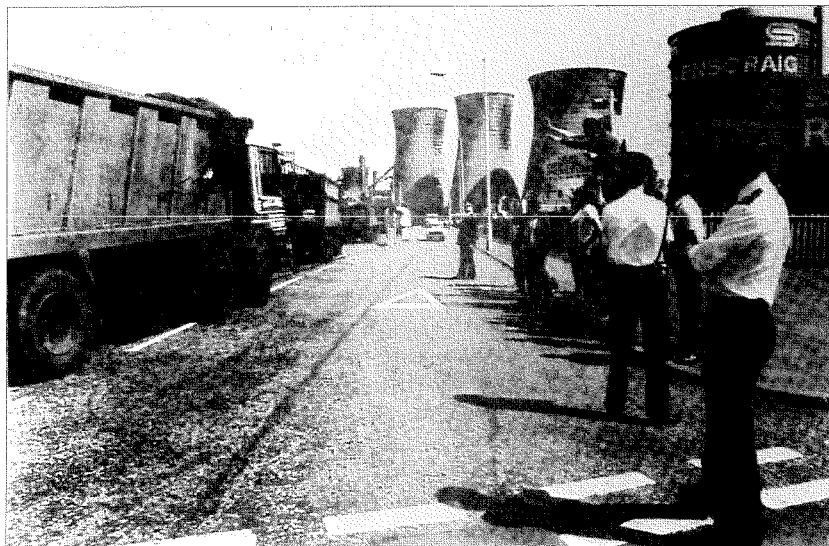
Euro-elections, can start to seriously discuss launching such a movement. I think it can be done, and, if we do do it, we can turn a lot of what are going to be sporadic little protests against New Labour into a mighty movement.

Greg Tucker

THIS was called a debate between us, and I must say that of the 13 minutes you've just taken, it's hard to find in the first 10 anything to speak against. I think differences are just a question of nuance

and *how* we do things, rather than whether we should do them. I don't want to cover too much of the same ground.

Gerry's right, the starting point has to be the role of the trade union bureaucracy and its privileged position, and the role it plays in dampening down struggle and the role it is playing currently in terms of the Labour Government. We have to put building a new rank and file movement in that context. We have the lowest level of strikes this century. We've got nearly all of this century behind us, I'm afraid, so it's a pretty awful situation. Last time I looked at the figures someone suggested to me that the RMT was probably responsible for over half of the official disputes last year: that shows how bloody awful everyone else certainly was. It is true to say that expectations in the Blair Government are not being met, but ideologically the question of social partnership is not being challenged. The TUC is not under any great pressure to move away from social partnership ideology. We do have glimmers of hope: people are beginning to respond to their expectations being broken against the rocks of the Labour Government. There is the beginnings of some left unity, particularly in the European elections. That's a fragile experiment, but



The miners' strike of 1984-5. A rank and file movement could have undercut the official leaders' isolation the miners

Communication Workers' Union you have people who are too frightened of their careers to form a rank and file movement sitting on top of a workforce which would love to have a rank and file movement and are in a certain sense already a rank and file movement.

You have all sorts of complex and difficult situations, but I think if we can get the left, the revolutionary left, to throw its weight behind a call for a rank and file movement we might be amazed at what we could do.

Essentially we need to put in the minds of other people on the left the idea of unity, of working class unity, of socialist unity around the idea of a new rank and file movement. The changes in the Labour Party make a lot of the old debates on the revolutionary left redundant. We need to re-examine where we are, our strategy and our tactics.

The simple fact of the matter is unless you create a framework for unity, we will just be talking about it in the vaguest sense. And the framework you have for unity is a battle to reclaim the unions. It is something that will make sense to everyone, something based on practical day-to-day activity. It would make the petit-bourgeois revolutionary left turn to the working class, which is the source of the power of the ideas of

worth working on. For the first time left wing political organisations are beginning to talk to each other and beginning to work some things through.

The experience of the trade union broad lefts is relevant to our discussion. There is a long, long history, over the last 30 or 40 years, of movements being built up. All have foundered for various reasons, more than anything else because in each case the political founding organisation decided it wanted to control the trade union organisation and to use the formation of a cross-union, cross-sectoral left organisations as an opportunity to make party-building gains. In each case that's the way it worked and why it foundered. Independents, let alone the rest of the left, weren't prepared to put their time and energy into just building someone else's party. We have to look at any initiatives to build a new cross-sectoral broad left from the angle of building trust between people. It can't be just some experiment to find ways of building a particular organisation. It must be something real, really about building a broad left.

The worst experience has been with the secret Broad Left formations — electoral pacts just there to get people elected. I'm in such a body at the moment. We're trying to find ways of broadening it out and going beyond just being an electoral pact. Electoralism on that basis leads to one thing: you end up supporting people already themselves part of the bureaucracy. They get themselves elected then turn out to be exactly the same as the bureaucrats they've replaced, without anybody being able to hold them to account. And that's the point about the secret Broad Left: there isn't any accounting at the end of the day. So the first thing that we have to say is that we have to have open left organi-

sations, ones which concern themselves with class struggle, not with putting people into positions of power, one which uses people in positions of power to further trade union action of our class. They have to be clearly open and democratic — not just something that individuals can use as power blocs in their own struggles, empowering working class people. So, that's the first thing, to avoid electoralism.

The other side of it, of course, is that you have the other extreme — rank and file groups that decide not to bother with the bureaucracy, and have no impact at all on the bureaucracy. Rank and file groups like those which the SWP had in the '70s, which talk to nobody but themselves, don't challenge the bureaucracy at all, and in practice let them off the hook whenever they do anything wrong.

So, again, it's got to be a rank and file movement which is serious about it's tasks, one of which is to confront the bureaucracy and where necessary fight to remove them from power. As Gerry has said, we have to be conscious that we are not trade union loyalists. We are building something broader than that and, sometimes that does mean breaking from those trade unions, rather than just fighting to win them.

I do agree that we need to build existing campaigns, Reclaim Our Rights and other campaigns of that nature which already exist have been useful in terms of building trust between people, and have agendas which are useful in themselves. Building Reclaim Our Rights is an important task today. But we also need to advance discussion on the left about the politics of what's going on around us. One of the initiatives, for instance, which would be central at the moment, would be a trade union bulletin discussing the whole question of social

partnership and the ideological positions being taken by the TUC. I think we should be pushing that forward. I agree that we need to build a new cross-sectoral trade union alliance, a new broad left formation. But we have to look at that in a serious way, not think we can just invent it tomorrow. We do need to be bold about initiatives, but can't run before we can walk. We are at a very early stage.

I do think there is a possibility, but we can't do it if we just think we can invent it straightaway. We have to be patient in terms of how we build it.

Socialist Outlook would agree to try and build a cross-sectoral alliance. The question is how do we work for that? We can't just invent that overnight. I'm not sure that any one particular union, or the left in any one particular union, is strong enough. Clearly events are everything, and if the struggle heats up in one particular union or another then that will give us opportunities. I don't think that's immediately posed inside the RMT today, but I do think we need to work at it as best we can.

To end, there are a lot of difficulties at the moment because of the grip the TUC has over the movement. There are signs of change — the elections in ASLEF and elsewhere show that things are beginning to break up. We've seen the bureaucracy's response to that with increasing witch-hunts — in the RMT, in MSF, in UNISON and in other unions. It won't be easy. What I would be positive in saying is that we would welcome discussions with comrades in the AWL to work out how we start the process of building a cross-sectoral trade union alliance of the proper left. Build on the unity we've got now around the European Union election. Work on that and let's see if we can go forward!

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The life and work of Stanley Kubrick

The man who made *Spartacus*

By Clive Bradley

BLATANTLY recognisable, but with a style which never overwhelms the content. His films are individual, personal — yet awesome in scale and power. So protective was he of his artistic vision that he lived for most of his career in self-imposed exile from the Hollywood system in Britain, even reconstructing Vietnam here because he didn't like flying. He was idiosyncratic, maverick, reportedly very difficult and perfectionist; but that is frequently the mark of an artistic genius.

Beginning with small, noirish thrillers, Kubrick made his first major feature, *Paths of Glory*, in 1957. It's a war film; but here there is none of the platitudinous sentimentality of *Saving Private Ryan* or a host of other, even lesser stuff. During the First World War, a French general given impossible orders passes the buck down, and the buck is continually passed until three men, one of them black, are on trial for cowardice. It is the task of Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) to defend them at the court martial. In a beautifully simple drama, the horrors and evils of the battlefield are evoked — but more importantly, the evils of the powers behind the war are centre-stage. Unlike the standard "war film", *Paths of Glory* doesn't just condemn war for its brutality, or pay homage to the ordinary Joe caught up in terrible events: it puts the system which caused the war on trial. Like all Kubrick's films, it is innovatively shot, almost expressionistic, but never just as a

gimmick.

When Douglas was executive producing *Spartacus* and the original director, Anthony Mann, was sacked early in production, he turned to Kubrick to fill his place. Kubrick was still largely unknown, and *Spartacus* was the only film he was ever hired to direct (as opposed to seeing it through from its inception). Evidently Kubrick's experience on the film, and particularly with Douglas, were so bad that he resolved never to be controlled like this again, and from then on did his own thing this side of the Atlantic.

But *Spartacus* is one of the most astonishing, powerful, marvellous socialist films ever made. Kubrick achieves in it one of his characteristic tricks: to take a well-known, hackneyed genre, and utterly, unrecognisably transform it (he was to do the same, for example, with science fiction in *2001*, and horror in *The Shining*).

Based on the novel by Howard Fast (and of course on historical events in the first century BC), with a script by Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten who went to prison rather than testify to McCarthy, *Spartacus* is the well-known story of the slave revolt. It's in the tradition of all those sword-and-sandals

"*Paths of Glory* doesn't just condemn war for its brutality: it puts the system which caused the war on trial."

fifties epics, the best of which is *Ben Hur*. But no Bible-story this. I've seen *Spartacus* more than a dozen times, and every time it reduces me to tears. It is a marvellous story of the unquenchable human struggle for freedom, even against impossible odds, which culminates in an extraordinary dramatic feat: we want the hero to die.

It is a deeply intelligent, humanistic

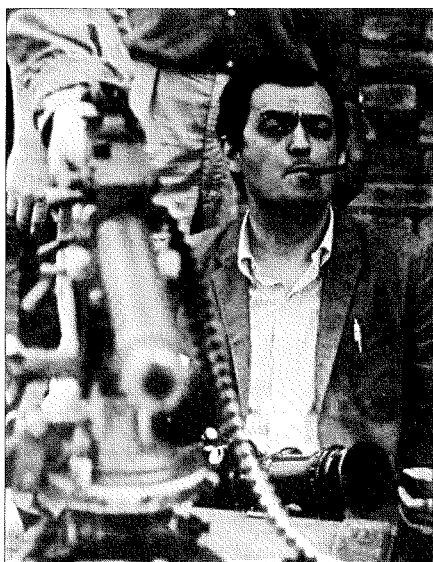


***Spartacus*: the unquenchable human struggle for freedom**

film, in which all its central characters are multi-dimensional and fundamentally honourable. The antagonist is Olivier's Crassus; but even he is motivated by his sense of honour, and we are asked to condemn not the evil man, but the evil system which he cannot but support, and which makes him terrified of slaves, who he must destroy.

The climax, the extraordinarily staged battle on the hillside between the slaves and the Roman legions, is vintage Kubrick — spectacular, terrifying. We know the slaves are doomed, but understand why they have to fight. It is followed by the famous scene in which the entire vanquished slave army declares "I am Spartacus!" rather than allow their leader to be crucified, one of the great moments in film.

Kubrick's next work was the opposite end of the scale, and no doubt closer to his natural instincts — his weird, quirky adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita*. In Kubrick's hands (Nabokov wrote the screenplay), this becomes a tragi-comic satire on smalltown



The young Kubrick

America. If you saw Adrian Lyne's awful recent version, put it out of your mind and see Kubrick's funny, discomfiting little gem.

Then came *Dr Strangelove (Or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)*, Kubrick back again in anti-war territory, and once again focusing on the insanity of power. A lot of the energy comes from the virtuoso performance of Peter Sellers (in three roles); but notice also little touches like the documentary style in which the siege of the US army base is shot. It's cheaper, and a lot more effective, than the lauded opening of *Saving Private Ryan* — a savage indictment of imperialism's world-destructive drives, done with anger but wit.

2001: A Space Odyssey, made in 1968, has been blamed for everything bad that's happened since in American film because

"Spartacus is a marvellous story of the unquenchable human struggle for freedom, even against impossible odds."

of its use of state-of-the-art special effects. Yet there is no other science fiction film anything like it. It's an enigmatic, awesome, philosophical account of the first meeting between humanity and extra-terrestrial life.



A vision of inhumanity: *Paths of Glory*

Some people complain they don't understand it: but a civilisation this advanced would seem magical and beyond understanding. The idea of staging the meeting between astronaut and aliens in a familiar little room, without meeting the aliens at all, is to my mind a stroke of brilliance.

The film has dated somewhat, rooted as it is in the days of moon-shots and the Space Race. But at its heart is a prescient meditation on the nature of artificial intelligence which is more relevant now than it was in '68. HAL, the computer (a warm red light in a cold human environment), goes mad, while the human beings rarely show any emotion at all — and goes mad because its/his creators were unable to grasp the moral complexity of his programming.

Mention should be made of the tremendous cut from the distant past to the near future. An early hominid, who just discovered the use of tools, tosses a bone into the air; as it spins in the sky, the image is transformed into a spinning space station. It's a fantastically economical cinematic image. But more than that, it expresses the very essence of humanity — the role of labour, so to speak, in the transition from ape to man.

Kubrick withdrew *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) from circulation in the UK because of fears of copy-cat killings. As a result, in this country it can only normally be seen on crappy pirate videos (when a London cinema screened it a few years ago,

Kubrick sued) — which is the only way I've seen it myself. Based on Anthony Burgess' novel, the film is an almost cartoonish stylisation of inner-city violence, of moral emptiness, and of the equal moral void in the state's efforts to address the problem. Again, Kubrick goes for complex, ambivalent material: who is worse — the violent thug, or the state which "deals with him" by robbing him of emotion, of humanity?

Barry Lyndon, based on Thackeray's novel, is one of Kubrick's least seen and least liked movies, because it is extremely long and slow (and it bombed commercially, I think). But it deserves to be seen. Once again, you have the distinctive Kubrick style and attention to



A Clockwork

detail — here addressed to lavishly recreating on the screen eighteenth century paintings, even where this required technical breakthroughs in lighting.

It was followed by one of his most popular movies (although at the time it didn't do that well in the cinemas): *The Shining*, adapted from a Stephen King novel. Kubrick takes a traditional and rather corny ghost story, and turns it into a terrifying indictment of the nuclear family. A man, his wife, and possibly psychic child spend the winter looking after a hotel. There, the conflicts, frustrations and repressed emotions of their family group erupt into violence. For most of the film, you can read the progression of the father (Jack Nicholson) either as his response to the hotel's ghosts, or as simply the development of his own mental instability. If the film has a fault, it is that this "two-level" interpretation is occasionally violated, and only the supernatural explanation is possible. But even at the supernatural level, we are given a powerful metaphor for America: the hotel is built on a graveyard.

Visually, the film is pure Kubrick (the famous tracking shots following the kid around the corridors on his bike; the set-



Barry Lyndon: the film Kubrick withdrew from circulation.

piece "visions", blood pouring out of the elevator) — and there is Kubrick's typical use of classical music, rather than an original score (here it is mainly Bartok).

But the real question which demonstrates the film's strength is simply this: can you think of another horror movie which is even vaguely similar? Poltergeist takes a similar basic idea — the angry spirits of the dead beneath the housing estate; but to compare the films for a moment is to realise how in Kubrick's hands this is not merely a "horror" device, but a statement — something with real meaning. This was Kubrick's greatest skill — to take something familiar and transform it.

Full Metal Jacket does the same thing with the "Vietnam film". Formally, it's unusual, as it is divided into equal halves — first in a training camp, then in battle. (The standard Vietnam film gets you into the jungle a lot earlier.) And this is because, again, of Kubrick's real concern: not just "war" in the abstract, but the relations of power between people. At the film's climax, the Vietnamese sharpshooter who has been scaring the US soldiers to death, and whom they finally kill, turns out to be a teenage girl.

The faceless sniper, "the enemy", is just a child. It raises, in very simple dramatic form, the crux of the matter politically: why is a teenage girl prepared to risk her life to fight American soldiers? It might not have the grand epic quality of *Apocalypse Now*, but it is powerful stuff nonetheless.

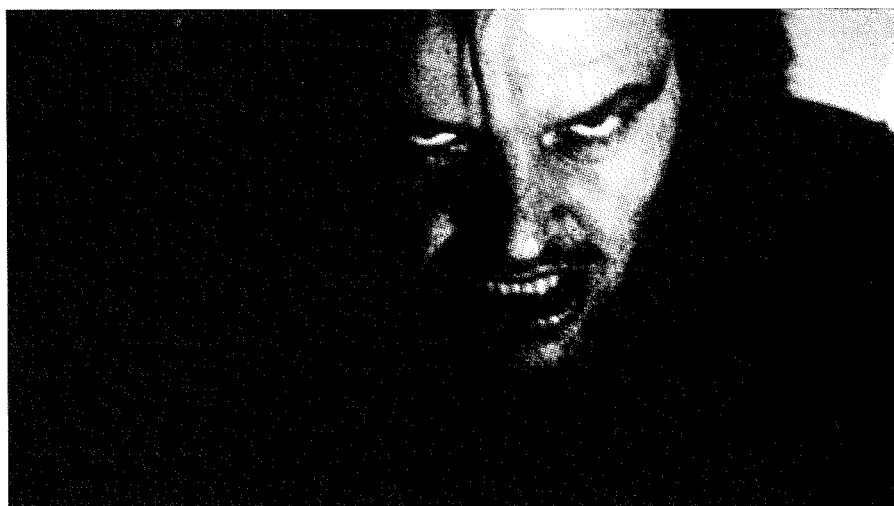
Eyes Wide Shut, starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, will be released later

this year. Apparently, it's Kubrick's look into the world of sexual fantasy. In fact many of his films have little or no sexual content at all, which is unusual in itself (some do, of course, most obviously *Lolita*). It sounds, therefore, like something of a departure. Much has been made of the obsessiveness of Kubrick's demands on the actors (50 odd takes of Cruise coming through a door). The real point, however, is that actors whose standard fee is millions of dollars don't decamp to England for two years and live in near hiding for just anybody. Even Tom Cruise, offered the chance to work with Stanley Kubrick, jumped at it at whatever cost.

A lot was made, in his obituaries, of Kubrick as the last of the "auteurs". This idea, which comes out of 1950s French film theory and the directors who developed it

"Actors whose standard fee is millions of dollars don't decamp to England for two years and live in near hiding for just anybody."

(Jean Luc Goddard, Francois Truffeau), was to do with the director as sole "author" of the work of art. In so far as directors have clear, individual voices, Kubrick was plainly an "auteur"; but the idea has limited meaning. No director is really sole author, as they depend heavily on writers, cinematographers, designers and editors to create their films (not to mention the actors). To detach *Lolita* from Vladimir Nabokov, or *2001* from Arthur C. Clarke (who co-wrote it) is stupidly to diminish their contribution.



The Shining

What is Marxism for?

MUCH of the material in this *Workers' Liberty* is about Marxism itself. Even much of the coverage of the Kosova crisis is focused on the Marxist left. That is necessary. Socialism is about the class struggle, about practical action, about the inescapably violent seizure of industry and power out of the hands of the ruling class. Yet the only socialism that has ever made itself a viable force in history has been a socialism, and socialists, "of the book" — socialists concerned with theory, with science, with learning, with knowing and remembering. "Without a revolutionary theory," wrote Lenin famously, "there can be no revolutionary movement."

A hundred years ago in the Russian Empire, as far as the Tsarist authorities were concerned the most fearsome revolutionaries were the Narodnik terrorists. They killed a Tsar in 1881. Lenin's brother Alexander, who took part in a plot to kill a Tsar, was hanged in 1887. By comparison the Marxists, with their doctrinal disputes, seemed relatively harmless. Some Marxist scientific literature was legally tolerated. Yet, Trotsky would write with perfect truth after the October revolution, it was not those who set out with guns and bombs in their hands who overthrew the Tsar, but those who set out with Marx's *Capital* under their arms.

Of the Ulyanov brothers, it was not the heroic martyr Alexander but the book-worming Vladimir Ilyich (Lenin) who posed the fundamental threat to the system. Marxism offered an alternative world outlook to that of the bourgeoisie and the landlords and those throughout society who supported them. It provided a theory of society and a method of extending and deepening that theory; it offered the perspective of a different type of society growing up within the capitalist class society, but dependent for its realisation on the revolutionary activity of the capitalist wage-slave class, the proletariat. The Marxist socialist movement was the memory of the proletariat. The "fusion of science [Marxism] and the proletariat" created mass working class movements that did, indeed, seem capable of carving out the future they proclaimed. The battle for Marxism against bourgeois and petit-bourgeois outlooks within the labour movement was understood to be itself a front of the class struggle — the "ideological front".

THIS issue of *Workers' Liberty* contains four articles that shed light on this question. In 1914, the upper layers of the socialist parties of the Second International turned patriots and backed their own governments in the war. The bourgeoisie proclaimed the "collapse of Marxism".

Lenin and others felt obliged to dig down to the roots of the Marxism that had dominated the International, and worked to define the flaws, mistakes and corruptions of doctrine that had led to the International's collapse. Of the results of this work Lenin's *State and Rev-*

olution is perhaps the best known.

The "movement of the book" had to clean, shuffle, re-read and supplement its books. In Russia "science and the proletariat" had been fused as nowhere else — a raw, militant proletariat able to innovate new weapons like the mass strike and a Marxist movement forced to keep its intellectual weapons sharp and clear: "Marxism", which saw capitalism as progressive in history, had been adapted by layers of the Russian bourgeoisie opposed to the backward Tsarist system. The proletarian Marxists had to define and redefine themselves, the nature of the Russian revolution they worked for, and their own role in that revolution — "theory" was central. Yet, though Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg, Plekhanov and Martov believed that there could be no revolutionary movement without a revolutionary theory, they made no fetish of "theory".

What distinguished Lenin's group from all the others was its capacity to pierce through the limits of its own theory and learn from the living working class, adjusting theory accordingly. There was a living fructifying interaction between theory and practice.

THUS, though Lenin and his comrades, like all the Marxists before 1905, believed that Russia needed and could not have other than a bourgeois revolution, they came in practice to differ from the others. Using theory as blindfold rather than microscope, the Mensheviks were content to stay on the level of generalities and to draw conclusions not from life, but from theoretical generalisations. A bourgeois revolution? Then obviously it will be led by the bourgeoisie. A bourgeois revolution? Yes, said Lenin, in chorus with the others. But, he continued, no longer in chorus, what kind of bourgeois revolution? He insisted on examining the real Russian bourgeoisie as it was in life, irrespective of what theory said. He concluded that the Russian bourgeoisie could not lead a revolution and postulated that the workers and peasants would have to make the bourgeois revolution, against the bourgeoisie.

Focussing on the social realities he thus concretised and deepened theory and laid the grounds for a revolutionary transformation of Marxist theory in the course of the revolution of 1917. The idea of fetishising "theory" in such a way that it blinkered perception and stifled concrete analysis and thought was utterly alien to Lenin. So was the idea that one could blame "bad theory" if, out of deference to "theory" one failed to keep concrete social, political and economic reality under constant review, testing and honing, and, where necessary, supplementing the theory in the process.

Though Lenin went into the 1917 revolution with a set of mistaken theories, he was not disabled by them as were the theoretically self-blindfolded Mensheviks. The Russian revolution allowed a comprehensive renewal of Marxism.

This month's *Workers' Liberty* begins a series of articles about the collapse of "Marxism" in 1914, and its renewal, beginning with

the first installment of an account by Boris Souvarine of the collapse of the Second International. Souvarine was a central leader of the Communist Party of France in the 1920s. When he backed the Trotskyist Opposition in the USSR he was removed by the Zinoviev-Stalinist Communist International leadership.

Clive Bradley debates Comrade Torab, whose Iranian "orthodox Trotskyist" organisation was wrecked 20 years ago in the course of the Iranian revolution. He thinks that Marxist theory is now only a thing of holes and shreds. Torab is a respectable victim of an understanding radically different from that of the Bolsheviks of what "Marxist theory" is, and of the consequences for his organisation of the ensuing self-blinding by the international tendency to which he then belonged [the Mandelstam "Fourth International"].

Tony Brown analyses the influential obscurantist current of modern bourgeois thought known as "post-modernism".

Paul Hampton makes a sweeping survey of the theory of the SWP in a review of Tony Cliff's booklet *Trotskyism after Trotsky*.

THE production of two books last year — *How Solidarity Can Change the World* and *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* — wreaked havoc with our publication schedules. It has to be a matter of political judgement as to whether that was a price worth paying: we think it was; the texts in *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* will over time help restore and regenerate the revolutionary left. Illness disrupted our plans to produce a double number on Ireland in December; illness and then the production of the special issue on unity in January derailed Part Two of the discussion piece on Hal Draper and Israel. That will appear in the May *Workers' Liberty* and in the following issue, Alan Johnson will reply to it. The discussion on Ireland will resume in the next *Workers' Liberty* with a contribution from John Bloxam. Much of the work on the projected Irish double issue is done, and we hope to publish that in August.

With this fourth consecutive monthly edition of *Workers' Liberty* we are back on regular schedule: *Workers' Liberty* will appear 10 times a year, excepting August and December, with 40 pages per issue. Each August and December we will produce some sort of "special" — pamphlet issue or book.

Sales of *The Fate of the Russian Revolution Volume I* have been very encouraging. So far we have got back 70% of the £10,000 cost of producing and circulating it. The paucity of reviews has been disappointing so far, but a number of reviews are expected in the next few months. Three things you might do, if you haven't already, to push the circulation: order a copy of *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*; ask your local library to order it (do that even if you have bought it: others will benefit); order copies to sell to your friends and "contacts".

Sean Matgamna



Russian May Day demonstration, 1917

Remaking socialism: part I

By Boris Souvarine

The eclipse of the International

ON 4 August, 1914, the Workers' International breathed its last, and that watchword of socialism "Death to militarism", which should have rung out clear and strong above the tumult of mobilisation and the clash of arms, was unheard by the peoples of the world. No doubt this cry of revolt from a workers' movement animated by a true solidarity of the exploited against their task masters would have been promptly stifled by the death-dealing implements of war, and by the weight of censorship and martial law, but ere its defeat it would have awakened the consciences of thousands, who, in their turn, would have awakened thousands more.

Thus the opposition of the workers to militarism would have swiftly followed on the declaration of war, instead of supervening years later, and the governing classes would have had to reckon from the start with an opposing force to whose ranks every additional day of warfare

would have brought fresh recruits, until they assumed revolutionary strength. But, instead of this, the International remained silent.

The International, that is to say its executive and its representatives rather than its component sections, has never, unto this day, refuted the shameful conduct to which its members had to submit. The men who were pledged to denounce capitalism and all its crimes suddenly forgot their sacred trust. They gleaned from the columns of the capitalist press reasons, which, in their minds, would exonerate them from blame in becoming traitors to their cause, by exchanging their sense of human solidarity for "patriotism". They forsook their socialist credo "Proletarians of the world unite!", endeavouring to make others forsake it also, commanding their victims: "Proletarians destroy one another!"

In Austria, Pan-Serbianism served as an excuse. In Russia they advertised the need of helping Serbia. In Germany they denounced the Cossack menace. In France they made much of the threatening Pruss-

ian militarist caste. In England they appealed for aid for stricken Belgium. In all countries they voiced loudly such catchwords as: "right", "liberty", and "civilisation". Everywhere "national defence" was a commanding reason for men to shoulder the burden of war, to obey the ruling classes, to suffer and to die for their country.

The "leaders" of European socialism, such as Jules Guesde, Hyndman, Plekhanov, Victor Adler, Scheideman, Vandervelde, who had taught us the principles of the class struggle and of the solidarity of class, soon found bonds which would link together the exploiters and exploited of the same country, and the interests common to both masters and slaves. Thus did the masses become identified with the "nation".

Thus was the proletariat won over to crime in order to safeguard the interests of an oligarchy which socialism has ever denounced as a robber and a usurper. And yet these "leaders" of the International were in no way unaware that war, under whatever pretext it may be fought, was but

the result of the imperial politics of all the ruling castes in Europe. They well knew that the happenings of the week previous to August 4, 1914, were of only secondary importance, they were but the immediate provocation and not the causes of the war. Had these "leaders" not taught us themselves to discern the deep and tremendous reasons which make the capitalist management of the world nothing less than a war-generating machine? Is not modern warfare but the violent interpretation of rival interests and economic jealousies which modern capitalist society has split into opposing camps?

Up to the eve of war the words "general strike" and "direct action" were for them the supreme interpretation of the popular desire for peace. "Not an ounce of our flesh, not a drop of our blood, not a man, not a cent will we yield you," said they, not deeming the causes of conflict worthy of the life either of a French infantryman or of a German grenadier. And those who did not believe in the efficacy of a general strike, said to the masses: "Shoulder your gun, but turn it against your exploiters."

Suddenly the socialist creed completely changed its colour. Within 24 hours it was identifying itself with "national duty" and its words of command were directly opposed to those tenets with which we were all so familiar. They exacted allegiance to the war from all socialists, even insisting on their becoming combatants. They forbade any "disturbance" whether at the front or in the rear, meaning thereby either agitation or revolt. Opposed to militarism as the workers were in times of peace, yet had they to submit to it during the war.

Such was the attitude suggested by the behaviour of the "leaders" of the International. But this treachery was not the result of the weakness of a day, but was unavoidable owing to the previous policy of those forever disqualified "leaders", whose shameful conduct we have already hinted at and mean to discuss later. The confusion caused by the declaration of war on August 4, 1914, might have excused a temporary slackening of their beliefs, for which we should not have blamed them unduly, had they subsequently repudiated their action and repaired some of the damage they had caused. But instead they wished to justify themselves in their sudden change of camp, and out of their error even founded a new political creed, which amounted to nothing less than perfidious treachery to their old flag.

In collaborating with the bourgeoisie, in sharing the responsibilities of the capitalist policy of the war, in becoming

members of the "Sacred Union", in accepting the aims of imperialism, in resisting every hint of proletarian revolution other than in the "enemy countries", in all these ways have they done more than merely sever their connection with socialism — they have passed over into the class camp of the enemy.

Many socialists are not well informed on these points, and that is our reason for writing thus. We propose to study the causes of the death of the Second International and to deduce therefrom any lessons to be gained. We wish to combat the infection with which its carcass is surrounded; namely, the miasma of misconceptions, of spurious sophisms which have survived it, and which nothing can disinfect or purge.

Finally we propose to define the organisation and working of the Third International, which rejects those men and those ideas that war has poisoned, which calls to its councils all revolutionary workers and all socialists whose creed was undamaged by the crisis of August 4, 1914. The Third International is born of the war; baptised by trials and sufferings, sanctified by revolutions, and its young strength will be tomorrow irresistible.

The Rise and Fall of the Second International

IF the downfall of the Second International and its leaders was rendered inevitable by the policy it adopted after August 4, 1914, its former policy had rendered that defeat inevitable.

Eaten out by an opportunism which was disseminated by a revolutionary Marxist interpretation, undermined by doubt in the presence of essential problems, content to delve in equivocal terms and in contradictory solutions which solved nothing, this organisation of international labour crumbled at the first shock. We certainly recognise the merits of its work during the last 20 years, and in no way ignore either its considerable educational propaganda or the spiritual influence which it exercised on Europe and upon the world. None but the members of the bourgeois regime would deny its beneficial work for peace and for the liberation of labour. But the salvation of the proletariat, to which cause socialists have dedicated their lives, makes it necessary that we should sternly judge our faults.

If that great organisation of the past is dead, it has not been killed by the war, rather has it held within itself the festering germs of its own decomposition. The historico-political conditions wherein it was born and bred contaminated it with poisonous ferments. As Charles Rappoport has justly said of the Second International:

"It possessed from the start a defeated soul."

The defeat of the Paris Commune, the implacable bourgeois repression and the discouragement which ensued, overshadowed it and became at last an obsession.

The First International was that of theorists... and of dissolutions. The Second was that of recruiters... and of unity. The desire for a large membership obsessed the socialists during the '80s. To this task they especially applied themselves, endeavouring to increase the membership of the various parties, and were wholly preoccupied with the avoidance of a new proletarian disaster. The idea of the invincibility of numbers was their pole-star, and thus it was that they underestimated the importance of economic crises which might confer political supremacy on the revolutionary elite. Nor did they value sufficiently the homogeneous doctrine enabling that elite to realise their programme and thus gain the support of the masses.

Keen in recruiting, eager to give their supporters a field of immediate satisfaction, the Second International gradually lost sight of the final aim of socialism. They forgot the luminous doctrines of Marx and Engels, which exhort their disciples at all times when the proletariat grows restless to emphasise the necessity of a radical change in the present laws of property.

Under the cloak of realism it repudiated "illegal" action as dangerous, and regarded a revolutionary seizing of power in catastrophic circumstances as a mere utopia. Under the pretext of educational and preparatory activity it sacrificed the revolutionary training of the masses. It made the vote and parliamentarism the essential weapons of the proletariat, at the same time teaching that the action of the masses as a means of helping forward the movement was a dangerous method to employ.

Nevertheless, if socialism decided to carry on the political struggle, there was nothing to indicate that this struggle must of necessity be identified with parliamentarism. On the contrary our interpretation only looked upon electoral action as a means of agitation, and parliamentary action as an adjunct to direct action.

Electoral appeals and parliamentarism were only to be means of propaganda, only special aspects of political action.

Jules Guesde, at the period when he still drew his inspiration from Marxism, remarked that the struggle at the ballot box was only the preparation for the armed struggle (Congress of Nancy, 1907). This formula and many others remained merely platonic.

Reformism, which had been appar-

ently overcome at the International Congress of Amsterdam, triumphed over those who had overthrown it, by inoculating them with it. Electoral successes intoxicated the parties to the extent of giving them a sort of feeling of security and of assurance of certain victory by means of the normal and progressive growth of votes and of the number of elected socialists. They forgot the lessons of history which Marx had underlined, the decisive role of "midwife helping the new order in its birth pangs", the ever-increasing oppression of the state, as day by day the transference of power from one class to another becomes more imminent, the inevitability of a gesture of conservative will on the part of the privileged on the approach of real danger.

Lulled into false repose, they did not give to imperialism and to the threats of war the attention that a more rigorous logic should have demanded. Instead of looking upon imperialism as an attribute of capitalism, inseparable from the regime to which its fate is linked, our parliamentary chiefs looked upon it merely as an error of bourgeois politics, a mistake which the governing classes would renounce whenever we should prove to them that it was harmful to their interests.

Many were the socialists who awaited from the hands of the bourgeoisie both disarmament and peace, as later, in paroxysm of aberration, they awaited from President Wilson's influence those benefits which socialism expects solely from the mission of the proletariat. Such a heresy proves that we must not play with reformism: socialism must eliminate it or perish.

Inspired by this spirit which respected the form of the Marxian interpretation whilst emptying it of its revolutionary content, which extinguished the flame and only preserved the ashes, socialists held as legitimate colonial expansion, that detestable aspect of imperialism, by affirming the need for the colonies to traverse the phase of capitalist production prior to the abolition of their subjection. The most cynical confirmation of this thesis was that of the Italian reformers who were banned from the party at the time of the expedition to Tripoli.

Finally, when faced by the prospect of a European war, the misinterpretation of the fundamental principles of the class war was disclosed, side by side with the theoretical affirmation of the responsibility of the regime, formulated as if to rid themselves of a painful task the Second International proclaimed the necessity of "national defence" and the "defence of an invaded country".

To borrow thus the bourgeois phraseology which socialist language would have

expressed as "defence of capitalist privileges" and "sacrifice of the proletariat to the interests of the class oppressing them, to a country they did not yet own", was this not renouncing revolutionary opposition, a renunciation by which the possessing oligarchy were soon to benefit?

It is true that the International further proposed a popular agitation as a means of ending the war, and hastening the fall of capitalism. But this is precisely an absolute contradiction.

To defend the bourgeois mother-country excludes all hypothesis of revolution: events have amply proved this.

The adhesion to "national defence" subordinates all proletarian schemes to the victory of one imperialism over all other competitive imperialisms. The collaboration of classes for the benefit of a privileged class, the participation in power, the credit votes etc., etc., all diminish the probability of a rising "before the enemy".

The fumes of nationalism have long obscured these truths; today they appear in so crude a light that the simple exposure of events constitutes the most damning evidence against opportunism and its champions.

The French and German socialists, the grave diggers of the Second International

WHEN the first days of August, 1914, saw the irreparable accomplished, that is to say when the socialist provisions announcing the inevitable transformation of capitalist competition into imperialist war were realised, the two fractions of the International, on whom should have fallen the task of resistance to the enterprises of the governing classes, renounced all resistance.

The German fraction, which had denounced the policy of the Empire, and of its Austrian ally, which had held up to scorn Chancellors and Ministers, Pan-German squireens and junkers, which had vehemently condemned the ultimatum to Serbia as a provocation to war, accepted the accomplished fact, and submitted to the war, to its methods, to the regime. Its representatives in the Reichstag unanimously voted the war credits, with the exception of one member, Fritz Kunert, who deliberately walked out of the chamber. (This fact was not allowed to leak out until after the termination of the war.)

The French faction, which had denounced the policy of the Republic and of its Russian ally, which had abused President Poincaré and his ministers, together with the nationalist diplomatists and financiers, which had vehemently con-

demned the alliance with Russia as likely to lead to war, accepted likewise the accomplished fact, and submitted to the war, to its methods, and to the regime. Its representatives in the chamber unanimously voted the war credits.

The vows of the past were forgotten, the International solidarity of the workers had disappeared. The solidarity of the exploiters and of the exploited was established.

In Germany and in France there were a few opposing elements to the abdication of parties and of leaders, but at first their number was infinitely small. They succeeded in profiting by favourable occasions in expressing their fidelity to international socialism, and in resuscitating the revolutionary spirit. They discovered means of revolting against "socialist discipline", in the name of socialist doctrine. Their lack of discipline towards the parties saved the honour of socialism in Germany and in France, saved socialism itself.

But for a long time their voices were stifled, and only the traitors to socialism were able to speak in the name of socialism in voices that could be heard. They spoke, they wrote, they acted, unfortunately for the proletariat, to their eternal shame.

If they had renounced the socialist interpretation because they were powerless in face of chauvinism let loose, at least they should have remained silent, and have waited for the propitious moment to utter a socialist protest. They need not have put their programme into action, but, at least they should not have renounced it.

They did renounce it. They not only submitted to the war, they accepted it, then they approved it, then they justified it, then they magnified it, and thus they prolonged it. After the vote of credits, the symbol of the renouncement of opposition, the French socialists entered the bourgeois government, while in Germany an active support was given to the Imperial government. This was followed by a refusal to link up international relations. Later on the omnipotence of the army staff, the dictatorship of war profiteers, the censorship, the state of siege, the "war to the end" (that is to say until imperialist appetites were satisfied) were all, one after the other, accepted. Finally came adhesion to the counter-revolution.

In their apostasy they adopted all the bourgeois theses, which they had formerly denounced. They each invented their theory of the first aggressor, the Germans laying the blame on the Russian mobilisation, the French on the German attack, as the principal event justifying their new attitude. They pretended to forget that, according to the luminous formula of Montesquieu, the real responsibility for a war

rests not on him who declares it, but on him who renders it inevitable, and that, for us socialists, it is the actual regime under which we live which renders war inevitable.

One of the characteristics of their policy was the repudiation of international policy, common to all socialist parties. Each group of opportunists maintained that his country was in some special sort of situation necessitating a special policy. Each one was a revolutionary — for a neighbouring country. The French opportunists applauded the revolt of Karl Liebknecht, and the German opportunists approved the protests of the French Internationalists. Both declarations were hideous hypocrisies.

Logical in their opportunism, Vandervelde, Jules Guesde, Albert Thomas, etc. adjured the Russian nation not to revolt, but submit docilely to Tsarism. The war first, the republic later, wrote Guesde. The Russian revolution was a crime against the cause of the Allies, and therefore according to our socialist-patriots against justice and socialism. On the other hand the German revolution was beneficial from the socialist-patriotic Russian point of view; the Russian revolutions were beneficial to the Allies, those of Germany and of Austria were criminal.

Thus does opportunism lead socialists to espouse the interests of their respective bourgeoisies, and revolutionary socialists cannot fight the ones without the others. As a matter of fact they should oppose the opportunists more firmly because they are more dangerous than are the declared enemies of socialism, because of the socialist mask behind which they hide.

The renaissance of the International on the ruins of the International

IT must be recorded that the socialist parties of France, Germany and Belgium, which made common cause with the bourgeoisie, were, before the war, united parties. In other words they had an all-pervading desire to preserve their unity at the cost of reciprocal concessions of tendencies, concessions which allowed profound disagreements, rendering all common action impossible to remain behind a facade of resolutions of unanimity. The evident result of these tactics was great electoral success... and at the decisive moment complete abdication.

On the other hand, in the various countries where the socialist fractions kept their distinct organisations, answering to distinct conceptions, revolutionary inter-

nationalism was much strengthened.

In Russia, the Bolshevik and Menshevik social-revolutionaries fought against the war. Any betrayals only amounted to the secession of individuals, and in no way compromised the parties. The Social-Democrats of Poland and of Lithuania adopted the attitude of the Bolsheviks, the Bund that of the Mensheviks. The Polish Socialist Party of the left, which had broken away from the right, remained faithful, whilst the right declared for the war.

In Great Britain, the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party protested against the war. The betrayal of Hyndman and of a handful of his friends was of no real consequence.

In Italy, the Socialist Party, which had broken with the reformists, remained socialists and internationalists, whilst the reformist fraction claimed solidarity with Italian nationalism.

In Bulgaria, the so-called "narrow" Social-Democrats (because of their doctrinal intransigence), in Serbia, and Rumania, the Social Democratic Parties remained firmly opposed to the war.

Finally, in the United States the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party, both refractory to chauvinism, remained parties interpreting the class struggle and revolution. The few "intellectuals" that approved of warlike intervention were forced to leave the Party.

In France and in Germany, where the united parties abdicated from one day to another their independence and their role of revolutionary opposition the overpowering weight of the organisations crushed down the minorities in whom were incarnated the socialist conscience. Nevertheless, these minorities grew and increased in strength in proportion to their power to deliver themselves from a discipline whose letter killed the spirit.

In Germany, some weeks after the declaration of war, Karl Liebknecht began his fight against the Empire, the capitalist regime, and German imperialism, and also against the treacherous social-democracy. Supporting him were Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Otto Ruhle, Paul Levey, Clara Zetkin, Karl Radek, and many others less known, who undertook the historic task of destroying in the German people the militarist spirit, patriotic submission, and docility to the suggestions of the renegades of socialism; and of leading them on to the revolution. The annals of international socialism, and of human progress will blazon among their greatest the names of these heroes.

In France since November, 1914, Pierre Monatte denounced the war policy of syndicalist leaders, and resigned from the confederal committee. With him Mer-

rheim, and later Bourderon and other syndicalists who had remained faithful to the International, to its ideal of peace and solidarity between nations, to its principles of struggle against the possessing class, attempted the renewal of international relations, and the restoration of its original tactics.

On the occasion of the convocation of a conference of socialists from neutral countries at Copenhagen (November, 1914), of Liebknecht's declaration in the Reichstag (2 December, 1914), of the socialist and syndicalist conference of Allied countries (London, February, 1915), they did their best to echo the pacifist appeals of Denmark and of Germany, and to make of the Allied conference the first step towards the International conference.

In the Socialist Party there were with Bourderon, Pernand Lorient, Charles Rapoport, and later Louise Saumoneau and Alexandre Blanc, seconded by militants less known, but of absolute devotion, who constituted the opposition group.

By the side of these artisans of the new International, socialists more hesitating in their attitude, but haunted by noble scruples, and by an imperfect notion of socialist duties reacted against the absolute betrayals of the majorities. In Germany it was "Opposition inside the Organisation" led by Haase, Ledebour, Kautsky, Hoffman, Bernstein, Louise Zietz, Dittmann, etc. In France it was the "minority" with Brizon, Raffin Dugens, Lonquet, Pressemane, Mistral, Mayeras, Paul Faure, Verfeuil, Delepine, Maurin, Dunos, etc. These two fractions, whom socialist logic scared, who did not dare to adopt the principles and the tactics of the out-and-out revolutionaries, who were troubled about preserving "unity" with traitors, and who consequently condemned themselves to impotence, nevertheless played a useful role through their resistance to chauvinism. The German fraction showed itself more active than did the French, and destroyed the pernicious unity of social democracy by forming the Independent Party, appealing from the Reichstag benches to the people, in favour of a popular rising.

These groupings, whose socialist spirit was not completely obscured by the war, used their efforts without any general vision, without co-ordination, in the same way as did the parties or fractions among the socialists of neutral countries (Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Greece, Portugal), who were inspired with similar ideas. International Conferences were necessary. The first one met at Zimmerwald, 5 September, 1915, a place and date of primary importance henceforth in the history of socialism.

Getting to grips with post-modernism

By Tony Brown

IN the English speaking world post-modernism has become highly influential in the universities, on the left and among a loosely defined "intelligentsia". What is remarkable though are the number of people, regardless of whether they are advocates, opponents or just interested bystanders, who acknowledge that they have little understanding of what post-modernism's essential tenets are or what they mean.

While post-modernism has become an increasingly fashionable topic of debate in academic circles it is not confined there. It is commonplace to read in newspapers that a movie, a novel, a building, a dress style, a restaurant or even a menu is post-modern. On campuses it become almost a new orthodoxy, especially in the humanities and social sciences. This in turn feeds back into the media as journalism and cultural studies departments turn out bright young graduates.

But for many students in higher education the simple question is: what is post-modernism? And for most even after making serious attempts to find out, or listening to someone who is trying to explain the basic concepts, they remain confused, mystified, and doubt their own powers of intellectual comprehension. Some become post-modernists but for the rest they must decide for themselves whether the person they asked for an explanation was dim in that they couldn't explain this popular idea; that they are dim because they couldn't understand something that so many others appear to have embraced; or that the concept itself is fashionable but unfathomable, a mish-mash of ideas dressed in radical clothes. I favour the last explanation.

Yet it obviously has appeal for some. It appears to offer an explanation of a fragmented society at the end of the twentieth century even if one of its central ideas is that we cannot make sense of the world. It's worth, therefore, trying to understand what appeal this theory holds, what its core ideas are, where they come from (or to use a favourite post-modern term what is its "genealogy") and why its critics assess it as a politics of despair.

On the surface there is considerable appeal in post-modern claims. In embracing the difference and diversity of modern societies they reject conservative claims for an all-embracing monoculture built upon uni-



versal "truths" dictated by western, white, colonisers. They challenge the dominance of masculine power and its representation and expression in the institutions which dominate our lives. They object to the normalising pressures on sexuality and point to the power of language in constructing understandings of the world and relationships.

As Terry Eagleton has pointed out many activists were attracted to the work of Michel Foucault, who drew attention to the social construction of sexuality, who saw power as being dispersed through society, for instance in families and prisons, and insisting on the connection between power and knowledge. Foucault's work seemed to offer a theoretical basis for shifting the focus of radical analysis away from macrostructures such as the economy and the state, and toward daily life, ideology, social relations and culture. Foucault's identification of resistance with the marginalised and suppressed attracted many at a time when radical struggles were being led by groups peripheral to mainstream culture such as disaffected youth, feminists, gays and lesbians and black and indigenous minorities.

It seemed very radical to argue that the views and beliefs of all these "identities" were equally valid and that there is no such thing as "truth". The argument goes that because the perception of reality is mediated by images and constructed by discourse

there can only be truth claims. And since there is nothing against which these claims can be measured, they all have the same standing.

But its ideas tap into other prevailing moods. The 1970s began a long, still continuing, period of uncertainty. The end of the long post-war economic boom heralded in a crisis for both the right and left wings of mainstream bourgeois politics. The certainties of the post-war period fell away, a gradual decline in working class living standards began laying the foundation for Thatcher and Reagan, the welfare state began to be dismantled and public services privatised. What had at times been a militant labour movement accommodated to Thatcherism, and in France, Spain, New Zealand and Australia led the way in introducing free market policies. Revulsion at the politics of the be-suited managers of capital and their personal immorality is personified by Clinton, but he is only one among many before him. The rapid collapse of the Stalinist states in Eastern and Central Europe took away the final certainty for many on the left. It is not surprising then that many newcomers to politics are dismissive of those who claim there is still a politics that aspires to be emancipatory for an entire class of people. They are ready to reject such "projects", instead opting for particular campaigns, whether they be anti-racist, environmental or feminist.

What post-modernists have been very

successful at doing is claiming that they have revealed new insights, that they have discovered something — for instance that the centralised, male-dominated power of the advanced industrial states oppresses and disregards third world peoples — women and minority groups, that hasn't been theorised before. They have simultaneously achieved, especially within many university faculties, a hegemony that has positioned opponents as somehow defending the status quo.

A real problem is that those who are sceptical of the claims, who question the plausibility of cultural studies, literary theory or modern sociology stay silent for fear of being ridiculed for not understanding the "theory" in the first place. It is a contemporary example of an age-old "fear" of speaking the truth that Hans Christian Anderson captured in the story of the Emperor's Clothes.

The important task then is to distinguish between the ephemeral and the substantial, between what is new in the post-modern theory and what are its continuities with earlier ideas. We need to say what are the implications and consequences of these ideas and then to assess their significance.

What is post-modernism ?

IN the 1970s and 1980s post-modernism was loosely associated with avant-garde trends in architecture and art, and new technology related-developments in computers and the media. It was launched in 1975 when Charles Jencks coined the term "post-modernism" to describe a trend in architecture. Since then it has spread through the social sciences. The various strands of "post" literatures — in culture, post-modernism; in politics, post-Marxism; in political economy, post-Fordism; in philosophy and linguistics, post-structuralism — emphasise the principles of fragmentation, heterogeneity, and contingency, and are hostile to ideas of "totality", structure, and "grand narratives".

If post-modernism is another theory, a way of interpreting the world, or a "truth claim" what is its "genealogy"? That is, where does it come from, what is its heritage, who are its forebears? And why do Marxists call it ahistorical, and an anti-working class politics?

The language of post-modernism is so impenetrable that it can only be a deliberate, exclusive language game. Post-modern moment, post-modern doubt, over-determined conflict, post-structuralism, binarisms, metanarratives, essentialism, deconstruction, decentredness, totalising imperatives, identity, irreducible materiality, semiotics, dialogism and so on, now make

up intellectual exchange despite the fact that very few can give any relatively straightforward explanation of what is meant by these terms. However, the ideas that underpin it are not so new.

Nineteenth century sociologists saw scientific rationality as the triumph over a pre-modern world associated with religion, superstition, tradition and pre-ordained roles. Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Darwin and J. S. Mill among others all believed that scientific analysis could uncover a larger, encompassing story of human development (what post-modernists call "metanarratives"). And all thought they could identify the future direction of social change.

A number of post-modern theorists argue that the aims of the Enlightenment (they mostly use this term instead of capitalism, and as Ellen Wood (1996) succinctly explains it is historically inaccurate) have been abandoned in the 20th century. People no longer believe in the inevitability of progress, the power of science to solve problems, or the possibility of running societies in a rational way, arguing there is a wider variety of beliefs and that most people are unwilling to accept one set of truths in preference to another.

The early 1970s represents the end of the Enlightenment period, the end of modernity. It is a permanent and decisive break with the past. In fields such as the humanities, cultural and media studies, literature, literacy, feminism and education there are those who argue that this time marks the divide between modernity and post-modernity suggesting that the current post-modern era represents an epochal break from the whole preceding history of capitalism.

The structuralists

POST MODERNISM'S immediate intellectual forebears had formed a structuralist movement in France in the 1960s. They became more influential following the French general strike and demonstrations of May 1968, and in reaction against the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. A number of French thinkers headed by Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Claude Levi-Strauss put structuralism on the map. They built on the work of three earlier European writers — Marx, Freud and Ferdinand de Saussure — drawing on their analysis of social structures, psychoanalysis and linguistic analysis respectively.

Of the three it was the Swiss de Saussure's model of linguistic structures which has had the most lasting impact. This model, or "semiology", was a science of signs which, it was claimed, went beneath the surface events of language to investigate a

variety of concealed signifying systems, declaring that humans are made by structures beyond their conscious will or individual control. The structuralist claim to uncover these hidden unconscious structures was gradually challenged by a new school of French intellectuals — including Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-Francois Lyotard — who have been collectively grouped under the heading of post-structuralism. (See Epstein 1997, pp. 130-144.)

It is not possible here to detail the post-modern claims about the transition from modernity to post-modernity or the features of the new era. Instead I want to highlight some core ideas which make it easier to locate postmodernism in the context of the breakdown of the long economic boom and the struggle by capital to reassert the rate of profit growth and exploitation.

In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard argued that post-industrial society and post-modern culture began to develop at the end of the 1950s, although the rate and stage of development varied between countries. He saw these developments as related to technology, science and other social changes, but most importantly to changes in language. His key concept is that of "language games". He saw social life as being organised around these language games, which serve to justify or legitimate people's behaviour in society.

According to Lyotard, "metanarratives" (or overarching theories) of human emancipation, self-fulfilment and social progress have been undermined by post-modern society, resulting in "an incredulity towards metanarratives". He contends that the essence of post-modernism is a scepticism about every possible attempt to make sense of history, instead emphasising fragmentation, flux, instability and questioning the validity of claims to authenticity and truth.

For Baudrillard (1983) society has moved away from being based on production and shaped by the economic forces involved in exchanging goods. The central importance of buying and selling material goods has been replaced by buying and selling signs and images, which have little, if any, relationship to material reality. Modern society is based on the production and exchange of words and images (free-floating signifiers) which have no connection with the things that the words and images refer to (the signified).

While post-modernism rejected aspects of structuralism it retained the focus on language, the view that language provides the categories that shape the self and society. According to this view all reality is shaped by language; suggesting that language is real, everything else constructed or derived from it. Seemingly modern management

theory has picked up on this idea. Renaming a garbage collector a sanitary engineer or an accounts clerk a project manager might be intended to lift that individual's self esteem or prestige, but at the end of the day they are both still arm deep in muck of one sort or another.

The post-structuralists

JACQUES Derrida renounced the search for the structuralists' underlying meanings and the binary oppositions of surface and depth, inner and outer, conscious and unconscious and instead celebrated the excesses of language as a multiple play of meaning. His deconstructive strategy, in brief, is that prior systems have been constructed on the basis of conceptual oppositions — external/internal; good/evil; universal/particular. One of the terms in each set is "privileged", the other suppressed or excluded, for instance capitalist/worker.

Yet despite its rejection of binaries, post-structuralism itself rests on a new set of binary oppositions — modernity/post-modernity being the classic example — and at the same time establishes new metanarratives, for instance globalisation and the market, to replace those it rejects, such as that of class. That this reliance on language as the key shaping influence on individuals and society is not so new, and is indeed closely connected to earlier idealist philosophy: one need only refer to European debates taking place more than a century ago. Marx and Engels in their criticism of German idealist philosophy wrote in *The German Ideology* that:

"One of the most difficult tasks confronting philosophers is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life."

Marx & Engels 1976 pp. 472-473

Post-modern Marxists

THE conjuncture of the 1968 revolts in Paris and Prague, the reaction against the Soviet Union, and the beginning of the end of the boom combined for a number on the left in a retreat from the class analysis which had been the hallmark of Marx's method. The move away from this method was laid by intellectuals who had been members of Marxist political par-



Jacques Lacan (left) and Jacques Derrida (right)

ties. Althusser and Baudrillard had both been members of the French Communist Party while Lyotard had been a member of Socialisme ou Barbarie.

Althusser was a leading figure in the French Communist Party and a prominent philosophy lecturer at the Sorbonne. The revelations of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which Khrushchev made his famous secret speech denouncing Stalin, had set a number of European Marxists to question their own understanding of and involvement in Marxist politics. Althusser's major work, *For Marx* (1969), entailed a re-reading of Marx in which he developed a critique of what he considered to be Marx's base/superstructure argument. In this work he argued that Marxist understanding of the relationship between economics and "ideology" (or the state, laws, culture, propaganda, etc.) was too deterministic, that is, it was too simplistic in that economics supposedly determined the infrastructure of society — hence the characterisation of the debate as being a "base/superstructure" debate. Althusser's conclusion that ideology was separate or "relatively autonomous" was vigorously debated by writers such as EP Thompson (1978) and Ernest Mandel (1978) and later by Wood (1986 and 1995), but also stimulated entire fields of "ideology" study in cultural and media studies, philosophy, language and literacy.

If economists and politicians found the end of the long boom disorientating then the same struggle to come to grips with the causes and consequences of the changes in the 1970s can also be seen on the left. A number of new strands opened up with some going further away from Marxism into ideology critique, others seeking to synthesise post-modern concerns with Marxism and still others reassessing and revitalising the Marxist method freed of the shackles of the "actually existing socialism" of Eastern Europe.

David Harvey (1990), along with Fredric Jameson (1991), attempted to

synthesise a post-modern approach with a Marxist analysis of economic and cultural change. Harvey argued that the economic system remains at the heart of contemporary societies. Capitalism, he claims, is based on economic growth, worker exploitation is constantly restructuring and periods of crisis are unavoidable. For Harvey the economic crisis of the early 1970s had important consequences for society and culture, and led to a different regime of accumulation which produced a new mode of social and political regulation. The shift from modernism to post-modernism, which, by the way, he dates as occurring between 1968 and 1972, was characterised by a change to "flexible accumulation". For Harvey post-modernism "signals nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over a whole range of cultural production" (pp. 147, 38, 298).

Common to another strand of post-modern writing is the sense of the end or death of an era — and perhaps ironically a sense of loss. To add to Barthes' "death of the author", Derrida's "death of the subject" and Baudrillard's "death of the social", there is Lyotard's "end of all metanarratives" (Kumar 1997, p. 102), repackaging in philosophical language what Daniel Bell and Andre Gorz were writing some years earlier. Here the similarity to Fukuyama stands out and post-modernity itself becomes another version of the "end of history".

Post-Marxists

OTHER former Marxists, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe further developed Althusser's and Poulantzas' earlier questioning of class as the fundamental starting point for political and social analysis, elaborating a new post-Marxism. In their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Laclau and Mouffe (1985 pp 82-85) argued that all political identities or perspectives are constructed, that there is no particular relation between class position, for instance, and political stance. That is,

identities, relations, political positions are constructed entirely through interpretation, that there is no identifiable social reality against which interpretations can be judged, no ground in material or social reality that places any constraints on the formation of identities or perspectives. The link with postmodern theory is apparent.

Laclau (1987) believed that the contemporary crisis of the left had arisen because the basis for all the perspectives of socialism throughout the twentieth century had been eroded to the point where it was hard to believe in any of them any more. This had led to an acute malaise and lack of direction. The essential step in renewing socialist politics according to Laclau was to abandon the centrality of the working class because the numerical decline and economic fragmentation of the working class made the term less acceptable as a sociological description. Secondly, as a political notion the growing importance of other types of struggle which were not primarily working class struggles made its central position "far from evident". This meant that the working class was "a social agent limited in its objectives and possibilities and not the universal class of the Marxist tradition, the necessary agent of global emancipation" (1987, p30).

If the working class is limited as an historical agent for achieving socialism, how then is this limitation to be overcome? Laclau favoured an approach that emphasised the need to link the various struggles he saw as important — such as the anti-racist, feminist, and green movements. The means for doing this was a political movement that could transcend the particular struggles of different groups by making its supreme objective the struggle for a radical democracy. But this is an argument entirely within the confines of an outmoded phase of liberalism. But as the strike movement in South Korea or in France in 1995 demonstrate, the fundamental class struggles retain all their capacity to shake the social order and to pose alternatives.

The logical conclusion of these two strands of thought — post-modernism with its acceptance of the separation of ideology and economy; and post-Marxism with its abandonment of the working class as the principal agent of socialist change — leads to an acceptance of, or detente with, the existing social order. Together they suggest that the political, economic and social changes since the early 1970s have re-invigorated capitalism, combining post-Fordism, post-industrialism and post-modernism. Rather than challenging the status quo or the inequalities of power or wealth, they celebrate the opportunities of the "social market" which supposedly recognises and values the difference and diversity of con-

sumers. They do not challenge capitalism's fundamental exploitative social relations and are essentially pessimistic about both the possibility and desirability of socialist change.

A politics of despair

THE renewed interest in Marxism of the sixties and seventies influenced and shaped the political campaigns and social movements on the streets and in the universities. The mass campaigns waged against the Vietnam War, second wave feminism, anti-colonial and anti-racist movements were largely shaped by the organised left. Yet little more than 20 years later this "retreat of the intellectuals" seems a rout. Amidst the dominance of post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-feminism, vulgar anti-Marxism is commonplace. And connections to social movements, let alone anything so materially crass as class, are little mentioned. What happened?

Terry Eagleton argues that left intellectuals in the US adopted post-modernism out of a sense of having been badly defeated, a belief that the left as a political tendency has little future. It is a deep pessimism which says its not worth analysing social systems because they can't be changed anyway. Ellen Wood directs attention to, among other factors, the "sociology of the academy" which becomes the institutional context of these theoretical developments. She argues that to understand the rise of post-modernism as a theoretical framework one needs to understand the collective biography of a generation of western left academics. Their rise in the 60s from student radicals to their tenured positions as senior staff in the academy in the 1980s runs parallel with the failure of their political expectations. Where they once saw political liberation being delivered by third world guerilla movements or the political leaders in Beijing, Havana or Belgrade, they gradually realised that they were mistaken. They equated these formations with Marxism and concluded that Marxism had no future. Embittered by their youthful expectations being shown to be hollow they have become "world weary pessimists" accepting the existing social relations and with a hostility towards those who would seek to end those relations.

But there is a discernible shift towards a more critical assessment of post-modern writing. Its exclusivist and pretentious language, its despair at a time of escalating inequality, its Euro-centredness and many of its political commentaries are increasingly under attack.

The most celebrated of these was that of Alan Sokal's parody of post-modernist studies of natural science published in *Social*

Text as a serious contribution in its "Science Wars" issue in the Spring of 1996. Sokal, a physicist at New York University then revealed the hoax, provoking a debate on the politics of post-modernism and the nature of truth, reason and objectivity. (His subsequent book *Impostures Intellectuelles*, co-written with Jean Bricmont — which is a blistering denunciation of writers such as semiotician Julia Kristeva, philosopher Regis Debray, and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan — was recently reviewed in *Workers' Liberty*.)

Sokal explained in an article written in the American journal *New Politics* (Winter 1997, pp 126-129) that the nature of truth, reason and objectivity are crucial to the future of left politics. The main threat to science he argued are "budget-cutting politicians and corporate executives", not a handful of post-modernist academics, but contends that a scientific worldview is important to defend against "wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery" and that the reason for defending these "old fashioned ideas" are basically political.

His concern is that post-modernism diverts attention from formulating a progressive social critique of actually existing society by leading people into "trendy but ultimately empty intellectual fashions. These fashions can, in fact, undermine the prospects for such a critique, by promoting subjectivist and relativist philosophies... inconsistent with producing a realistic analysis of society..."

Assessing its relevance

THE real question to ask is how grounded are these ideas? Do they help us understand the world we live in and does it offer a means of transforming it? Do they reflect the reality of work and production in either the advanced or the third world?

In some instances the claims are so fantastic that they are laughable. Two examples illustrate this. Baudrillard writes that there is no difference between the American Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Reagan because they were all puppets (of what one might ask if there is no power?) without any genuine chance of changing America or any other part of the world. Yet, as Harvey points out, Reagan had a very real impact on people's lives. Between 1979 and 1986 the number of poor families with children increased by 35%. Despite rising unemployment the percentage of unemployed receiving any federal benefits fell to the lowest level in the history of social insurance.

Then, in the lead up to the Gulf War in 1991, Baudrillard predicted in a French magazine that there would be no war. Subsequent events you might say proved

him wrong. But Baudrillard would have none of that. Some time later when the magazine went back to ask him about his prediction he said he was right; there had been no war, it was all images and virtual reality.

What are the political consequences of these positions given the vast gaps in wealth within and between countries? It is not hard to answer the question of whether they contest or accommodate to capitalism and power?

It is not just a different way of analysing the world, it is a rejection of collectively organising to change the world. Rather than developing a new philosophical method it reworks old ones. In the tradition of liberalism it emphasises the individual. Two British educators argue that we each assume "an identity through identification with a narrative", while individual "identity becomes a constantly changing reflexive project, constructed and manifested through images, consumption choices and lifestyles." In other words we are identified by stories or linguistics or signs, and consuming those images and lifestyles (culture and aesthetic) allows us to express our desires. We are liberated through consumption. (Edwards and Usher 1996, p234, 233)

Inevitably this has led to new ways of relating to, rather than contesting, capitalism, and relating has led to accommodation, both at the political and intellectual level. As Eagleton concludes one reason that post-modernism has taken hold so widely is because it is easier to be critical than to present a positive vision. Being on the left means having a conception of the future and the confidence that there is a connection between the present and the future, that collective action can lead to a better society.

What is needed is the development and articulation of alternatives to capitalism, liberalism and the discredited versions of twentieth century "socialism". Re-imagining alternatives is a vital task in inspiring young people that socialism is something altogether different to that personified by either Gorbachev, Mao, Kinnock, Blair, Hawke or Mitterand.

Conclusion

ONE of the vogue ideas of post-modernism is that images capture the illusory nature of existence. As Bill Clinton struggles to maintain his grip on office the film *Wag the Dog* is called upon to demonstrate how nowadays life reflects art. *Wag the Dog* at one level is a disturbingly amusing film. But it also draws on Baudrillard's view of the Gulf War. Here the viewer is asked to contemplate the possibility that the unseen American

powerbrokers can so manipulate public awareness that they conjure up a war that doesn't exist and people will believe it is real. A virtual war and, according to the postmodernists, a narrative for these "new times".

At the same time Disney films draws on an older "narrative" in its *A Bug's Life*. Here the hero is Flick the Ant. Flick summons up the courage to speak up against Hopper, leader of the marauding grasshoppers. Flick suggests to the worker ants another way of organising the colony, he exhorts them to realise that they are many and the grasshoppers are few, and that together they could rid themselves of their predators who appropriate their labour. It is an old story.

Both stories draw on a philosophical heritage (indeed a metanarrative). I know which film (narrative) lifted my spirits.

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Left unity and the state of Marxist theory: a debate

By Clive Bradley and Torab*

Clive Bradley

THE launch of the London Socialist Alliance on 9 March was an interesting and novel event — to have various revolutionary organisations sharing a platform and being rational and constructive was positive. That is the context for this meeting. Revolutionary socialist unity, or, more broadly, socialist unity, is on the agenda.

Of course there are different levels of unity — a particular election project, or attempts at organisational unity, bringing together socialists from different organisations. It is this, latter, issue I want to concentrate on.

The general context in Britain and the starting point for our debate is this: for most of the last century British politics has been defined by the fact that we have had — basically — a two party system in which one of those parties, the Labour Party, was established by the organised labour movement. That is, from its origins the Labour Party was a groping towards an independent voice for the organised working class in politics.

Of course this voice was limited and inadequate. And this is the reflection of a number of things. Firstly the fact that the key and most decisive force in creating the Labour Party, and throughout its existence, was the trade union movement, itself bureaucratised, and the Labour Party has reflected this. Secondly, that, defining the Labour Party politically, the Labour Party has been an extension of the principle of trade unionism into politics. That is, where trade unionism bargains within the capitalist system over wages and conditions, the Labour Party is an extension of that principle into politics. So, however inadequate, the Labour Party has been a first faltering step on the road to the workers having their own political voice.

The Labour Party in power has — of course — always been a bourgeois party, acting in the interests of the ruling class. However, over the past few years and, in particular, since Blair came to power, that whole, fundamental character of the Labour Party, and therefore the shape and basic framework of British politics has been under attack. That process is not complete.

The Labour Party has not been completely destroyed as an independent voice for the unions. But plainly the process is advanced.

What we are seeing is a historical regression in British politics, the increasing whittling away of the Labour Party as an organ of working class representation. We are moving back to the situation which existed a hundred years ago — of two straightforwardly bourgeois parties.

It seems to us that recognition of that fact is extremely important. As revolutionary socialists we are not indifferent to the state and the health of the broad labour movement. Quite the opposite. A revolutionary movement, a movement capable of overthrowing capitalism and beginning the transition to socialism, will come out of the transformation and radicalisation of the existing mass organisations of the working class or it will not come at all. It is not possible to construct a revolutionary movement from nothing, in parallel and in opposition to the broad existing labour movement.

The consolidation of the Blair faction in the Labour Party is a starting point. How should we respond? We cannot simply stand aside and allow Blair to have a free hand. We must reassert the idea that the workers must have their own political voice.

Now what that voice says is a matter for discussion and socialist intervention. We want a coherent socialist voice — but to have a voice at all is an important beginning. We gear everything around this task.

The idea which expresses this task is the idea of a workers' government. That is — Blair's government is a bosses' government, and what the working class needs is a government of its own, a government which will act in its interests, which will defend the rights of workers, tax the rich to restore the health service, and so on.

This must be the objective of the labour movement and, in the first instance, the objective of the socialists within the labour movement.

This orientation and strategy is a precondition for socialist unity. The point of socialists uniting is not simply to have a pleasant discussion, or to become a bit bigger, but to have a particular effect on the political outlook of the mass movement. That is — the labour movement must begin to reassert itself, fighting for its own interests against Blair.

The precise practical implications of the struggle for a workers' government is

not something it is either practical or desirable to try to predict.

The battle in the Labour Party is not finally ended. On a cold assessment it seems unlikely that the unions will assert themselves and get rid of Blair. But there are all sorts of forms that fighting for an independent workers' voice can take.

For example, one direction the struggle may take is the creation of a Labour Representation Committee in the unions.

However, what is absolutely clear is that whatever shape the struggle takes — a battle in the Labour Party or the creation of a new body — the decisive place this battle will emerge from is the trade unions. So any effective socialist activity must include an orientation to the unions. This is central.

The existence of Blair gives this project an added urgency. The united Euro-elections list is simply one possible expression of our overall task.

But I want to talk specifically about revolutionary unity.

There are a huge number of revolutionary groups. And, of course, the differences between them are not entirely capricious or just bloody-minded (although there is an element of this). There are real, important disagreements, and we would like to find a way of discussing them.

I would just like to suggest how we see ourselves, how Workers' Liberty is defined.

Basically there is broad agreement on the following ideas.

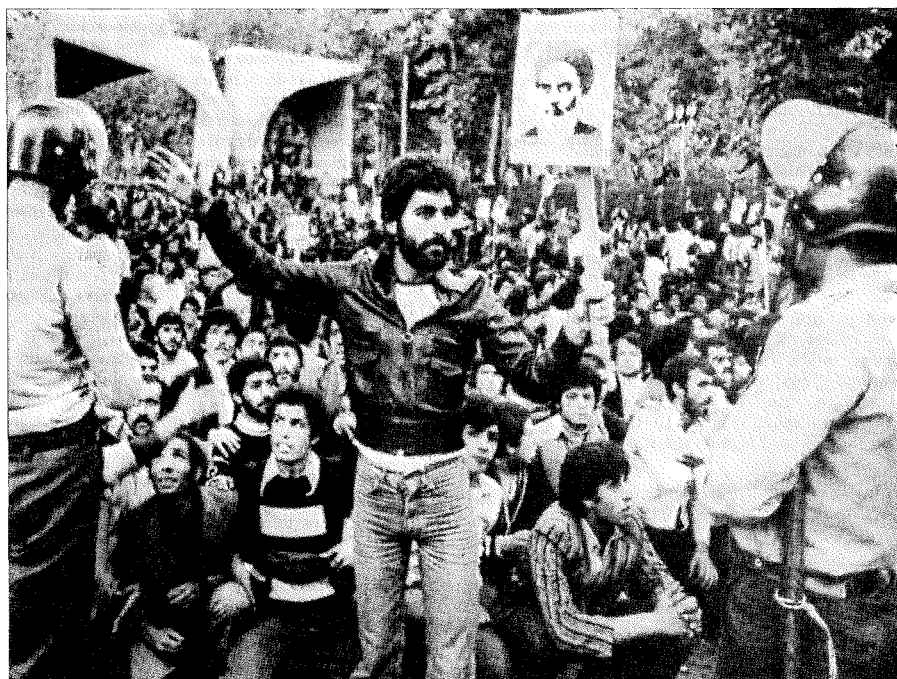
- the emancipation of the working class is an act of the workers themselves;
- we are fighting for a democratic workers' republic as the first step towards building classless socialism;
- we believe that this can only be achieved by sharp, possibly violent, conflict with the existing capitalist state;
- socialism will not be introduced gradually;

I think that there are four things that determine Workers' Liberty as a distinct tendency within the general revolutionary left.

The first and most important is a view of Stalinism. Although our tendency came out of an orthodox Trotskyist background, belief in the so-called "deformed and degenerated workers' states", this was a view we rejected long ago, although in open theory, formally, a decade ago.

Looking at the left today it strikes me strongly that the groups which have had the "workers' state" position on Stalinism — a

* Clive Bradley of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty debated Iranian socialist Torab at a recent meeting in London



The Iranian revolution. Both the Iranian left and the left internationally lost their way.

confused and soft position — are also the groups which have fared the worst over the past 10 years. Compare the fortunes of the Militant and the SWP.

Secondly, a view of imperialism. We have rejected what we see as a rather two-dimensional and simplistic view of the way the world is organised and imperialism functions, and how that translates politically.

Two quick illustrations. In 1982, when Thatcher went to war with Argentina in common with the rest of the left we opposed Thatcher's war; however we disagreed with much of the far left that support should be given to the Argentinian junta during the war. To us this idea seems primitive — that the Argentinian rulers were some sort of anti-imperialist force.

Similarly in the Gulf War — between western imperialism and Iraq. And also in the earlier Gulf war, between Iraq and Iran. There was a point in that war when the left swung behind Iran on the grounds that imperialism was supporting Iraq — which we rejected.

Thirdly, is a view of the national question. In Britain there are distinct differences on the Middle East and Ireland.

One issue that connects all these three sets of questions together was the issue of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Although there were minorities in various international tendencies, we were pretty much isolated in the broadly-defined "orthodox" Trotskyist movement in opposing the Soviet invasion.

Many groups backed the USSR because the CIA was backing the Mujahadeen — they believed that made the Russian war an

anti-imperialist struggle. A soft view of Stalinism meant the left thought that there was something progressive being achieved by the Russians. A wrong view on the national question meant much of the left did not understand that the Afghans had the right to self-determination.

The fourth issue is the question I have already touched upon, the question of orientation and strategy. We favour the building of a revolutionary party, but do not believe that this can be achieved by simply declaring it and recruiting in ones and twos, although, of course, we are very keen to recruit ones and twos! It will be built out of convulsions and a transformation of the mass workers' organisations.

I do not think that the three areas — imperialism, Stalinism and the national question — necessarily rule out having a common framework between revolutionary organisations. We would be quite prepared to be in a minority on these questions in a democratically-organised united organisation. However the second issue here, and a decisive condition for revolutionary unity — beyond an orientation to the mass organisations — is genuine democracy: i.e., that it is possible to have debate and that minority rights are respected.

Democracy means: civilised debate among people who take ideas seriously; minorities having the right to organise; not requiring minorities to argue positions they disagree with. Obviously organisations have to be able to act, and act in a decisive way. However, democratic rights are not optional, they are a basic requirement for long-term political health.

In conclusion: there is an urgency about creating socialist unity, and it would be a great step forward if the various groups on the revolutionary left were able to unite. Certainly we can unite for particular actions, but it would be better to unite in a more long-term organisational way.

Torab

WHAT I am going to say may sound a little different. I will approach the same topic from a different angle, a different side of the question.

Obviously socialist unity requires unity on orientation towards the class struggle. I do not deny that. No one can deny that.

Although, here, orientation towards the class struggle and mass organisations of the working class — given even the levels of debate here in Britain — is not as easy a question as Clive is trying to make out. There are a lot of issues involved — exactly how do we do this? The question of Labour Party entryism and the way we work in the unions are both debatable questions. Not every question is solved; not everyone agrees on a common action programme.

But, even if we agree on all such matters, on their own they do not resolve the question of socialist unity. Socialists can only unite on a long-term basis on some strategy for socialist revolution.

Temporary unity, unity in action, unity around an action programme, no matter for how long a period, is some form of tactical agreement.

We need to agree on a strategic and programmatic basis before we can unite. And this is precisely why there is such disunity among revolutionary socialists internationally. Internationally we are in a deep, deep crisis. And unless we address the question of this deep crisis we will not be able to agree on any sensible solution to the way forward.

If we examine the question organisationally — the forces of revolutionary socialism have been decimated over the last 20 years. None of the international organisations claiming to be international do much more than exist on paper. The organisation I was a member of is probably one hundredth of the size it was 20 years ago. And the same goes for all sorts of other groups which existed in the 1960s and '70s. Organisationally they have been decimated.

There is no established leadership internationally. No one has the authority or prestige to claim some leadership role.

There is confusion on so many programmatic issues that every organisation that exists on an international scale has all sorts of tendencies inside them.

The same tendencies which exist in

one international exist in another — at least given some differences due to historical background. Basically what this proves is that these internationals are essentially artificial. They have not resolved many of the questions relating to strategy and programme.

Even if we go beyond what Clive referred to as “orthodox Trotskyism”, my own experience, in the Iranian revolution, comparing the Trotskyists to semi-Stalinists, the same types of splits which took place in the Iranian Trotskyists also took place in the semi-Stalinist groups. The same tendencies were reflected in both.

So, whatever safeguards we had as Trotskyists, against deviation, in real life, in practice, in the middle of revolution, proved not to hold much water.

The same reformist tendencies were produced inside our organisations as inside the centerist groups.

The splits over the Iranian revolution inside Iran were repeated internationally. When I came to Britain in the 1980s I was attracted to *Socialist Organiser* [a forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*] precisely because of your position on the Iranian revolution. You did not go along with the idea that support should be given to anyone who claimed to be anti-imperialist. We saw the comical outcome of this sort of anti-imperialism in the Socialist Workers' Party: one year Iraq was the agent of imperialism, and so they backed Iran; the next year Iraq was defending the interests of the revolution in the Middle East against imperialism, and the agents of imperialism were now Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

So, we have a situation where there is no established programme internationally that has authority, prestige or organisational weight to unite around itself the revolutionary socialist forces everywhere. there is

no such thing.

There is a crisis in theory. Again, one of the useful things in the positions of *Socialist Organiser* was opposition to the “deformed and degenerated workers' states” theory. We have seen the results of this position. The groups that hold it — how wrong were they!

I will never forget an article by Ernest Mandel when the Berlin uprising [1989] was happening. He said US imperialism would invade because the political revolution was taking place. The US was going to invade East Germany and socialists everywhere should fight against it and support the workers' revolution. How wrong can they be!

This position has led to crazy political lines. And we have suffered as a result.

The question of permanent revolution. We have seen how 99% of the Trotskyist forces internationally used the theory of permanent revolution to justify support for Khomeini in Iran. The theory of permanent revolution is out of date. It no longer applies to any country in the world. Everywhere there is a bourgeois state. No longer is there any need for a democratic revolution to grow over into a socialist revolution.

I don't know, perhaps there is some hinterland, somewhere, that I don't know about, where there is still a semi-feudal or pre-capitalist state. But all the major countries in the world, including backward countries like Iran, are not like this. Iran has a capitalist state. So why do we need a gadget theory like permanent revolution? Why can't we talk straightforwardly of socialist revolution?

The third plank of the Trotskyist movement, the *Transitional Programme*. It is no longer a programme that can unite us, it can no longer guide us in our revolutionary activity.

Even in Marxism itself we have to resolve some of the most fundamental problems. Comrades in this room might understand Marxism as dialectical materialism. But to me this is bourgeois materialism combined with Hegelian nonsense. There are all sorts of questions and problems of theory that are now hitting us in the face.

The whole epoch has changed. We do not have any analysis that can satisfy me as a socialist which explains globalisation? What has happened to capitalism? Where are we going?

So how can we unite? We cannot unite on such shaky ground.

We have no theory. We have lost our old programme. We can fight this. We can say: I come from this tradition; this tradition has managed to hold us together; I will carry on for 20 or 30 years; we will do the same thing we have been doing.

Or, like lots of sects, we can create a new sect, the product of two or three sects uniting. It will last five or 10 years and then collapse. For the last 10 years we have seen many of this type of re-groupments, followed by degeneration.

Let's set up a new international — then collapse!

If we want to respond sensibly to this situation then we have to do certain things. Firstly, how can we approach the crisis without taking stock of our own past? We have to discuss and publish documents.

Where do we stand? Do we still call ourselves Trotskyists? Let's answer this. Is it still correct? What does it now mean? So, let us take stock of our whole experience back to the Russian revolution. Hasn't the last 20 or 30 years shown us that basing ourselves on one experience, of the Russian Revolution and Leninism, is far too narrow? It has shown its limitations already.

What do we mean by calling ourselves socialists? What exactly is this socialism we are talking about? What is this workers' state? What do we understand by programme? By “revolutionary party”?

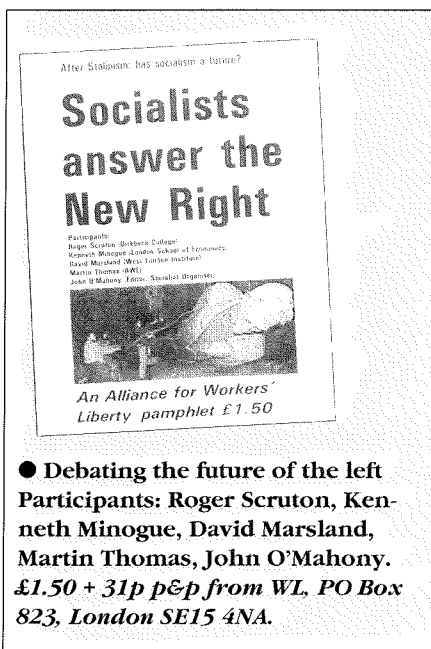
All these questions are debatable. there is no given solution. If comrades still think that they have all the solutions to all these questions, in their own small group, you are surely mistaken. Look around, internationally, there are so many opinions on all these questions.

What we have to do, what my Iranian group has tried to do, is to take stock. We have done the following — we have not got answers to everything. But there are a certain number of minimum things we are absolutely sure about. We call this our “Minimum Platform”. Let us, on this basis, go forward.

Comrades, I have not seen your group attempt to do this. What is your minimum understanding of all these programmatic questions? Why not put your understanding down in one document, so we can debate it? If we want to fight for socialist unity we must do this. Every group which is at least aware of this crisis must at least begin doing this.

Secondly, a debate requires a common journal. If four or five or six socialist groups cannot produce a common journal, talk of unity is simply artificial. We cannot simply get unity by uniting on an election to the European parliament or for London's mayor, or whatever.

Thirdly, we have to have a more flexible form of organisation in the future. I cannot ask a comrade from a particular organisation to abandon his organisation and join a discussion forum. No, we have to have a form of organisation in which we are not really yet united — some are individuals, some are members of other



After Stalinism: has socialism a future?

Socialists answer the New Right

Participants:
Roger Scruton (Birkbeck College)
Kenneth Minogue (London School of Economics)
David Marsland (West London Institute)
Martin Thomas (HALL)
John O'Mahony (Tynes, Socialist Organiser)

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organisations - but they still work together to carry on a discussion.

To sum up: take stock; a common journal; flexible organisation.

Torab: summation

The debate turned into "Are we for theory, or are we for practice?" To me this is ridiculous. We all know, as socialists, we have to practice. Every comrade who considers themselves a socialist will get involved, even as an individual, in whatever struggles they can.

In fact, precisely because of this I suggest again: a flexible form of organisation in which there is agreement between tendencies and groups to allow us all to carry out whatever activities we want.

Comrades, I've been in Britain a long time. I know about the debates over the Labour Party and unions. I know you do not all agree on one line of practice. Even among yourselves you do not agree on how to respond to the Labour Party. We can see this today, even in this meeting.

Comrades cannot just propose a couple of lines on which to unite, and leave the theoretical problems to later. Even in the simplest of questions there is a disagreement.

However, that does not mean: let's sit in a room, discuss, write, for 10 years, at which point we can emerge and get involved in practical activity. No! Practice whatever you were practising already. Do whatever appears to you to be correct. But, bear in mind that none of this practical work will — in the long-run — resolve the crisis of the socialist left, neither in Britain or internationally.

The problem of the British left is not that you are not involved in practical activity. It is that you do not understand what you mean by "socialist revolution", by "workers' party" or "workers' state". Or the relation between socialism and democracy. On none of these questions is there agreement. And nor do we even understand our disagreements.

One comrade talked of "tradition", saying that until he found something else, this would guide him through thick and thin. But it doesn't. That "tradition" is very cosy in a British situation which does not change for 60 years. But face a revolution and we have political flip-flops.

Have a major turn in the class struggle and you do not know how to respond. All this lack of theoretical clarity will come to the forefront.

If you do not discuss the fact that the theory of permanent revolution is out of date, and you enter the Iranian revolution half of you will end up supporting Khomeini. It has happened to us so many times

over the past 50 years.

So we should proceed in a serious manner. We try to identify areas of agreement and areas where we are sure we are right. We are not saying comrades must just sit and debate. No.

We need a journal and flexible organisation. After the process of discussion we will have a more solid basis for socialist unity.

Clive: summation

I AGREE with Torab about the theory of permanent revolution. It is confusing to talk of the theory of permanent revolution in a situation where there is a capitalist state. However I do not think that the basic problem in the Iranian revolution was that the Trotskyist movement adhered to a confusing theory of permanent revolution. I think it was to do with the entire view of the world into which this theory was fitted.

The Trotskyists came out of the Second World War into a world where they expected Stalinism to have collapsed. But it expanded. And the Trotskyists shrivelled. The orthodox Trotskyists concluded that the revolution was continuing, regardless of the workers. The revolution became a disembodied force that could take any form. It would be nice if the workers led the revolution, but the revolution had become a process with its own dynamic, divorced from workers' struggles.

Khomeini fits into this picture. The revolution is continuing regardless, and in Iran its expression was Khomeini. The origins of this problem is the entire world view of post-war Trotskyism.

On the basic programmatic issues we do have answers. We do know that the working-class revolution requires working class self-activity. We do know workers' rule requires some form of workers' councils.

Of course we do not know the precise shape of the future. But we do know that there must be a decisive conflict with the capitalist power. And it is possible to operate politically on the basis of our basic theoretical-programmatic understanding.

Three quick examples. As it happens Marx writes *Capital* during a long lull in the class struggle. But in 1848, before *Capital* had been written, he was quite prepared to take part in practical revolutionary activity on the basis of a basic understanding of where capitalism stood in history.

On the other hand the Bolsheviks were wrong about their understanding of the Russian revolution, until 1917. But it did not stop them being able to intervene.

On a more humble level: we do not have a theory of Stalinism. Comrades in the

Alliance for Workers' Liberty have various theoretical approaches. But we do have programmatic agreement about the position of these societies in history, about a working class programme for the overthrow of Stalinism. It is politically adequate. That is the way to go forward.

One comrade raised the question of the London socialist slate for the Euro-elections. The reason for supporting such a slate is categorically not to do with the idea that a space is opening up to the left of the Labour Party. This has absolutely nothing to do with our position. It seems very improbable that this will emerge in the immediate future.

Our stance is this: in an election someone has to make socialist propaganda, somehow. Otherwise the political agenda is left to Blair. Standing candidates in these elections will allow large numbers of workers to hear socialist ideas, directly. If only a handful are convinced, it is a reason to stand. And it is not counterposed to a more general orientation towards the task of transforming the labour movement.

Two final points. The question of orientation is more than just a tactical question. The question is: are we trying to build a movement trying to relate to the working class movement, or not? Are we trying to relate not only to workers in struggle, but to their organisations, too. If not, unity is pointless.

We know from history that workers in struggle do not, spontaneously, know exactly what to do. The socialists organise to put forward ideas of what is necessary to take the class forward.

The socialists need to be organised for this ideological-political work.

Just throwing up the idea of unity doesn't help much. Discussions on unity become more fruitful after and during practical work.

The lies against socialism answered

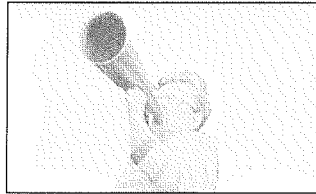
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A tale of organisational jealousy

I WOULD like to make a few additional points to Jill Mountford's comments on *Socialist Outlook*'s withdrawal from the Welfare State Network. I write both as an AWL member and as an editor of *Action*.

1. For over four years the WSN has been a collaborative effort of different groups, campaigns and individuals. That is a fairly unique experience on the British left.

2. *Outlook* have never been excluded, bureaucratically or otherwise, from the campaign or from the campaign's paper, *Action*.

3. *Outlook*'s viewpoint has never been censored. From the point of view of developing political discussion and trying to shape a healthier left we felt, and still feel, that is a good thing to have political pluralism in the WSN's paper. As *Action* did, and *Action for Solidarity* will continue to do, we publish the views of *Socialist Outlook* on different, including contentious, subjects. The only obstacle to this is *Outlook* refusing to provide an opinion, as they did, for example, for the forum on left unity in the Euro-elections in *Action* 48, to which the SWP, Socialist Party, Scottish Socialist Party, the AWL and John Palmer contributed.

4. *Outlook* have always had to the opportunity to contribute to, sell and distribute *Action*.

5. However for nearly four years *Outlook*, as an organisation, have not taken any copies of *Action* to sell. From September 1998 John Lister's involvement in the production and editing of *Action* has been minimal. To this extent *Outlook* have excluded themselves from the campaign and from its paper.

6. The WSN democratically agreed by a majority vote to publish *Action* fortnightly. We were able to so why shouldn't we? *Socialist Outlook* have gone off in a huff, complaining that decisions have been "rammed through". They have withdrawn from practical collaboration as a means of protest. They simply lost the vote!

7. *Outlook* knew the direction the AWL wanted to take with *Action* — making it a broad socialist newspaper. They have known what our thoughts and plans are all along, because we have debated and discussed these things!

8. The truth is *Outlook* did not want the AWL to be able to develop *Action* as a political paper for the labour movement, because they feared that if we did that the AWL would be able to use it as a political tool — not because the paper would be a closed AWL affair in any way, but because AWL activists would be

the most energetic in promoting a broad socialist paper. If *Outlook* did not have the energy to sell both their tendency paper and *Action* they were damned if the AWL were going to be allowed to. *Outlook* were never able to create good political objections for *Action* developing politically. They have proceeded on the basis of organisational jealousy and that is terrible political practice. That is the top and bottom of this sorry business.

One final point. Some people on the left have called the AWL's decision to put a lot of effort into campaigning around the idea of "rebuilding the welfare state" as low-grade politics, not the stuff Trotskyists should be concerning themselves with. This is snobbishness. It is also very near-sighted.

The AWL bases its political practice on the idea of transitional demands, i.e., we think demands such as "for state of the art health care free at the point of need, can mobilise our class, help strengthen the movement and educate workers about the need for socialism. Politics for us can be about making agitation around what Marx called "the political economy of the working class". It isn't just about intra-left polemics, however important those may be.

Right now we are getting on with the job of producing *Action for Solidarity*. We invite anyone on the left, including *Socialist Outlook*, to write for, and provide debate for, its pages.

Cathy Nugent

Resigning from, not resigned to, Labour

WE received from a disillusioned Scottish Labour Party supporter a resignation letter to his CLP Secretary. Extracts:

"HAVING been a member for 23 years and having worked at the Walworth Road head office for three years, leaving the Labour Party is a big wrench for me.

The New Labour Government has disappointed, confused and demoralised Party members and supporters pretty much across the spectrum of policy areas. "Welfare reform" seems to be a euphemism for destroying the principles of universality which have underpinned the post-war welfare state. The state provides a safety-net only for the poorest.

The Government claims to be

providing tens of billions of pounds of new funding for health and education. The claim is a major public relations con. During its first two years this Government imposed an unprecedented squeeze on public spending.

New Labour is committed to not increasing borrowing for current expenditure, to not increasing taxes (even on the rich) and they have cut corporation tax. I suppose this explains why Glasgow City Council is set to impose another round of service cuts and redundancies in order to fund Labour's election year commitment to a zero increase in the council tax.

The final breaking point for me has been the realisation that in Glasgow the Labour Party will fight a large part of its campaign for the City Council on two issues that reveal just how far New Labour is pursuing a Thatcherite agenda — the handing over of all Glasgow's secondary school buildings to be run by private consortia and the transfer of all Glasgow's council housing stock to a quango.

The policies will weaken democratic accountability, expose new groups of council workers to private employers seeking to worsen pay and conditions — and, over time, will lead to deteriorating services as commercial considerations take precedence over the needs of the people of Glasgow.

The only rationale for New Labour's determination to use PFIs as widely as possible to fund public investment is that they accept the Thatcherite argument that the private sector is inherently more efficient than the public sector. New Labour's conversion to a belief in the efficacy of private enterprise and free markets also explains why we have heard so little about "stakeholding", which once was to be Tony Blair's "big idea".

As a socialist I cannot campaign and urge the public to vote for policies which extend the role of the free market. I believe in building a society and economy ordered on the completely different principles of co-operation, mutuality, accountability, and democratic planning.

It is true that the Government is carrying out a fairly extensive programme of constitutional reform. However New Labour is demonstrating that modernising the antiquated British constitution is not incompatible with working within a Thatcherite consensus on economic and social matters.

Many socialists in the Labour Party share my analysis of New Labour in government, but have decided to fight on within the Labour Party. I have certainly remained a Labour Party member for more than two decades because the party's links with the wider labour movement and the electoral support it receives from working people led me to the

conclusion that any realistic hopes for changing British society in a socialist direction would have to be realised through the Labour Party.

But New Labour have also torn the democracy out of the Party's constitution to make their position within the Party virtually impregnable.

The attitude of the trade union leaderships to recent developments has been a disappointment. Only with trade union support, for instance, has New Labour been able to get away with neutering internal Party democracy.

Many in Scotland place their hopes for the future in the Scottish Parliament and anticipate a growing independence for the Scottish Labour Party. Yet every Labour MSP will have been elected on a New Labour Manifesto that endorses PFIs and fiscal prudence — a manifesto to the right of their main challengers.

Moreover the first administration in Holyrood is likely to be put together by a Labour/Lib Dem coalition. This scenario will see Scotland as a testing-ground for the next stage of the New Labour project, which seeks to reunite the Labour and Liberal traditions — an objective perhaps made easier by Labour's adoption of the nineteenth century Liberal Party's ideology of free market capitalism. All of which will, no doubt, throw up many uncomfortable parallels as the centenary of the Labour Party's foundation quickly approaches.

Forced to hit the electoral campaign trail in support of policies that are effectively anti-socialist, socialists in the Party are unable to stand up to be counted against cut-backs and privatisations. Surely socialists should be engaging with workers and communities struggling against the impact of a rampant capitalist offensive. Labour Party membership makes that option increasingly difficult.

A socialist alternative to the current free market and pro-capitalist consensus can only be built outside the Labour Party. I do not suppose there will be any short-cuts. The process of rebuilding a socialist movement is likely to be slow and difficult, but we can make a start only once we escape New Labour's prison guards.

I have decided the Scottish Socialist Party is the best available vehicle for taking the first steps in constructing a socialist alternative. Its leaders seem open to bringing on board those from a range of political traditions and to building broad-based alliances. Only by advocating the case for socialism from an independent platform and standing shoulder to shoulder with those seeking to defend and improve their conditions of life can the socialist tradition be kept alive."

Nick Rogers

Trotskyism after Trotsky? C'est moi!

A review article by Paul Hampton

"As in private life one distinguishes between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, still more in historical struggles must one distinguish the phrases and fancies of the parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality."
Karl Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

THIS alleged history of Trotskyism after Trotsky* is an exercise in self-aggrandisement by its author, Tony Cliff. Cliff's pamphlet is a slapdash cut-and-paste job of old articles. Since this is myth-making and not political history there is a great deal about the idiocies of the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel "orthodox" Trotskyists, but no mention of the other "unorthodox Trotskyists", in the first place Shachtman and his comrades in the US. In the decade when Cliff was still an orthodox Trotskyist, they developed the ideas of Trotsky's last period — initially in conflict with Trotsky himself — into a rational alternative to the "orthodox Trotskyists" who lost their way.

Cliff was an "orthodox Trotskyist" on the USSR until 1947-8, and on key questions he remains in that tradition to this day [for example in his caricatural Cannonite/Zionovist idea of the revolutionary party].

Cliff argues that Trotsky's four main prognoses at the end of his life turned out to be false. These were:

- that the Stalinist regime in Russia could not survive the war;
- that capitalism was in terminal crisis, so there would be no expansion of production and therefore no prospect of social reforms;
- that in backward, underdeveloped countries, according to the theory of permanent revolution, bourgeois-democratic tasks such as national liberation could only be advanced by the working class;
- that the Fourth International [FI] would quickly grow into the leading force of the international proletariat.

All were mistaken. Stalinism not only survived the war but emerged stronger, expanding into further territory; capitalism underwent its greatest period of economic expansion from 1950-73 and new welfare and social reforms were fought for and won; in China, Cuba and Vietnam, Stalinist regimes were created and there was a wave of decolonisation and later capitalist economic development in parts of the so-called Third World. The "FI" remained tiny.

Cliff claims to have single-handedly provided the only Marxist explanations of the origin, development and decline of Stalinism. Though Cliff's body of theory does contain some useful insights, all of the ostentatious boastings here of Cliff's omniscience are not only ridiculous but simply false. He even presents himself as the first state capitalist! This myth-making booklet is the SWP's equivalent of Pierre Frank's vacuous "history" of the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel "Fourth International".

State capitalism

CLIFF'S 1948 argument to prove that Russia was a "bureaucratic state capitalism" had two disadvantages: it was both incoherent and not really a theory of state capitalism!

Cliff says that the two main features of capitalism are the separation of the workers from the means of production and the transformation of labour power into a commodity which the workers are forced to sell, and the accumulation of capital forced on capitalists by their competitive struggle. He says both of these features characterised the Soviet Union during the first Five Year Plan (1928-32). Popular consumption in the USSR was subordinated to accumulation. The USSR was organised like a single capitalist enterprise; the competitive dynamic was provided by military competition with Western capitalism. He wrote:

"In order to see whether labour power in Russia is really a commodity, as it is under traditional capitalism, it is necessary to see what specific conditions are necessary for it to be so [Cliff quotes Marx]... If there is only one employer, a 'change of masters' is impossible, and the 'periodic sale of himself' becomes a mere formality. The contract also becomes only a formality when

there are many sellers and only one buyer. (That even this formal side of the contract is not observed in Russia is clear from the system of fines and punishments, the 'corrective labour', and so on.)" [State Capitalism in Russia 1988: 218-219]

Logically, for Cliff in 1948, labour power in Russia is not, can not be, a commodity. Cliff's pupils were explicit. Binns and Haynes, for example, wrote 30 years later that, "Labour power cannot be a commodity in the USSR because with only one company (USSR Ltd) purchasing it, there cannot be a genuine labour market" (IS: 2,7, 1979: 29). Cliff in 1999 ignores this question.

In 1948 Cliff wrote of the law of value:

"Hence if one examines the relations within the Russian economy, abstracting them from their relations with the world economy, one is bound to conclude that the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production, is not to be found in it. In essence, the laws prevailing in the relations between the enterprises and between the labourers and the employer-state would be no different if Russia were one big factory managed directly from one centre, and if all the labourers received the goods they consumed directly, in kind."

By what mechanism then is the USSR capitalist? Recognising the virtual absence of trade between Stalin's USSR and western capitalism, Cliff argued, "Because international competition takes mainly a military form, the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz. a striving after use values." (1988: 222)

But there is nothing specifically capitalist about military competition. Marxists analyse and categorise class societies by the specific economic form in which surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers — under capitalism, as distinct from feudalism and ancient slave-labour societies, by the exploitation of formally and legally free wage labour by capital under conditions of free sale of labour power. Workers and capitalists appear to meet and trade as equals — an illusion of equality which was one aspect of what Marx called: "the fetishism of commodities".

Marx's starting point in *Capital* was the essential contradiction within the commodity between its use value and exchange value — between the natural (use) and the social (exchange) form of the products of labour. Capitalists do not just accumulate ever more varied kinds of wealth in its natural form, or engage in military competition, they accumulate wealth in a specific social form: money as capital. What matters for a capitalist is not whether they accumulate tanks, or tractor factories or Black Sea villas, what matters is the accumulation of ever expanding amounts of money.

A capitalist for Marx is someone for whom "the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement [M-C-M']. As the conscious bearer of this movement, the possessor of money becomes a capitalist. His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which his money starts and to which it returns." (*Capital*, Vol 1, Pelican Marx Library).

Whatever can be said for Cliff's theory, one thing he didn't demonstrate is how the "accumulation" of means of production — and of destruction — by the Stalinist bureaucracy was driven by the circulation of money as capital as an end in itself.

Even in retrospect Cliff does not believe that these and other fundamental tendencies of capitalism operated in the USSR. His "state capitalism" was a capitalism without commodity fetishism, capitalists or the accumulation of money as capital. It was never anything more than a label in search of a theory.

Arms production in Russia, Cliff says, explains why it did not suffer from the cycle of boom and slump" (1999: 52). In a somewhat gentle review of the first [1955] book version of Cliff's work on Russia, Hal Draper [in 1956] wrote that, "The 'state capitalist' theory sometimes shades into versions which make it virtually identical to our own [that the USSR was a bureaucratic collectivist state, a distinctive form of class society]. This tends to happen where the 'state capitalism'... is labelled as hyphenated capitalism only as a matter of terminological taste. Cliff's analysis does not begin that way, but it tends to wind up so" (WL 49 1998:43). Cliff calls Russia state capitalist but *what he describes* is not a capitalist society!

Cliff's basic syllogism was faulty: such and such occurs in the Eastern Bloc, the same happens in the West; the West is capital-

* Tony Cliff, *Trotskyism after Trotsky: The Origins of the International Socialists*, (Bookmarks 1999).

ist, therefore the Eastern Bloc is capitalist. As far back as Aristotle the serious thinkers have understood that, though analogy can be very illuminating, reasoning by analogy — as if distinct things with some common traits were fully identical — is necessarily fallacious. Reasoning by analogy, and as if analogy is identity, Cliff assumed what needed to be proved — the existence of capital and a capitalist class. Impermissibly he redefined the dynamic of capitalism as the competition of use values in the production of armaments. This grasped neither the essence of capitalism as a world system nor the origin and development of Stalinism. Joseph Carter made the same point against Cliff's unacknowledged predecessor with a state capitalist analysis of the USSR C. L. R. James, in 1942, when he wrote, "It is the 'specific manner' in which the factors of production are united, this specific way in which surplus labour is extracted from the working class, that differentiates bureaucratic collectivism from capitalism" ('Aspects of Marxist Economics', *New Internationalist*, April 1942: 80).

Cliff doesn't even bother to acknowledge and evaluate attempts by his pupils to develop his state capitalist theory. In 1980 Duncan Hallas wrote against Binns and Haynes that, "If labour power is not a commodity in the USSR then there is no proletariat. Moreover if labour power is not a commodity, then there can be no wage/labour relationship and therefore no capital either. Therefore, there can be no capitalism in any shape or form." (*IS*:2:9, 1980: 128-130). Alex Callinicos argued that labour power was a commodity in the USSR because enterprises did compete for workers (*IS*:2: 12, 1981: 15), correcting Cliff's "obscure" and "misleading" account, and Derek Howl (*IS*:2: 49, 1990) wrote that the law of value did apply to the internal workings of the USSR. Such a debate amongst the SWP mandarinate was surely needed — yet none of this is even mentioned in Cliff's review of the history of the theory. This is because to argue that all the laws of (private) capitalism applied to Russia would junk virtually all that was distinctive in Cliff in 1948.

Cliff's merit in 1948 over Trotsky's "workers' state" epigones lay only in the insistence that this was an exploitative class society. Many others had already said that and not only in theories of state capitalism, and continued to say it. His specific ideas were worthless mystifications: there can be no greater proof of that than the fundamental modifications [above] his "school" has had to make to 1948 Cliff. SWP "state capitalism" is reduced to a general label behind which there are conflicting versions of the elements that make up the theory. Who was it said sects change their doctrines far more readily than they change their names?

Cliff argues that the changes in Eastern Europe in the '90s can only be seen as a "move sideways", a change "within the mode of production" because it was accomplished so easily, without revolutionary violence or a wholesale change of either the ruling class or the state. Those who believe a more profound change has taken place were revising the Marxist theory of the state.

This is the eclectic Cliff using arguments long-cherished by upholders of the workers' state position.

It is true that the working class cannot seize power without smashing the old bourgeois state machine and that, once in power politically, it cannot be supplanted without a counter-revolution, crucially by the smashing of the democratic organs of workers' self-rule, that is, the working class character of the state, the soviets (and the Marxist leadership). This is what Stalin accomplished after 1928.

The socialist revolution is qualitatively different from previous revolutions in that the workers must take and hold power consciously in their own interests. The bourgeoisie do not necessarily have to rule politically in order to rule socially and economically; nor did they in fact come to power in most cases through revolution (France after 1789 was of course a crucial exception). In most cases the German Bismarckian road to power is the dominant form of bourgeois revolution, where a section of the old ruling class facilitated the introduction of capitalism from above. When all sorts of formations have made bourgeois revolutions in the past. Why should this pattern not unfold in Russia and elsewhere in the current period?

The Permanent Arms Economy

CLIFF'S most ridiculous piece of self-aggrandisement here is the claim to have originated the theory of "permanent arms economy", which, he says, explained both the extent and the limits of the post-war capitalist boom between 1950-73. He claims that the theory of the permanent arms economy avoided both the capitalism-is-about-to-experience-another-great-slump catastrophism typical for decades of "orthodox Trotskyism", and the endless optimism of Keynesian economists. Here he repeats the

idea that the basic cause of capitalist crisis is the relatively low purchasing power of the masses compared to the productive capacity of industry ("underconsumptionism"), so that periodically goods are produced which cannot be sold.

Capitalism avoids permanent slump by cycles of investment in capital goods. Capital goods will eventually produce consumer goods. The massive increase in armaments expenditure by some imperialist states such as the US and Britain, beginning with World War One and continuing from the '30s through to the Second World War into the Cold War, worked to counteract this tendency — arms production, unlike Department I production of machines, makes goods that never produce Department II (consumer) goods dependent on the mass market. It allowed for both investment and consumption to grow for an unprecedented period after 1945. However, in fact, other states such as Germany and Japan, defeated in World War II, gained a competitive advantage from not enduring the heavy burden of arms expenditure, and this eventually reintroduced the classic boom-slump cycle of earlier capitalism.

Cliff says that his 1948 analysis of Russia contains the germ of the permanent arms economy (PAE) theory (military competition between Russia and the West). But, in fact, he only formulated his PAE in 1957, in a short article ['Permanent Arms Economy', in *Neither Washington nor Moscow*, 1982]. As always, Cliff, who knows no shame on these matters, fails to acknowledge his intellectual debts, here to the real originators of this theory — Paul Sweezy who with Leo Huberman edited the soft Stalinist journal *Monthly Review*, and Ed Sard (who wrote under the pseudonyms of Frank Demby, Walter S Oakes and T. N. Vance). The US "Shachtmanite" bi-monthly magazine *New Internationalist* carried a book-length series of articles signed T. N. Vance throughout 1951.

There are elements of the arms economy thesis in Luxemburg and Bukharin ["Imperialism and the World Economy"] before the '40s, but Paul Sweezy formulated the essence of "Cliff's" view in 1942, in his book *The Theory of Capitalist Development*. He argued that the rise of militarism had serious consequences for capitalism: firstly it fostered the development of a special group of capitalists in the steel and shipbuilding industries (and the munitions magnates) who produce the armaments; secondly, arms spending offsets the tendency towards underconsumption; and, finally, armaments production offers a profitable field for the investment of capital.

Sweezy? Sard? C'est moi!

ED SARD developed "Cliff's" theory of the arms economy, marshalling the data to illustrate it. He defined a war economy as, "whenever the government's expenditure for war (or 'national defence' become a legitimate and significant end purpose of economic activity" (1944: 12, in Dwight McDonald's magazine *Politics*). The state could address the problem of what he called "excess accumulated unpaid labor" — capital — by war outlays (equal to around 10% of national income) or by public works. In his 1951 *New Internationalist* articles, Sard added rapid capital accumulation, a huge national debt and interest burden, Bonapartist tendencies [the state rising to a position of command over society] and military-economic imperialism, to these basic characteristics of the "new epoch".

Both Sweezy's and Sard's theories had a heavy Keynesian twist. So did Cliff. He defined the basic cause of capitalist crisis as underconsumption. He argued that arms alone was the "great stabilising factor for contemporary capitalist prosperity". He added that by undercutting workers' living standards, encouraging developments in technology and facing competition on the world market the PAE would undermine itself. Cliff: "With the huge strides of Russian industry, it is possible that in another 10 or 20 years, she may, even if she does not reach the absolute level of United States industry, at least challenge the United States on the world market in certain branches — those of heavy industry."

While "underconsumption" in the sense argued by Sweezy and Cliff might play some role in explaining crises, it does not do so directly. Capitalists can have an adequate market for what they produce even when wages are very low. Demand by capitalists and their hangers-on for new machinery, equipment, materials and luxuries can make up the market. Low living standards for workers alongside vast luxury for capitalists make us angry, but they do not necessarily cause trouble for capitalism. It is not clear what "under" means here: at what level does the workers' share have to fall to, to cause a crisis? Marx himself wrote, as well as the usual quotation produced by underconsumptionists, that "it is pure tautology to say that crises are

provoked by a lack of effective demand or effective consumption. The capitalist system does not recognise any other forms of consumer other than those who can pay... The fact that commodities are unsaleable means no more than that no effective buyers have been found for them..." *Capital Vol 2* (L&W1956: 486-7).

Armaments production may act as a stabiliser, as some sort of replacement market, but it will only be a pre-condition for the expansion of capital, not its prime determinant. As Phil Semp, referring to the period 1937-42, put it, "It is not arms as such which increases the profits, but the recovery which increased arms production stimulated" (*Permanent Revolution* No1, September 1973). Cliff's old view, presented here once again much as in 1957, was riddled with problems. Cliff's disciple Harman, in his book on crisis, says Cliff's errors were a matter of his form of presentation — in language explicable to Keynesian economists. This begs the question why Cliff would make so many concessions to this milieu, rather than present his theory in its "real" Marxist form.

Kidron

MICHAEL Kidron's development of PAE, which argued that arms might have offset the tendency for the rate of profit to fall "perhaps permanently" [*Western Capitalism since the War* 1967], fared little better. As late as 1967 he argued that the signs of instability were merely "spots on the horizon".

In fact Kidron's model of capitalism, as a closed economy with leaks — export of capital, wars, slumps and luxury good production such as armaments [as set out in IS36, "Magnetism Marxism"], is still far from a consistent Marxist analysis. The concept of a "closed system" is nonsense if it means a single capitalist country, and a false starting point for an analysis of capitalism, which is an international system. His "leaks" are in fact integral to capitalism, as Marx's discussion of luxury goods (Department III) indicates. In his arithmetic, Kidron allows for changes on the organic composition of capital (c/v) to take place in this sector without this affecting the overall rate of profit. Like Cliff, he fails to register that arms still have to be paid for out of the total social product, a deduction which, like other forms of state expenditure, the bourgeoisie have been keen to reduce, especially since the crisis broke in 1973.

Chris Harman has tried to put a square circle around this muddle, but all his accumulated empirical material cannot hide the flaws in the basic arguments.

An explanation of boom and slump in the wider context of the whole circuit of capital can therefore incorporate the role which arms expenditure played since before 1914, and especially after 1945, in prolonging the boom. The technological innovations brought about by the pressure of war and the wholesale replacement of old means of production by American technology undoubtedly gave a boost to the development of the productive forces. But this was part of a wider feature of the post-war world — the increased role of the state. Any explanation of the boom would also have to include the "imperialism of free trade" under US domination, the role of the dollar and other international financial arrangements, and so on. By isolating a department of arms production, one useful insight, one cannot explain the post-war boom.

Cliff unintentionally recognises that the "arms economy" alone cannot explain the onset of crisis after 1973, when he points to the competition from non-military capitalisms — Germany and Japan — in precipitating this downturn. He dares not stretch the "arms economy" theory to the present crisis. If the arms economy were so essential to the last one hundred years of imperialism, to a new stage of capitalism, then what is the nature of the present epoch? Kidron of course drew these conclusions even earlier within Cliff's tradition, claiming that the post-war world was a new epoch altogether, a new higher stage of capitalism. ["Imperialism, Highest Stage but One", IS:9, 1962] But these confusions are best dealt with under Cliff's final theoretical edifice, the deflected permanent revolution.

Deflected Permanent Revolution

CLIFF'S (1963) theory about developments in the "Third World", known as "Deflected Permanent Revolution", purported to explain the emergence of Third World Stalinism, that is, what he called "bureaucratic state capitalism".

Cliff argues that where the bourgeoisie cannot carry through a bourgeois revolution, if the working class is not revolutionary (because of Stalinism and reformism), the outcome will not, as in Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, be workers' power, but Stalinism. This account of developments in the Third World, where some regimes took Russian Stalinism as a model of devel-

opment, is, of course, only as good as Cliff's theory of state capitalism. The collapse of Stalinism has dealt it a shattering blow. China is still a Stalinist hybrid — but essentially Cliff's theory of Third World Stalinism is now only an intellectual curiosity.

The most profound problem with Cliff's state capitalist version of permanent revolution is his failure to disentangle the various elements of the bourgeois revolution which are knotted up in permanent revolution. Thus while the SWP has moved on from Lenin's conception of imperialism, they appear to have stuck to a very narrow conception of the national question, derived from the 2nd Congress of the Comintern in 1920. In fact, Lenin's wider arguments on the right of nations to self-determination, and the Bolshevik championing of rights for national minorities as the best means to unite workers divided by national antagonisms, seems to have been completely lost. Instead the SWP indulges in precisely the kind of two camp "anti-imperialism of idiots" that their earlier theories attempted to avoid.

The house that Cliff built

THE measure of any revolutionary socialist political tendency is its intervention in the living class struggle. The record of the SWP is that of a tendency that has often been distant from some of the core conceptions of the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

On the issue of capitalist integration in the European Union, they jumped on the little Englander bandwagon. On the national question in Ireland, they have failed to provide a programme to unite Catholic and Protestant workers on the basis of consistent democracy, which recognises their respective rights as national minorities (the Catholics within the unviable northern statelet, the Protestants within the whole of Ireland) — some form of federalism.

On Israel-Palestine, Cliff's group combine a recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians to their own state with a shrill anti-Zionism which effectively argues that the Jews do not have national rights in Palestine. As the Jewish people appear to be the only nation denied this right to self-determination, this argument is dangerously close to anti-semitism. Far from learning from Lenin, on these two questions the SWP appear to have a notion of "good" and "bad" peoples. Some have more rights than others.

The worst mistakes on imperialism have undoubtedly been their assessment of the Gulf wars. In 1987, having assessed the Iran-Iraq war since 1980 as a war between rival sub-imperialisms, the presence of US ships in the region led the SWP to "militarily support" Iran because of the "intervention of imperialism". Then, after Iraq had seized Kuwait in 1990, they flirted with critical support for Saddam: "Socialists must hope that Iraq gives the US a bloody nose and that the US is frustrated in its attempt to force the Iraqis out of Kuwait..." (*Socialist Worker* 18 August 1990). Only later did the SWP sober up and analyse the war as a conflict between US imperialism (and its allies) and an ambitious sub-imperialism, Iraq.

Ensnared by his own contradictions Cliff repeatedly falls back on one argument — that socialism is about the self-emancipation of the working class. This means socialists should champion working class independence. Even here, Cliff's record is very bad. In South Africa in the '80s this issue was posed sharply: how to break the unions (COSATU) from the political domination of the ANC in the struggle against apartheid. Some socialists, including our own tendency, argued that COSATU should form a labour party to fight for the interests of workers; the SWP disagreed but offered no strategy in its place. When in the presidential elections in 1994 the same issue came up, and the Workers' List stood against Mandela and de Klerk, and put forward working class demands, the SWP swung in behind Mandela. So much for promoting working class independence.

This book glorifies Cliff's theories which, he says, generated the politics of the SWP. If that is so, then they would have little to recommend them even if they were far more coherent than they ever were.

Cliff never had a coherent theory of the Eastern Bloc, but a label underneath which the politics wavered opportunistically. The SWP believed that "state capitalism" was the next phase of capitalist development and did not anticipate or explain the terminal decline of Stalinism in the late '80s. In reality, Cliff's theories explained very little. The politics of the group are and were shaped and reshaped mainly by catch-penny opportunism.

There is tremendous potential for Marxists in the present period, and accounting for past analyses is indeed part of the role of theory as a guide to action in the living struggle. False, boast-

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