

Allow the Kosovars to decide!



For a Democratic Federation of the Balkans

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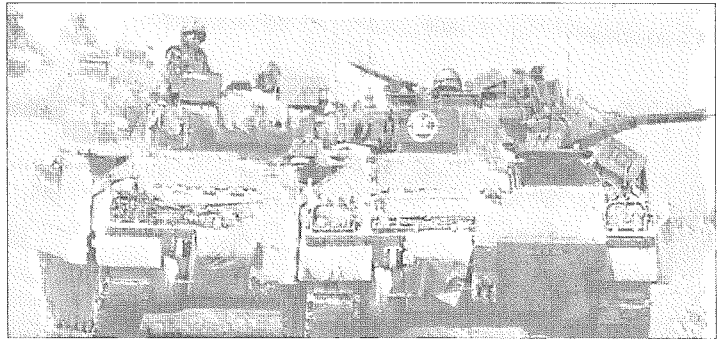
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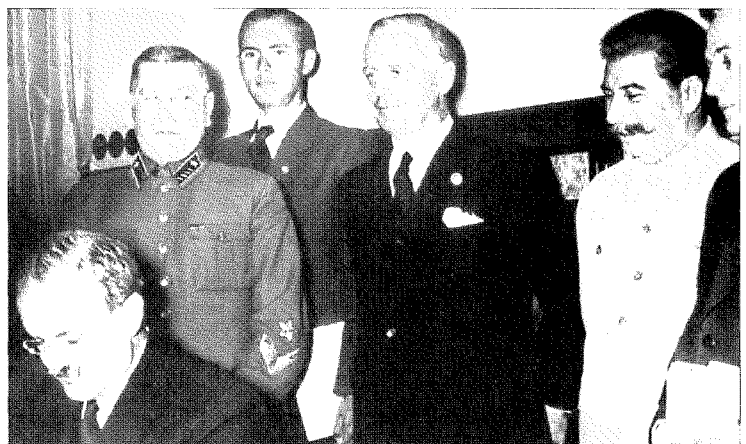
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Who will win the peace?

AFTER 11 weeks of NATO bombing, Yugoslavia (Serbia) has surrendered. NATO went to war to force the Rambouillet "agreement" on the Serbian regime. Rambouillet proposed to restore to Kosova, which was populated by more than 90% ethnic Albanians, autonomy within the Serbian state.

That would be a very great improvement for the Kosova Albanians. Rambouillet was not, however, primarily pro-Albanian. Rambouillet aimed to curb, stifle and frustrate Albanian nationalism. There is a more or less continuous area populated by Albanians stretching from the Albanian state through Kosova to parts of Macedonia and Montenegro. They are divided by artificial borders. NATO's concern was that, once Albanian resistance began to take the form of guerrilla warfare, the increasingly savage Serb oppression of the Kosova Albanians could destabilise much of the Balkans.

For most of a terrible decade, Kosova Albanian resistance to ethnic oppression — they were kicked out of jobs, basic schooling, higher education and medical care, and attacked by soldiers and cops when they tried to organise schools of their own — had taken the form of unarmed civil disobedience.

To prevent destabilisation, NATO wanted to secure some tolerable conditions of national life for the Kosovars, before Milosevic and the Kosova Liberation Army set the Balkans alight. Thus Rambouillet laid it down that the KLA should be disarmed and that Serb soldiers and police would control Kosova.

They started bombing Serbia in the expectation that Milosevic would cave in quickly. Perhaps they even saw the bombing as a matter of giving him an excuse to cave in quickly. On past experience in Croatia and Bosnia, Milosevic was a man they could do business with. The Serb drive against the Kosovars which had been going on for many months, ostensibly against the KLA, but increasingly taking on the character of ethnic cleansing against the whole population, was both NATO's reason, because it signified that things were on the brink of getting out of control, and NATO's excuse. It was both the real reason, or part of it, and the "good reason".

NATO may well have calculated that Milosevic would defy a few days, or even a couple of weeks of bombing. They may well have expected that Milosevic would use that time for a brutal drive against the KLA. But plainly they thought that a few days, or a week or two, of bombing would be enough to bring Milosevic to heel. Had they believed otherwise, they would not necessarily have made better preparations to protect the Kosovo-

vars: most likely they would not have started bombing.

In previous wars, most spectacularly in Vietnam, heavy high-tech bombing from the air could not stop a relatively "low-tech" enemy on the ground. From the start some establishment critics said that the bombing could not possibly achieve the stated goal, protecting the Kosovars, without a simultaneous invasion by NATO ground troops. Evidently Milosevic thought likewise.

Far from bringing Milosevic quickly to their bidding, the bombing gave him cover for what must have been a pre-planned all-out drive to kill or clear out the two million Kosova Albanians. The noise of the exploding NATO bombs in Serbia came to be only hellish background music to the catastrophe that engulfed the Albanians.

Wrong-footed by Milosevic, NATO could neither retreat by stopping the bombs nor up the ante by immediately dropping ground troops into Kosova. Once Milosevic refused to capitulate after a short spell of bombing nothing but large numbers of ground troops could have shielded the Kosovars. NATO remained fundamentally concerned with securing stable conditions in the Balkans for the "imperialism of free trade" and with asserting US power, not with the rights and interests of the Kosovars. NATO chose to wage a long high-tech air war, with minimal NATO casualties; to concentrate on bombing the Serbian economy back decades, while the Serb chauvinists went on doing their awful work in Kosova: mass killings, rapes, burnings, the driving out of many hundreds of thousands of Albanian people.

NATO remained what it always had been. As we wrote in *Workers' Liberty* in April: "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". We could not support NATO. Our camp was the "Third Camp" of the working class and oppressed peoples aspiring to liberation.

Yet, if NATO had stopped the bombing after the first few days, when catastrophe started to engulf the Kosovars, that would have given Milosevic a tremendous victory and guaranteed him a free hand to crush and disperse the people of Kosova. He would not have needed to fear a harsh reckoning in the near future from forces inside Serbia.

Undoubtedly the bombing did drive the Serb opposition — most of them nationalists indifferent or hostile to the Kosovars — into solidarising with Milosevic against the enemy in the sky. And what if Milosevic had won an easy victory over NATO and realised the old Serb nationalist dream of driving the Albanians out of Kosova? That would have been for him what Egypt's US gift of "victory" over Britain, France and Israel, at Suez in 1956, was for Egypt's Abdul Gamel Nasser. It would have raised him above challenge by any opposition in the calculable future; immediately, it would have meant extirpation for the Kosovar Albanians.

The future of the Kosova Albanians, if they were to have any future in Kosova, depended on the outcome of NATO's air war.

Now that the war is over, NATO politics, expressed but simultaneously obscured by its military action, will come to the fore again. To claim that the air war was about NATO making an attack of the old colonial-imperialist sort on Serbia's national rights defies the facts and whitewashes Milosevic.

In April's *WL* we called for independence for Kosova and arms for the Kosovars. We denounced NATO's desire to maintain a strong rump-Yugoslav state and conserve the national

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borders in the region, regardless of the rights of such groups as the Kosovar Albanians. That desire has been consistently expressed in US and European Union policy towards ex-Yugoslavia since 1987, when Milosevic started his drive to tighten Serbian control over Kosova and create as much of an ethnically homogenous Greater Serbia as he could. Now we denounce NATO on a further count: its public acceptance in advance that the Serb population of Kosova will be driven out.

At the start of Milosevic's recent "ethnic cleansing", they were less than 10%. We do not know how large a portion of the Serbs living in Kosova were actively involved in the assaults on their Albanian neighbours. Most likely, many were. But *the ethnic rule of thumb is, for consistent democrats, no acceptable measure of anything on either the Serb or the Albanian side.* The idea that all Serbs are guilty should be regarded with the same hostility as we regard Milosevic's attitude to the Kosova Albanians.

That Kosovar Albanians and the KLA will feel "it's our turn now", and try to act on it, is only another facet of the murderous ethnic antagonisms that led to the horror in Kosova. Those socialists who backed the Kosovars against Milosevic can have no part of it. Socialists must insist: democracy, not revenge!

II

THIS still-unfolding tragedy is one of a long series of ethnic conflicts and wars in Balkan history. As the wars produced in Croatia and Bosnia by the break-up of Yugoslavia showed earlier in this decade, there are no good and no bad peoples in these wars. At each turn of events the oppressors change roles with the oppressed. The central problem is that which Trotsky, a war correspondent in the Balkans during the wars of 1912 and 1913, described like this: the borders of the states are drawn across "the living bodies of the nations". Today, that is still true. The peoples have a deeply felt — and often deeply frustrated — sense of ethnic-national identity. The working class socialist answer to this situation was worked out as long ago as 1910, at a Conference of Balkan socialists in Belgrade.

The 1910 Conference statement read: "To free ourselves from particularism and narrowness; to abolish frontiers that divide peoples who are in part identical in language and culture, in part economically bound up together; finally, to seep away forms of foreign domination both direct and indirect that deprive the people of their right to determine their destiny for themselves."

Trotsky commented: "The positive programme that follows from this is: a Balkan federal republic."

The Communist International endorsed this programme, linking it to an immediate struggle for socialism. They did not propose to brush aside or suppress national aspirations, but to drain the chauvinist poison out of them by a consistently democratic arrangement of their affairs, and the maximum ethnic-national self-rule within the Balkan Federation.

Superficially, Tito's Yugoslavia seemed to be a realisation of that programme in a part of the Balkans. In the late mid-'40s the Stalinist rulers of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia even made some efforts to unite their countries; it appeared that the inclusion of the Albanian state in Yugoslavia and its union with Kosova would lead to the creation of a separate Albanian Republic inside Federal Yugoslavia. Russian interference, and then the open break between Tito and Stalin (mid-1948) put an end to all that.

In fact, it is pure illusion to think that Tito's Yugoslavia was a mini version of the Balkan Federation of the 1910 and Communist International programme. Even bureaucratically, in its later, looser, form, the Stalinistic Tito regime did everything from on top, like the Stalinists they fundamentally were (see Barry Finger's article in *WL*55). In Kosova, in particular, rule from Belgrade was always imposed by superior force, never freely chosen by the people of the area.

The main point for an understanding of the ethnic-national conflicts of the '80s and '90s is that Yugoslavia did not approach its

national problems in a democratic spirit on any level; it did not allow maximum self-determination for its component peoples. The 1910 programme has not been tried and failed because of some deep unreason in the people; it has never been tried.

Within the six Yugoslav Republics and two (sometimes) autonomous regions, Kosova and Vojvodina, the boundary lines *within* Yugoslavia still cut through "the living bodies of the nations". Most of the Republics had national minorities, without any form of self-government — the Serbs in Croatia, for example, and the Albanians in Montenegro and Macedonia. Behind this arrangement lay the idea that the existence of such interlacings — with minorities dependent for their rights on the good will of the central government — would bind Yugoslavia together, like jutting bits of a jigsaw puzzle locking into other pieces.

Where the 1910 and Communist International programmes had proposed to render the ethnic-national antagonisms non-toxic by giving each nation and fragment of nation maximum freedom, thus also building a common democratic respect for the freedom of others, Tito's Yugoslavia did no such thing. The Titoite state was created by conquest from within by the Partisan Army which Tito and his lieutenant had created after mid-1941 to fight the German and Italian occupation. Ethnic-national aspirations were not satisfied, but bureaucratically balanced and set off one against another, and frozen in a police state. They unfroze, to revive, and be revived, when an economic crisis triggered by Yugoslavia's interactions with international capitalism exploded in the 1980s.

The virulent revival of Serb and Croat chauvinisms in the late 1980s triggered and licensed other nationalisms. The Serb minorities in Croatia and Bosnia, who should long ago have had self-rule, were mobilised in the cause of building a Greater Serbia. How? By way of a primitive imperialist expansion that aimed to replace — "cleanse" — the population of an area and plant it with Serbs. A devil's carnival of bloody-handed chauvinism spread across wide areas of former Yugoslavia.

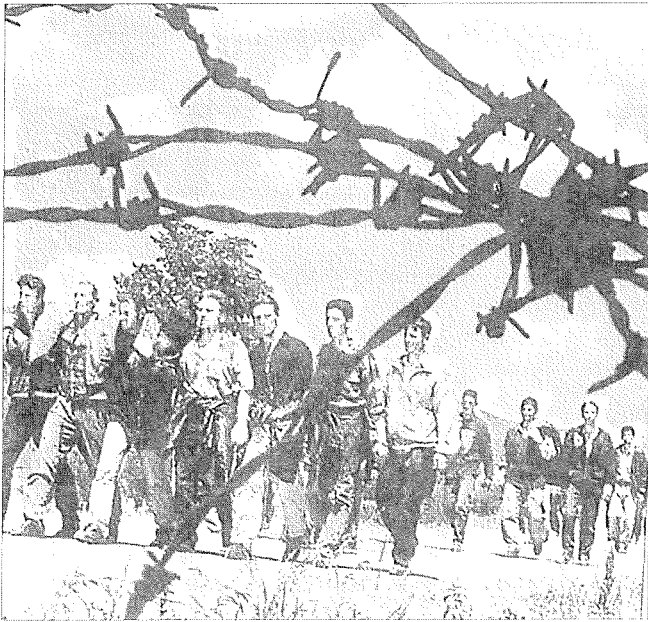
III

WITHIN Yugoslavia, Kosova always had a special place: it was what Ireland was for centuries to England, an internal colony. Trotsky called the Serb occupation of Kosova in 1912 an act of imperialism. The Albanians in Kosova were subjected to massacres in 1918 and 1919-20. Many were driven out to Albania and Turkey. They were subjected to forced Serbification; their own language, literature and history was suppressed. That was their fate in the Serb Empire from the end of the First World War. They suffered an identical fate for more than half of the life of Tito's Yugoslavia.

The Kosovan territory was conquered, like all of Yugoslavia, but more so, and occupied by the Partisans in 1945. There was another massacre. Partly because the dissident Titoite Stalinists feared that the Kosovars could be used as agents of the Albanian state, which supported Stalin's Russia in the post-1948 conflict with Yugoslavia, everything that had happened to the Kosovar Albanians in the 1920s and '30s was repeated in the '50s and '60s. About a quarter of a million of them were forced out, to Turkey, in the mid-'50s.

Then, from the late '60s, as a result of mass student action and changes in the Tito regime, to the late '80s, Kosova's Albanians experienced a brief Golden Age. The 1974 constitution gave Kosova all the attributes of a full Republic, except the name and the notional right to secede which it bestowed. Yet the arrangements were full of contradictions.

The clumsy bureaucratic nonsense that characterised the Tito regime's national policy even at its most benign, shown clearly in the fact that the Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro remained cut off from Kosova, though they were contiguous with Kosova, by arbitrary administrative decision; all of them remained cut off from the adjoining Albanian state. Rather than give the Kosovars the status of a full Republic, they kept it as an autonomous — but



no longer subordinate — part of the Serb Republic; real Kosovar Albanian self-rule within this clumsy arrangement demanded that Serbia's "autonomous region" be given considerable rights of veto over decisions of the Serb Republic. As if to illustrate Karl Marx's dictum that a nation which oppresses another can never be free, this frustrated the self-rule of the Serbs in the Serb Republic!

The age of Kosova Albanian self rule ended with a brutal Serb drive to turn Kosova back into a direct-rule internal colony.

IV

SOcialists have responded to the war in three ways. Some have seen Kosovar national rights as the main issue. Others have seen the Kosovars as irrelevant or subsidiary elements in a conflict between Serbia and imperialism. A third group has tried to amalgamate the first two approaches. In Britain the radical or would-be revolutionary "anti-imperialists" united with pacifists, with Stalinists (who think Serbia is the last surviving "socialist" state in Europe) with anti-EU people, anti-Americans and anti-Germans, to form a peace campaign around the slogans "Stop the Bombing! Stop the War!"¹

But how, on what basis, was the war to be stopped? From what vantage point were they opposing the bombing? Except to those who nonsensically claimed, in order to fit their agitation into old models, that the war was about NATO using a national-minority problem as a convenient excuse for colonial or semi-colonial conquest of Serbia, it was plain that the war could be stopped by Serbia ceasing its terror against the Kosovars. What does it mean to call for "Stop the bombing" while flatly opposing Kosovar self-determination, failing to mention it, or saying in the small print that Kosovar self-determination is desirable but improbable and anyway secondary?

In a war, one side of which was doing what the Serb state was doing in Kosova, what does it mean to focus a campaign around a military-technical slogan telling the other side to stop doing the only thing they are doing? It means to throw what weight you can muster on Milosevic's side — the side of Serbian imperialism! It implies that NATO bombing of Yugoslav property in which the Belgrade regime claims 1,500 civilians have died is a far greater evil than the deliberate slaughter of unknown, and probably vast, numbers of Kosovars, and the driving from their homes of most of the two million others.

"Stop the Bombing, Stop the War!" (NATO's war) meant "Vic-

1. At the start of the war, *Workers' Liberty* thought "Stop the Bombing!" made sense. Bombing could not achieve its supposed objective, defence of the Kosovars. But the Serb drive to clear out the whole Albanian population of Kosova, killing large numbers of them, changed the meaning of that slogan.

tory to Milosevic" and "Leave the Kosovars to Milosevic"!

In fact, at meetings of the "Stop the Bombings; Stop the War" campaign, the front rank organisers, the Socialist Workers' Party, were fanatical in their opposition to adding such slogans as "Yugoslavia/Serbia out of Kosova"; "Arm the Kosovars"; "Independence/Self-Determination for Kosova". They wanted the campaign to mean what the slogan they did not dare raise actually means: "Victory to Milosevic". They bolstered their case by agitation, some well-founded and most exaggerated, about the horrors of the NATO bombing. The SWP turned *Socialist Worker* into a Serb war-propaganda sheet. SW refused to publish letters from SWP members raising the question of Kosova.

V

ALL "Do this! Do that!" military-technical comments on a war imply an overall analysis, even if the analysis is not understood or the implications intended. That is why Marxists never take sides, or refuse to take sides, or extrapolate general assessments, from specific events or tactics in a war according to such criteria as: who fired the first shot? Who has invaded whose country? Who won the last battle? Who is most savage in pursuit of victory? Which side is our own capitalist government on? We are not always for the defeat of our own capitalist government, irrespective of who they are fighting or why. None of these "case by case" responses will allow you to make sense of a war: frequently they will lead you to radically misunderstand what is really going on. If you are honest about it, they will lead you to zig-zag wildly, a kite in the changing winds of the war.

Marxists proceed differently. We ask who is fighting this war, and why? What objectives are they fighting for? What really led to this war? What is the overall international context of the war? If war is the continuation of politics by other means, of what politics is this the continuation?

For example, in World War One, Austro-Hungary, egged on by Germany, started the war, with an ultimatum to Serbia; Germany invaded Belgium and northern France. Prussian militarism did commit atrocities. For example when a civilian fired a shot at the German troops marching into Louvain, the German army, as reprisal, deliberately destroyed the medieval cathedral there and a library of ancient, rare and precious books! Fully a quarter of the population of Serbia was wiped out during the World War.

Going from "case to case", issue by issue, the parties of the socialist international could not but divide into antagonistic groups reacting differently to part of the picture — their "own" part. Germany's invading troops were in northern France and in all of Belgium. The Germans could not but see the threat of barbaric Tsarist Russian invasion; the Russians — the once-great Marxist Plekhanov, for example — saw Russia threatened with reduction to the status of a colony, and so on. It was necessary to go beyond part-views and to take an overall political view in order to see how the parts fitted together. It was necessary to take not many national, partial, viewpoints but a common, overall, international working class viewpoint. It was only in that way that the local specifics could be properly understood and assessed. Only in that way could the overall reality which dominated the specifics be seen.

A very good case could, Lenin argued, in isolation from the whole international situation, be made for action to rescue "poor little Belgium" and "gallant little Serbia". In certain circumstances socialists would support capitalist international action to drive the Germans out of Belgium.

"The German imperialists have brazenly violated the neutrality of Belgium, as belligerent states have done always and everywhere, trampling upon *all* treaties and obligations if necessary. Let us suppose that all states interested in the observance of international treaties should declare war on Germany with the demand that Belgium be liberated and indemnified. In that case, the sympathies of socialists would, of course, be with Germany's enemies. But the whole point is that the Triple (and Quadruple) Entente is waging war, *not* over Belgium: this is common knowl-

edge and only hypocrites will disguise the fact. Britain is grabbing at Germany's colonies and Turkey; Russia is grabbing at Galicia and Turkey; France wants Alsace-Lorraine and even the left bank of the Rhine; a treaty has been concluded with Italy for the division of the spoils (Albania and Asia Minor); bargaining is going on with Bulgaria and Rumania, also for the division of the spoils. In the present war waged by the governments of today, it is *impossible* to help Belgium *otherwise* than by helping to throttle Austria or Turkey, etc! Where does "defence of the fatherland" come in here? Herein lies the specific feature of imperialist war, a war between reactionary-bourgeois and historically outmoded governments for the purpose of oppressing other nations". (*Socialism and War*, 1914).

"We must speak the truth to the 'people' who are suffering from the war; that truth is that no defence can be put up against the sufferings of wartime unless the government and the bourgeoisie of every belligerent country are overthrown. To defend Belgium by means of throttling Galicia or Hungary is no 'defence of the fatherland'". (*The social-chauvinists' sophisms*, 1915).

In the real situation, two great imperialist blocs were at war. There were "Belgiums" and "Serbias" on both sides: to rescue one on the other side you had to consent to the slavery of the other on "your side". *The political method used by the "Stop the bombs, stop the war" camp to judge this war was that of the "social chauvinists" ("socialists in words, chauvinists in deals", as Lenin wrote) in World War One!*

Instead of making a concrete picture according to the method outlined above, they made a fetish of being against NATO and ignored everything else, including the attempt to destroy the Albanian Kosovars (some of them, the SWP, made dishonest propaganda for Milosevic, even about what was being done in Kosova). They hung their campaign on military-technical "demands" — demands which implied an analysis — and wound up as a propaganda resource for Milosevic and Yugoslav ethnic imperialism.

Now it would be just as wrong to make a fetish of Kosova. You might have to regard Kosova as a subordinate detail, if NATO's goal was to conquer Yugoslavia, using Kosova as its "gallant little Belgium". Is that what has been happening? There is not the slightest possibility of that. NATO's objective is to get capitalist order and stability on the south-eastern fringe of the EU. Throwing their weight about, trying to be the world's policeman — that is imperialist? Only in a certain context largely absent here.

Lenin understood that there is no such thing as a revolutionary slogan that is purely negative. You need to say, not just shamefacedly imply, what you are for, and why: you need to put it in political context. Because they did not do this, the SWP in the "peace campaign" wound up as public apologists for Slobodan Milosevic, using methods that were, in technique and substance — in their shameless lying and one-sidedness — startlingly like old Stalinist apologies for the USSR. Where old Stalinists (and current supporters of "Milosevic the socialist") wind up in such a position by way of a pixillated positive support for Serbia's "camp", these "Trotskyists" wind up in Milosevic's camp by blinkered negativism towards the other side. Their eyes fixed on NATO, they walk backwards into the company of Slobodan Milosevic and his genocidal Dark Age-imperial project on Kosova. Such an attitude is a peculiar form of brutish chauvinism — negative, back to front, upside down chauvinism, but a chauvinistic narrow, albeit negative, focus on one's own state.

VI

A CENTRAL fact of life is that both the left and the revolutionary international socialists are, for now, a very weak force; so, politically, is the working class. That is why the demoralised and confused "Marxist" "anti-imperialists" look to even a Milosevic to "give NATO a bloody nose". And why their socialist mirror image, the armchair generals of the shamefaced "Victory to NATO" camp, wound up agitating for ground troops in Kosova.

When NATO puts in ground troops, or bombs, or whatever, it will do it for ruling class reasons, not ours. It will act to carry out

not our political programme, but theirs. The idea that it can be otherwise, is fantastic wishful thinking. The idea that socialists should abandon their own political independence for a fantasy, a mere dream of influencing the ruling class to act contrary to their own nature and in accordance with ours. The "victory to NATO" socialists are, in the circumstances, less repulsive than the "victory to Milosevic" "Trotskyists". Both, however, are but different poles of the decomposition of international socialist politics into the chaotic confusion laid bare in this war.

The job of consistent socialists, political pioneers of a renewed mass working class socialist movement, is not to cover for Milosevic and demonise NATO, or play the same role the other way round. It is here and now to make propaganda for independent working class politics and to engage in the class struggle. In conflicts like that of the Balkans, our responsibility is to tell the truth, advocate consistent democracy — a democratic Balkan Federation, organised in a network of self-determining, ethnic-national entities. This is an essential part of the programme that will help unite the working class across the national-ethnic boundaries, and teach them how to drain the blood-filled rivers of hatred, contempt and ethno-centricity that murderously divides them now.

We are never nationalists. But socialists are always champions of the nationally oppressed. We advocate their right to self-determination, up to independence. This does not imply acceptance of pre-ordained stages — first solve the national questions and then the social questions. A consistently democratic programme on the national question is part of the working class socialist programme. It is the only way the working class — accepting and advocating a democratic framework within which the different peoples can live together — can unite. It is the only basis, translated into state structures, on which a socialist society can be organised.

That is one lesson of the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

In this war, *Workers' Liberty* has represented independent working class — socialist — politics against both the morally and politically disgraceful proponents of an anti-imperialism of idiots, the "Victory to Milosevic" element, and against those who though the role of socialists was to support and advise Blair and NATO.

We judged the issues from an overall political assessment of what was going on. We criticised and denounced NATO's politics; we will go on doing that during the working out of the peace settlement in the Balkans. We saw Kosova as the central issue — so we are glad that Milosevic has not won.

In the immediate circumstances, NATO victory is the lesser evil. But we do not bow down to the immediate circumstances and the lesser evil. We could not, did not and do not positively support NATO. We reject the delusion that somehow we could or can now persuade NATO to act as an effective-political surrogate for the independent working class force which, alas, has yet to recreate itself and which can only be recreated by socialists consistently advocating working class political answers rather than supporting ruling class "lesser evils". We indicted NATO politics. We shall continue to do so during the working out of the peace settlement in the Balkans.

For the Kosovars, NATO's victory is better than Milosevic's; for the Serb people it does not mean the loss of anything socialists and democrats can support them in claiming.

"The attempt of the bourgeoisie during its internecine conflict to oblige humanity to divide up into only two camps is motivated by a desire to prohibit the proletariat from having its own independent ideas. This method is as old as bourgeois society; or more exactly, as class society in general. No one is obligated to become a Marxist; no one is obligated to swear by Lenin's name. But the whole of the politics of these two titans of revolutionary thought was directed towards this, that the fetishism of two camps would give way to a third, independent, sovereign camp of the proletariat, that camp upon which, in point of fact, the future of humanity depends."

Leon Trotsky

The Balkans war: a symposium

Boris Kagarlitsky*

I THINK you may have a false view of opposition to NATO's bombing here in Russia. The Western media portrays Russians as pro-Slavic, pro-Serb, pro-Orthodox. But the opinion polls here suggest that the people do not give a damn about the Serbs or the Orthodox church. What there is is an anti-Americanism. This anti-NATO feeling has developed from a very strong anti-American current that has grown-up here during the last ten years.

How do you see the issue, both personally and as a representative of the left?

Prime Minister Zyuganov shares a kind of geopolitical attitude — that is, the West is moving closer to Russia, NATO forces are moving closer to Russian borders. This poses a direct threat to Russia; Russia has to resist. One possible way to resist is to back the Serbs, who are fighting the West. From this point of view, of course, the question of Milosevic and the Albanians looks like an irrelevance.

This is the popular feeling as well. Ordinary people say: of course we have sympathy for the Albanians, but it doesn't matter. Because they also know that during the Soviet war against the Nazis, there was a lot of repression against small peoples, but that did not change the nature of the war. If you are fighting a defensive war against aggression, the nature of a bad or repressive regime does not change the nature of the war.

On the left, the position is more complex. There is a debate going on about Milosevic and his regime. Different views are expressed. Some, from a traditionalist, or crypto-Stalinist background, view Milosevic as defending the remains of what they understood to be the old socialist Yugoslavia.

Others, on the contrary, insist that Milosevic is corrupt and that his regime has nothing at all to do with socialism. This wing is very negative about Milosevic's policy in Kosova and Serbia. However, they also insist that NATO has strengthened Milosevic's control inside Serbia and increased the repression in Kosova against the ethnic Albanians (in other words, giving the ethnic cleansing a sort of "justification"). This wing believes that even from a narrow humanitarian approach, NATO's actions are counterproductive.

In my view, I think the issue is not about whether NATO's actions are counterproductive or not. The question is: was anything positive or humanitarian ever desired by the NATO powers? I think not. They never had any serious desire to protect the ethnic Albanians. If you read the Rambouillet agreement, you will find that the agreement deals with the rights of NATO in Kosova and in Yugoslavia, not with the rights of the Kosovars. NATO is fighting an aggressive war.

And the way they have handled this war shows that they do not give a damn about the Kosovars. Their bombing has turned the whole area into a disaster zone. They have also created a situation where the refugees will not be able to return even if the West wins the war — because this area is so devastated. Pushing people back will be as criminal as pushing them out.

What do think the West's policy is?

They do not want to invade, not because they do not want to



control Serbia militarily, but because they will lose too much hardware and too many troops. And in the long run they fear losing the ground war. The West seems more powerful than it actually is.

What should the left say about the Kosovars? We cannot accept what has happened to these people.

Of course we should not accept what has happened to them. But the question is: once this disaster has happened, what should be done next?

The Serb police have behaved like pigs in Kosova for years. And they created the preconditions for rebellion. While I do not think that the KLA is an organisation for the left to support, this does not matter, because if you are a young Albanian in Kosova, and you have no job, and you face Serb police repression, everyday, on the streets, you will join the KLA. And this is despite the fact that the KLA is probably not much better.

But the West is not interested in the plight of the Albanians at all. It will not put the refugees back, not even if they win. And the degree of ecological and social devastation means that they should not be put back there.

Ironically the right policy now is not to deal with moving people back but, rather, how to help the refugees in a new life. The West started the war, and now the West will have to accept about two million refugees.

So the left should accept the result of what Milosevic has done?

Yes. We have to. And I'm sure most of them do not want to return.

The West is as guilty as Milosevic. Not accepting this means Western intellectuals do not understand that if you face such a war from the Serbian side there are only two ways to deal with Kosova: push the people out or to kill thousands and thousands of people in Kosova to stop a guerrilla war. The West pushed the KLA — not much militarily, but politically it pushed — to expand its operations. The KLA anticipated Western help.

Once the war starts, what are the military options available to the Serbs? If the population is still present, they are very hostile. If the people remain thousands will die to stop the rebellion. The

* Interviews conducted by Mark Osborn

other option is ethnic cleansing. It is awful but at least many remain alive. Both options are the results of the criminal policy of the Serb regime. But in the circumstances they have opted for a "lesser evil".

On the West's side, it has opted for the worst evil. They bomb from such a height because they are afraid to risk the lives of their pilots. They do not effectively hit military targets; instead they hit towns and economic targets.

What should the left demand? Some sort of autonomy for the area; the right to return must be guaranteed (whether we push them to return is another matter); the right to move elsewhere if they choose.

Why do you say "autonomy" rather than independence?

I'll tell you why. The Serbs are not colonisers here. They have been on this land for many hundreds of years. The ethnic balance in favour of the ethnic Albanians has shifted dramatically only in the last 20 years. It is a question of one generation. Before that the balance was 60% Albanian to 40% Serbian. Now it is 85% Albanian to 10% Serb.

This shift is a consequence of two factors: economic depression in Kosova itself led to Serb emigration. The Serbs were better educated and in a better position to get jobs elsewhere in Yugoslavia where they perhaps had relatives and spoke the language.

Secondly, Albanians moved to Kosova from Albania, which was even more impoverished than Kosova itself.

And also Serbs say that the policy of the ethnic Albanian leadership, in the pre-Milosevic period, favoured Albanians and pushed Serbs out. That could be true; we have seen such things elsewhere.

So, then, in the long run, the only solution is a Balkan federation. Some non-ethnic federation.

Anyway, in the shorter term an independent Kosova will not be viable.

There are three possible options: it could be taken over by Albania (even if not formally, in name) which would be no better than being ruled by Serbs. Why should I support this?

Second option: the Serbs keep it, but are unable to control it in the same way in which they have been doing. This means some sort of self-government.

Thirdly: a NATO protectorate. A formally independent state, with everything being done by NATO. That would be a real problem for the other peoples of the region. I'm sure that the Kosovars do not want a NATO-occupied state — but that is the only meaning of "independence".

● *Boris Kagarlitsky was jailed under Brezhnev for work on an oppositional journal. He is an author and socialist activist living in Moscow.*

Bruce Kent

I HAVE opposed the bombing for a number of reasons. The world community has, with great difficulty, built a structure, the United Nations, which has certain laws and rules to deal with aggression or cruelty. These provisions have been totally ignored. The major military bloc which survives has taken the law into its own hands. This initiative is immensely damaging and destructive of the whole rule of law.

I am totally opposed to the bombing of Yugoslavia. It is criminal. It is a violation of both NATO's own charter and of the UN's charter, which states that Britain will not use force against other countries except within the framework of the UN.

Moreover, if NATO was acting outside the UN and doing something which actually worked, there might be a case for acting. But everything, absolutely everything, has been made worse by their actions. They have accelerated the expulsion of refugees to an enor-

mous degree, they have ruined relations with Russia, they have destabilised a number of countries in the region, they have spent \$100 billion so far in military costs and future reparations — so I can see no good coming out of the bombing.

What would you say about the issue of the Kosovars? The Stop the Bombing campaign solely concentrates on what the NATO governments are doing. What about the other side of the war, the war against the Kosovars?

Every time I have spoken against the bombing I have also criticised Milosevic's treatment of the Kosovars. But no matter what I believe should happen to Milosevic, it has nothing to do with what NATO is now doing. NATO is making matters worse.

What would I do? The number of monitors on the ground should have been increased, rather than beginning bombing. All the evidence suggests that although the Albanians of Kosovo were very badly marginalised and oppressed before the bombing, that was nothing like what has happened to them since the bombing started. We should have backed the democratic opposition to Milosevic in Belgrade, and that we did not do.

What about the democratic movement in Kosova itself? One criticism of the British government is that it is fighting for the Rambouillet agreement. And Rambouillet is pitiful: it offers the Kosovars far less than they demand, which is independence.

I'm not a big supporter of movements for independence — it is a flag under which a lot of people get killed. We live in an interdependent world, and independence is largely an illusion — anywhere, not just in Kosova. No country is really independent.

If a large number of people in Kosovo want autonomy or independence, fine. But such rules should be applied consistently across the world: would this rule apply equally to the Basques, the Kurds?

Yes, these groups should have the right to self-determination too...

Of course, after what has happened, the Kosovars are entitled to some sort of separation from Serbia. But under what form? Under a Balkan federation? As part of the EU? I really do not know... But their desire now, and the Serb action against them, is very much to do with the actions of the KLA. And who is funding the KLA? Perhaps one day we will find out.

No doubt, all guerrilla armies get money and support from wherever they can. Look at the Kurdish group, the PKK. They have had political support from Greece. Their money comes from wherever they can get it. Politically they are awful. Does this mean the Kurds do not have the right to freedom and independence? Of course not. The same principles apply to the KLA and the Kosovars.

In the world today we are interdependent. Independence in an absolute sense does not work. But autonomy does. That's what we have in Britain where we are governed by all sorts of laws and regulations and rules which emanate from outside.

Not for one moment am I suggesting that the Kosovars should be under the iron heel of the Serbs, or anyone else!

But, so often, the cry for independence is a cry for blood, because it implies civil war. I simply believe that we need to find ways of living together.

Finally, why do you believe that bombing has started at this particular point?

Why it started? Well, why did we unravel Yugoslavia as fast as we did? What were the interests of the Germans in recognising Croatia? Why is Tudjman not indicted as a war criminal alongside Milosevic? There are a lot of conspiracy theories flying around. But

perhaps NATO did not want a non-NATO and hostile state within new NATO borders.

The point about Germany seems a bit off beam: Germany did not recognise Croatia until December 1991, well into the Serb-Croat war.

If there is to be recognition of a sovereign state there must be guarantees on human rights and democratic structures. There should have been international discussion. None of this happened. The recognition was impulsive.

Wasn't the trigger for the bombing that Milosevic was stepping up the ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians and that the West was worried that new waves of refugees would destabilise the artificial state of Macedonia and also Albania? They did not want this war. And for many years Milosevic had been someone the west could do business with.

Yes, Rambouillet did not envisage independence. And interestingly it talked about the "principles of the free market" applying in Kosovo. What was intended here — a little capitalist outpost?

And Rambouillet also proposed the absolute autonomy of NATO troops in Serbia. No country in the world would have accepted such a thing. So, why did the West put such demands on Serbia, demands they knew would fail?

You talk about expulsions, and I am no expert. It is true, clearly, that the Kosovars were treated as second class citizens. However, that is a different matter to mass expulsions.

And I have seen a German Foreign Office document which says, yes, there was pressures on the Kosovars, but that there were no mass expulsions before the bombings.

● *Bruce Kent is a former Catholic bishop and a well-known British peace activist*

Daniel Singer

BY now it is quite clear that the US are attempting to institutionalise American hegemony — first in Europe, then in the world at large. What is at stake in this, latest, confrontation is no longer the Kosovars or the lives of Serbs, but the "credibility of NATO". The US, through NATO, is attempting to become the prosecutor, judge and executioner, deciding who can get away with murder and who should be pursued. Politically, this can become very important.

However, when attacking American bombing, we have to be very careful to distinguish ourselves from Milosevic and ethnic cleansing. We must declare a plague on both their houses.

What is being presented by Clinton and Blair is the idea that NATO is fighting for democracy and equal rights. We must insist that universal laws — which the world is crying out for — cannot be based on double standards. Laws which say one thing for the Kurds and one thing for the Kosovars are not universal. And I can not imagine an international organisation dominated, necessarily, by the US threatening a Nethanyahu with missiles for refusing to grant the Palestinians' national rights.

You declare a straightforward plague on both houses. But to what extent is that idea applicable, without qualification? Milosevic has killed far more people. His aim is to destroy Kosova as a society. NATO is attempting to bomb Milosevic into a deal, that is true. And that deal, something similar to Rambouillet, is pitiful.

Isn't Milosevic's imperialism the worst imperialism here?

No. First we must destroy the moral case of the bombers. We must stop them invoking the Holocaust and using the Holocaust as a weapon to paralyse opposition to what they are doing. We must then admit that we are in no position to impose our own solutions.

If you wish to argue along the following lines: "a woman is

being raped; you are in no position to act; we should call the policeman, even though we know the policeman to be brutal and corrupt," I would reply: yes, but only on the condition that we believe the policeman will not make matters worse.

NATO's intervention in Kosova has been a disaster on three grounds. It has propped up Milosevic and not brought him down; it has weakened all those in the region who are for class solidarity and potentially on our side — these people say they have been swept aside by the nationalist tide in the wake of the bombing; the conditions for the Kosovars have become 10 times worse since the bombing began, despite the fact that Milosevic was preparing some drive against them.

So, yes, I favour punishment for Milosevic. But I refuse to single out Milosevic. I insist that if a judgement is to be made it should be made on Tudjman, the President of Croatia, for similar crimes, even if they were carried out on a smaller scale. And I will not accept the judgements of people who will not judge impartially. And NATO leaders declare Saddam and Milosevic as evil while Suharto and Somoza are members of the "democratic family".

I sense in your attitude that you want to accept that NATO is acting in the interests of human rights. If that is your purpose, you will not have me on your side.

Well of course I oppose NATO. But I do not see NATO and Milosevic as equivalents with equal weight. I am for the Kosovars. And it is Serb imperialism that is responsible for the ethnic cleansing. The Serbs have a Kosova colony, not NATO. Let's discuss the issues. Some of your arguments can be turned round and used as part of a case for ground troops to protect the Kosovars.

If I was assuming NATO's intervention was being carried out for humanitarian reasons that might follow. But I do not. The greatest danger we have to recognise is that under the disguise of humanitarianism something extremely dangerous is being prepared: the institutionalising of the right of intervention. And this will be carried out against socialists, not just Milosevic's regime.

It is quite true that the world is crying out for a defence mechanism against this sort of situation. But the system which is being designed is to be used to protect the existing society. As socialists we cannot accept that, because we know about the implied dangers.

It is interesting that you mention the Holocaust. In Britain some of the anti-NATO left is attacking the idea that Milosevic is perpetrating a Holocaust in such a way as to talk down and minimise Milosevic's crimes.

I consider that the Holocaust is at once unique and comparable. That is to say, it is unique in its scientific horror and it is a reminder to us all about the levels people can stoop to. In principle, I am not opposed to comparisons.

However, the parallel is being used cynically to paralyse the opposition to the bombing. It is being used to discredit any critic of the "just war" that is being waged. And the equation of Milosevic and Hitler is sheer absurdity. The Kosovars deserve our greatest sympathy and support. But the parallel between what has happened to them and what happened to the Jews is indecent and immoral. It is so, especially, because the reason this parallel is being made is purely cynical. Blair and Clinton want to portray their opponents as pro-Nazi. I have contempt for all those who use this argument to score political points.

I know what I am talking about. I am a deserter from death. I should not have been here: had I stayed, as a small child in Poland, my chances of survival were one in a thousand.

No matter what has happened to the Kosovars, what has happened to them is not comparable to the Holocaust. Equally, if, as you say, opponents of the bombing are minimising the scale of the ethnic cleansing, they discredit themselves.

Discussing the idea of developing a "third camp" in the area: clearly we need to make propaganda for workers' unity and internationalism. However the "active" part of the third camp here is the Kosovars and their struggle against Serb forces. What is your attitude to this aspect of the war?

At this stage we have almost reached the point where there are no good solutions. As socialists we must examine our own guilt in this story — in the break up and collapse of Yugoslavia and the triumph of jingoism over class solidarity and universal principles. Now, after the poison has spread so far, after so much suffering has taken place and so much hatred exists, some sort of separation is inevitable. Unfortunately any sort of "solution" will inevitably accept elements of ethnic cleansing.

We need to re-examine many basic questions. For example, the principle of self-determination. Where does it start? Where does it stop? Self-determination for whom? Only in national frontiers? Why is it right for the Croats and not for the Serbs of the Krajina? These issues must be debated.

But in Kosova, now, the problem for me is to stop the war, to allow the Kosovars to return and wounds to heal. At some point in the future we will emerge from ethnic politics towards socialist politics: class solidarity not ethnicity!

But, now, the cornerstone of any socialist policy is an unambiguous answer to the question: who should rule in Kosova?

I do not know if this is the basic principle here. There may be class considerations. In every concrete situation, socialists must ask themselves: what is the best way forward? What is the best way to allow our type of politics to revive? How do we go beyond ethnicity? You have attempted to keep me in an area where I have to choose between competing national rights. That is not my main pre-occupation. Perhaps some form of autonomy is best at this stage. But my consideration is simply to find the best way for Serbs and Kosovars to live together, if that is possible at all.

In the long run I would like to see some new Yugoslavia where the people are not divided on ethnic grounds, and the basic division is between the people who work and their exploiters.

● *Daniel Singer is a veteran of the French socialist movement, author of Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?; Is Socialism Doomed? The Meaning of Mitterand; The Road to Gdansk; and Prelude to Revolution. He is a contributor to Le Monde and the Nation.*

Tam Dalyell

YOU have been a prominent opponent of the bombing of Yugoslavia. Could you explain why you've taken up this issue?

Firstly, I thought that it was stupid to the point of wickedness to start bombing in the knowledge that you neither had the willingness nor the capacity to protect those on whose behalf you were purporting to act. This bombing campaign was begun by people who knew that they were unable to protect the refugees.

They said that President Milosevic was a tyrant. If they knew this, why were they so stupid as not to foresee that this is exactly what would happen?

A lot of people have used these arguments to support the calls for a ground war...

Now look, if they had put ground troops in place, at an early stage, that would have been a different matter. I would not have supported it, but that would have been a different matter entirely.

But secondly, I think the Serbs have half a case.

Why do you say this?

No-one disputes that Kosova was part of Serbia. When I was in Bosnia, I was told: Kosova is different; Kosova is the cradle of Serb

civilisation. Moreover, I am told, and believe, that a lot of the trouble has been stirred up by people who are not from Kosova at all, but who are from Albania — the odious lieutenants of Enver Hoxha.

Do you mean the KLA? But the KLA is a mass movement of Kosovars.

Yes, quite right, I mean the KLA. The KLA have quite ruthlessly murdered police officers with the precise intention of provoking retribution, so they could call in NATO.

The big majority of Kosovars are ethnic Albanians...

Well, they are now.

You say it is a "cradle of Serb civilisation", and it is true that Serb nationalists have a particular attachment to the area. But what about the people who actually live there?

That is a judgement you are entitled to make. But there are 52,000 ethnic Albanians living in Belgrade. This is not a simple Serb-Albanian problem.

They want independence, and so it is their democratic right to have independence. How do you think the question of the rights of the Kosovars should be resolved?

I would advocate: Stop the bombing! I would say to you that the great need to do something does not mean that you should do something silly! I think bombing is counterproductive. I am a great dove and believe that there is no substitute for aid to Macedonia and poverty-stricken Albania.

Obviously there should be aid to Albania and Macedonia. But what would you say to people who say: what do you think should be done about the Kosovars?

In a civil way I would say: do you want the consequences of a land war?

You haven't answered the question. But in reply to yours: I don't support NATO; Workers' Liberty is not calling on them to start a land war. But the idea that NATO is the biggest problem here is quite wrong. The main enemy is Milosevic's regime, not NATO.

Yes, Milosevic's regime is terrible. But there are a lot of terrible regimes around the world. What's the answer — bombing against every country where there is a terrible regime? There are a set of horrible alternatives here. All I am advocating is what I understand is the least horrible.

How would you reply to a critic who complained that "Stop the bombing" is one-sided — it tells "our" government to stop bombing, but says nothing about what Milosevic is doing to the Kosovars? "Stop the bombing" is also Milosevic's slogan — he also wants the bombing to end and for a free hand in Kosova.

Well, you may think this reply is a little limp, but what the bombing has done is to extinguish the chances of the anti-Milosevic opposition, which was coming along quite nicely up until the start of the bombing of Yugoslavia. When a country is bombed, the people rally round. In World War Two, the people of London did. The people of Hamburg and Dresden did too. If you are bombed, you turn all anger on the people who are doing the bombing.

● *Tam Dalyell is Labour MP for Linlithgow.*

Hillel Ticktin

THE West has gone into Yugoslavia and the region in order to preserve the global order. I don't think it has gone into assist the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia, or the Albanian majority

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in Kosova. I think they were afraid that if Milosevic was allowed to continue, there would be war between the various ethnic groups and countries in the region. That war would threaten the global order. They were looking to preserve the area for capital.

What about Milosevic and his war aims?

I think Milosevic was a pragmatic member of the Stalinist elite of the former Yugoslavia who saw the only salvation in turning to nationalism.

They found themselves threatened by the working class at a certain point, or potentially threatened by it. There were a large number of strikes, a declining standard of living. They turned to this form of rule. That led automatically to the various sectors of the elite splintering in conditions where the Stalinist economy was splintering. What Milosevic did was to preserve the elite, but he has done this in a way that he did not understand. That is: it has been preserved in isolated national forms, including his own elite. Of course what he intended was to preserve Yugoslavia.

What is he fighting for now?

He is still fighting for that elite, the elite in Serbia. If he did not fight, he would be overthrown. He is threatened by the working class and also by other sections of the elite. He is virtually compelled to continue in this way. He is stuck with the logic of his situation.

A lot of the left believe that West had an interest in the break-up of the old Yugoslav state, pointing, as proof, to the recognition of Croatia by Germany at the end of 1991. Do you believe this is true?

I don't agree with this. I think Yugoslavia was breaking up anyway. At the time, Bush, the President of the United States, was opposed to it breaking up because, from his point of view, it is easier to maintain order in Yugoslavia if it is in one piece.

I was there during the break-up, in the middle of 1991. As far as I could see many of those involved, including people around Milosevic, did not expect what actually came.

The recognition of Croatia? I think that the break up was happening anyway. It is true that Germany's recognition of Croatia made it easier, but that is as far as it is possible to go. I don't think it is true that imperialism wanted the break-up. Moreover, it is not even possible to talk of imperialism in this way.

Why?

I don't think this is an issue where external powers are trying to establish finance capital in that region or external powers were trying to establish a form of tribute in that region. That might happen over time, but in the first instance they were interested in the transformation of the region towards capitalism. That is as far as it went.

More recently: the Western powers seem to have thought long and hard before beginning the bombing. They became alarmed towards the end of last year and tried to strong-arm the Kosovar leadership and Milosevic to sign up to Rambouillet. The US State Department handed out a series of deadlines, which came and went. They were reluctant because they feared the consequences. Is this how you read it?

Yes. I think they made a mistake. They expected the bombing to simply form a part of their game: they would bomb for a few days and a deal would be struck. They did not understand that this was not just a question of Milosevic but of the elite as a whole. The elite had to stand and fight because they had no alternative.

They seem to have made a stupid miscalculation. After the way Milosevic has behaved in the past, in Bosnia and elsewhere, why would they assume he would not take the

opportunity to purge the ethnic Albanians of Kosova? Surely they had no right to believe Milosevic would behave other than the way he has?

Certainly he has been a ruthless opponent and, certainly, he belongs as a member to the set of Monsters of the Twentieth Century. However, he has co-operated with the Western governments in the past and, to a certain extent, he has also been a partner. I think they simply miscalculated, rather than "had no right" to assume he would act otherwise. In the past he has made deals. In the past he has massacred the other side, and then struck an agreement. They expected him to back down when they threatened to use real force.

I suppose you could say that if they were sufficiently intelligent to understand world history or the world economy they would have understood the situation. But I believe the bourgeoisie is in decline and fails to understand the situation. This is a symptom of their decline.

What do you think about the other aspect of the war: the war Milosevic and the KLA are fighting? There are a lot on the left who concentrate their fire on the KLA and who deny the Kosovars the right to self-determination...

The right to self-determination is a bourgeois concept. Nonetheless, I think there is no denying the Kosovars' right to self-determination as a bourgeois democratic right. The left demand is about socialism and the working class.

But what does that mean for socialists, now?

The first thing for socialists to realise is that we have very little role. There is no socialist movement on the ground. That leaves us with putting forward our socialist programme. The left must not degenerate into supporting the nationalism or either side. That includes the nationalism of the oppressed Kosovars.

Yes, we're not nationalists. Yes, we should reassert the idea of working class socialism. Equally the Kosovars are fighting for independence. We should decide what we favour, and if we do not favour independence, we should say what we do favour instead. We should say whether we believe the British government should lift the arms embargo and give the Kosovars guns to defend themselves...

I don't think socialists can give advice to a bourgeois government...

This is not advice. Socialists should simply say what we want to be done.

The workers of the whole region must find a way of uniting. Yes, call for independence, but also be very critical of the various nationalist organisations: the KLA and the Rugova faction. We cannot support bourgeois nationalist organisations — under any circumstances.

Finally, in terms of the campaigning against the bombing, people like Tony Benn have adopted one demand — Stop the bombing. Of course that is also Milosevic's demand. What do you make of this?

I think this position is Stalinist. Obviously I oppose this, and clearly such political positions give some sort of comfort and support to the current Serbian elite. Marching alongside Serb flags is a total disaster for the left.

Of course, however, we cannot accept either side. We cannot support Albanian or Serb nationalism, even though we recognise the oppression of one by the other.

● *Hillel Ticktin is a lecturer at Glasgow University and editor of the journal Critique.*



A different kind of politician

Monday 15 March

JUST got back from holiday. We've had an ongoing discussion in the Sheffield Workers' Liberty branch about whether to stand a candidate in the forthcoming council elections. The local struggle against privatisation, the failure of Labour councillors, including the so-called left, to respond to either this struggle or the anti-working class policies of the New Labour Government means it makes sense — but practically it seems like a huge task and nobody wants to be the candidate.

Wednesday 17 March

Initial meeting to discuss standing on a joint platform with other sections of the left. The Socialist Party have stood at a local level many times and are keen to stand in an alliance. An independent socialist who has been active in campaigning against cuts in the welfare state also attends and is committed to standing. The SWP don't attend and have told various people they've no intention of standing or of working with the likes of us. There's a disagreement about how to approach this.

We propose leafletting SWP meetings to put the case for standing and discussing with the membership. The Socialist Party are against doing this, on the basis that talking to members of another organisation without their readership's permission isn't the way forward for left unity.

Monday 22 March

I attend a picket of the council against privatisation, organised by striking housing benefit workers. It's an opportunity to discuss the idea of standing with prominent activists. The idea goes down well, even with long term Labour Party members. People are interested in having an alternative to meek support for the Labour councillors who've been selling us out for years.

Wednesday 31 March

We're definitely standing. Even though we've got a million other things to do we're going for it. Logic says that I should be the candidate — yuk. Meeting with the Socialist Party and Shirley (the independent socialist) to confirm the details. End of all the theoretical discussion, now we've got to work out what actually needs doing.

Monday 12 April

Campaign launch meeting. Goes very well. A reasonable attendance and a useful discussion. Also the press turn up. Workers' Power denounce us for being reformists — shocker!

Saturday 17 April

Our first go at canvassing. We speak to a couple of good people and have a few rows. Two people get shut in a flat with a man talking about devils coming out of the telly. Make a mental note to impose a "don't go inside" rule.

Sunday 18 April

Go canvassing in a mainly Asian area of the ward. Talk to loads of people about the war. Our propaganda based on solidarity with the Kosovars goes down very well.

Monday 19 April

Attend the first meeting of the Justice for Anthony Green Campaign, launched after a local black 18 year old is run over by the police. It's good to be able to combine our canvassing with building support for this local campaign. The standing Labour councillor decides to steer clear on the basis that his involvement might look like vote grabbing — he appears to favour doing nothing about racist policing in the area.

Sunday 25 April

We've been canvassing virtually every day, for an hour each evening and a few hours at the weekend. The momentum of the campaign has got going and a fair number of people are helping out. The best response was in the area we had expected — a mixed working class area — especially from youngish people who haven't been involved in any political activity but are looking for an alternative to Blairism.

We've found a few Labour voters and Labour Party members who are sympathetic to our ideas but don't want the Liberals to run the council. If the Liberals do win the council, the blame will lie squarely on the shoulders of the Labour councillors who've decimated local services, forced through Tory cuts and are now backing wholesale privatisation.

Wednesday 29 April

The local papers are full of the elections now, but it's been very difficult for us to get any coverage. They are concentrating on



the battle for control of the council between Labour and the Liberals. Our canvassing has shown the only reason the Liberals are anywhere near is because most working class people don't vote. A lot of people are saying that all politicians are the same. Explaining our involvement in local campaigns helps to get over this.

Saturday 1 May

Our approach in canvassing has been to concentrate on talking to people about politics rather than urging them to vote for us. We realise it would be good to get some votes, so begin to revisit people who have responded well to the initial canvass and leaflet with "remember to vote" flyers.

Thursday 6 May

Election Day. I'm at work, where the election is the main topic of conversation — Councillor and Wolfie are my new nicknames: very witty. Most people are taking the piss but quite a few have shown a genuine interest.

At the count in the evening the standing Labour councillor is looking very nervous but soon calms down as it becomes clear he has won easily in the ward. He makes a puke speech about continuing to do his utmost for the people of the area — the people of the area look forward to that.

We got 80 votes. That's about what we expected and up on the last time a "socialist" candidate stood in the ward. The best thing is we know who these people are and can now start to get them involved in campaigning in the area.

So all that dreaming about having a rest once the election was over...

● *Alison Brown is a health worker.*

Good Friday, Goodbye?

THE Good Friday (1998) Agreement is not dead yet, but if it rises from its sick bed it will be the greatest miracle since Jesus Christ called forth Lazarus, alive again, from his tomb. Signs of breakdown are everywhere. There is a small rash of sectarian attacks on Catholics. These for now are the work of racist bigots intent on embittering relations between the Catholic and Protestant communities and on burying the Good Friday Agreement. Others are in process of using even more potent weapons for the same purpose.

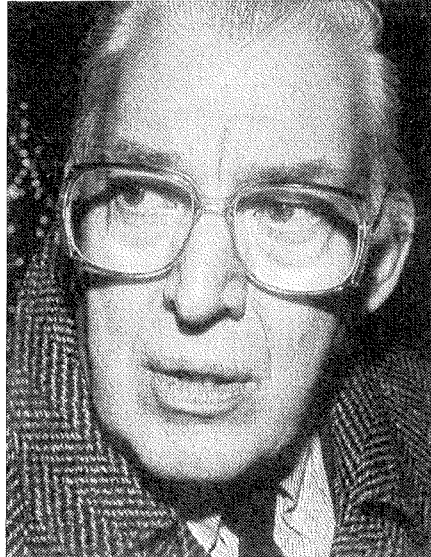
In the European elections on 10 June (after *Workers' Liberty* has gone to press) Dr Ian Paisley, an opponent of the Agreement, is certain to win one of the 3 Northern Irish European seats and John Hulme of the constitutional nationalist SDLP, who supports the Agreement, will win another. (Both are sitting Euro-MPs.)

Opinion polls show that roughly the same proportion — around 70% — as voted for it in the referendum a year ago still favour the Agreement. But that referendum percentage was, in the elections to the Assembly, broken down into its Catholic and Protestant communal constituents. Pro-Agreement Unionists won 30 seats for barely over half the Unionist vote, and anti-Agreement Unionists, Paisley's DUP and others, won 28 seats, for not much less than half the Unionist vote.

Trimble's overall majority depended on two PUP, paramilitary-linked, Assembly members. One of Trimble's Party members defected in a crucial vote last January, making it 29-29.

After a year that started with much-hyped expectations and then saw the Agreement falter and go into crisis, there is Protestant-Unionist disillusionment with the Good Friday Agreement — and thus a shift from the Protestants to the anti-Agreement Unionists in the election is to be expected. The whole Six Counties is one constituency for these elections. Paisley is treating the election as a second referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. So are other anti-Agreement Unionist candidates. Paisley's claim that he was right a year ago and that Trimble was duped or treacherous will seem plausible now to some who scorned it then.

The big question, assuming a shift to the antis, is whether it will be so large as to destroy Trimble's moral authority.



Paisley: will he wreck the Agreement?

That authority rests on his claim to represent the Unionist majority. It is, therefore, already weak, if not downright spurious. Trimble has said he will resign as First Minister if he loses the Unionist majority in the Assembly. A sizeable shift to the antis in the European election might well lead to defections from Trimble's party in the Assembly. That would probably be the coup de grace for the Good Friday Agreement.

Recently, the ever-balancing British Government has been leaning on the Unionists to get them to accept a formula that would let Sinn Féin/IRA take up, or start to take up two seats in a new Six County government, before the IRA has decommissioned any of its weapons, on a promise, or a hope that the IRA will start to get rid of some weapons by next May. That, if the Euro-elections register a shift of Unionist votes from the Trimbleites to the antis, might be a bit of balancing too far, and bring Trimble tumbling down.

Almost exactly a quarter of a century ago, in the February 1974 UK elections, opponents of the Sunningdale Agreement (under which a power-sharing government had been set up in Belfast) won 11 out of 12 *Westminster* seats, a spectacular success that struck a mortal blow at the power-sharing Unionists, who still had a majority in Belfast. They were finally seen off by an Orange General Strike in May 1974 (see *Workers' Liberty* 19 and see "Another Day" on pages 17-20).

In the Euro-elections Paisley is trying to

do again what he and others did then — destroy the moral and political authority of the more conciliatory Unionists. A success or a triumph for the antis will fuel tensions and conflicts in the upcoming Orange marching season.

If the Good Friday Agreement disappoints the hopes of those who backed it, where will the blame lie? First and foremost with the crazy framework which Northern Ireland is! A Six-County settlement requires its advocates to do an impossible balancing act between the island's natural Protestant minority and a manufactured, artificial, Six County Catholic minority (in a decade they may be the majority there, as in the rest of the island). The Six County entity is too narrow a frame; the Catholic minority there an unnecessary complication. The Protestant majority areas could far more easily be accommodated by way of autonomy in a United Ireland.

Secondarily, the blame will lie with the London, Dublin and US governments, who hustled through the Good Friday Agreement amidst a carnival of hyping and "spinning", while leaving unresolved — because the Agreement would not have been possible without fudging — the issues that have since come to the fore. Decommissioning was already an issue in the aftermath of the first IRA ceasefire, from August 1994–February 1996: did they think it would go away?

Thirdly, IRA-Sinn Féin. They too, signing up to the agreement, could not have imagined that decommissioning would go away. They still pursue the "guns and votes" strategy they have had for two decades, with the emphasis for the moment on votes. They hoped London, Dublin and Washington would bounce the Unionists into powersharing with them, while the IRA stood ostentatiously to arms in the background.

On one level, it is an artificial issue: those who "decommission" can rearm in the future. IRA disarmament now would not necessarily mean a great deal should they decide to rearm. It need not necessarily even mean demobilising "Oglac Na hEireann" — the Army of Ireland, as the IRA knows itself. Why don't they do it? Conversely, the Unionists too know that rearmament would be possible, after "decommissioning"; they have paramilitaries on their side (Trimble in the Assembly depends on David Irvine and Billy Hutchinson whose paramilitary alter

ego, the UVF, is as adamant as the IRA against decommissioning) — so why do they make decommissioning the live-or-die test for the Good Friday Agreement? Because both sides play politics and attach enormous importance to symbols as a means of binding themselves together.

It seems obviously true for Trimble to say his Unionist "majority" would not survive a decision to share power with members of a conspicuously unstood-down IRA-Sinn Fein. Even should he want to, it is improbable that Gerry

Adams could keep their movement united around a decision to disarm.

The argument that the Good Friday Agreement did not bind them strictly to disarm before the Six County government is set up is true, but the implication that it is unreasonable for the Unionists to want it is disingenuous. But that was always one of the greatest problems with the Good Friday Agreement: it meant radically different and incompatible things to those in each of the communities who bought Blair's promises.

John O'Mahony

ardly way for the Lib Dems to worm out of their election promise and betray students by keeping fees in place. But this manoeuvre may not be enough. Kenny explained: "Canavan or Sheridan will put a Bill for the abolition of fees and Sheridan will put an amendment for full grants. It then depends on the Lib Dems. Only Jim Wallace and two others agree with the deal. The rest are insisting on a free vote. Eight or nine out of 17 say that they will vote for abolition regardless of what the party decides. There are even still a few dissenting voices in the Labour Party. John McAllion voted against the proposal in Westminster and he's now an MSP, for example."

Glasgow Caledonian Students' Association are organising a march from Glasgow to Edinburgh for the opening of the Scottish Parliament as part of a campaign for the abolition of fees, which is supported by the CFE. This is intended to launch the campaign to build pressure on MSPs to carry out the mandate they received from the Scottish electorate and scrap fees. Fifty marchers from more than 15 institutions will set off from George Square in Glasgow on Monday June 28 and walk 18 miles to Cumbernauld. On Tuesday evening they will arrive in Falkirk for a rally with Dennis Canavan and Tommy Sheridan amongst the speakers. The final leg is to Edinburgh on the Wednesday, and on the Thursday morning there will be a march from Waterloo Place at 9.30 to King's Stables Road for a rally as the Parliament is set to open: again the speakers will include Canavan and Sheridan, as well as Kenny Hannah, the CFE and others. Twenty-nine colleges, the majority of Scottish colleges, are supporting the march, and they are getting encouraging support from trade union branches and from colleges outside of Scotland. This campaign could shore up and solidify free education support in Scotland. Already they have made great gains, shifting the policy of NUS Scotland in favour of free education and getting people elected to the Scottish NEC. Greater gains seem possible in the near future.

The importance of this campaign cannot be understated: there is a very real possibility of inflicting a major defeat on the Government. The effect of beating fees in Scotland would be a huge boost to the campaign in the rest of the UK. Glasgow Caledonian is "urging everyone to get their arses up to Edinburgh on July 1". This isn't just a Scottish issue. If fees go in Scotland then fees in the rest of the UK will be untenable and that's a major headache for Tony Blair. Let's hope we see a domino effect.

Demonstrate against tuition fees

IT was the first time that tuition fees had been a major issue in an election — and the Scottish electorate sent a resounding message of opposition to Westminster. Sixty-two per cent voted for candidates who supported the abolition of fees and 73 out of 129 MSPs are in favour of abolition.

Dennis Canavan said that his victory wasn't just a vote against the selection procedures used by the Labour Party — which tried to exclude the Westminster MP from standing — but was a vote for socialist policies, like opposition to tuition fees for students. Fees looked dead and buried, with only the Labour Party being in favour of them, and the issue was set to dominate the negotiations for a coalition government of Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems were about to show just what stern stuff they were made of....

Workers' Liberty spoke to Kenny Hannah, President of Glasgow Caledonian Students' Association and member of the National Executive of NUS Scotland.

PRIOR to the election, Jim Wallace, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats said that the issue of fees was "non-negotiable". Within one and a half weeks this non-negotiable stance had become "election rhetoric", as he put it on *Off the Record*. Scottish students see this as a shoddy and shameful sell-out. He sacrificed opposition to fees for two seats in the cabinet. He gets to be Minister for Justice — although it should be Minister for Injustice the way he's behaved. He

also gets to be Deputy Leader, but that's just a paper position, it's vacuous.

Even despite the deal struck between Labour and Wallace there is still hope. The deal sets up a review. This is the same mechanism they used to scrap grants and bring in fees in the first place.

Canavan or Sheridan will put a Bill for the abolition of fees to the Scottish Parliament, and Sheridan will put an amendment for full grants. It then depends on the Lib Dems.

The Tory government, with the support of Labour and the Lib Dems, set up the Dearing Inquiry. This was an obvious smokescreen to conceal their own plans to do away with grants. The Labour Government used it to buy time, so that they didn't need to reveal their plans before the general election, and as an excuse for their scrapping grants and bringing in fees.

At the time, the Campaign for Free Education pointed this out and referred to the Pit Closures Review that the Tories used to allow public anger at the shutting of the mines to die down so that the event could become a *fait accompli*. The CFE was right. This latest review is a cow-

Labour, the unions and the myth of social-partnership

TWO years on from Labour's election landslide, we now need to take stock of how the relationship between the Blair Government and the trade union leadership is developing.

Both sides have delivered their side of the bargain. Blair has made a few cosmetic changes to the Thatcherite legacy and the union leaders have done everything in their power to stop their members pressing for real change.

Workers' Liberty has covered the Employment Relations Bill in some detail so it's only necessary to stress the following about Labour's new settlement:

- It keeps 95% of the Tory legislation on the statute books
- It creates new balloting rules for union recognition which treat workers as second class citizens who can't be trusted within the normal rule of majority voting
- Most of the progressive but weak measures, like unpaid paternity/maternity leave emanate from European law and have been introduced in Britain in the least generous way the Government could get away with.

That this half-digested Tory crumb can be held up as a serious achievement by the trade union leaders only tells us how degenerate they are. But the Employment Relations Bill really is all they've got from Blair apart from some small changes to the



check-off regulations. Other items on the TUC wish list, like the right of union safety reps to issue improvement notices and a legal right to time off for all workers to undertake lifelong learning, have been indefinitely postponed by New Labour in the interests of not over-burdening small businesses with too many regulations.

So, with any serious changes to the profoundly anti-trade union framework of UK law ruled out and a minimum wage set at less than Mrs Blair spends at the hairdresser, the union leaders have to make do with the intangible — soundbites and more soundbites.

A recent TUC conference on "social partnership" gave us the spectacle of Tony Blair lecturing the trade union movement on the "meaningless" annual pay round

and warning unions that the TUC's concept of "social partnership" must not be "used" as a disguise, either to get your foot in the door and start rowing about recruitment or to go back to your old behaviour of the bad old days of the 1960s and '70s.

In return for listening to the Prime Minister upbraid them the TUC leaders got a £5 million grant to promote "partnership" in the workforce. This £5 million is to be matched by a further £5 million from the employers so that the TUC can help employers implement minimum standards in the workplace, with the emphasis on the word minimum.

All talk of social partnership is based on the illusion that bosses and workers have common interests and their relationship is built on mutual co-operation not the exploitation of wage labour by capital. But what is distinctive about New Labour and the TUC's notion of social partnership is that, unlike continental models, it is not based on a minimum of trade union independence and a pluralist notion of collective bargaining. Instead the social partnership that Monks and Blair want is premised on an *erosion* of collective bargaining and Thatcher's anti-union laws. It is a form of "partnership" ideology that threatens to lead to a degeneration of trade unionism below even that of business unionism in the US. Though union membership in the US is half that of the UK the level of militancy expressed through strikes is much greater.

If you want proof of how far the TUC leadership are prepared to go then just listen to John Monks' reply to Blair on the annual wage norms:

"We recognise that we don't deliver secure employment or rewarding jobs by having nothing more than an annual argument with employers about pay... Collective bargaining yes, but matched to a commitment to joint problem solving across training, skills and career development."

Meanwhile, outside Congress House and in the real world...

John Monks has two advantages over the other trade union bureaucrats:

1. He is not elected, and as a result
2. He has no industrial membership to keep happy by delivering improvements in their wages and conditions.

The problem for people like Bill Morris, John Edmonds, Rodney Bickerstaffe and the other key bureaucrats is that they actually have to lead unions and attempt to secure gains for their members. Yet the Government is attacking their members' wages and conditions through intimidation like PFI, Best Value and its support for continued privatisation and de-regulation.

Tom Willis

CWU's votes to scrap anti-union laws!

AT the Communications Workers' Union conference this year, delegates reaffirmed the union's fight against the anti-union laws, agreeing to call for a repeal of all the laws that prohibit solidarity action, effective picketing, walkouts and workers' control over the democratic structures of their own organisations. We also agreed to build the widest possible popular campaign against the anti-union laws and for workers' rights.

Have these decisions come too late? The Government's Employment Relations Bill is now in its final stages and there is little leverage on changing the law this year.

The leader of our own union, Derek Hodgson, pushed through a motion "welcoming" the Government's union proposals, thus setting a miserable standard for the rest of the trade union leadership. He derailed attempts by left activists in the union to increase the pressure for campaigning for union rights

whilst the legislation was being debated.

Delegates who backed Hodgson last year have changed their minds. They have seen how weak the legislation is and Hodgson's manoeuvring has been exposed for what it is: cover for a Labour Party leadership that will not deliver on any trade union rights.

Many CWU branches and activists are members of the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws. With the CWU vote and the affiliation of the MSF there is a real chance that this campaign will begin to grow into a real movement. The United Campaign is now supported by 11 national unions. It is the only trade union-based campaign that is capable of taking the fight against the anti-union laws forward. All left activists in unions should affiliate their branches, regions and unions to the campaign.

● UCRATUL, PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA. Tel: 0171-638 7521.

The contours of the new South Africa

AFTER the ANC's political victory in the second post-apartheid general election and the electoral marginalisation of the National Party, it is worth reasserting the basics about South Africa.

The economically dominant class remains the randlords — the monopoly capitalists whose wealth is based on the exploitation of the gold and diamond mines. The continuing brutal oppression and exploitation of the black proletarian majority is based on the randlords system

of racial capitalism, a system which predates apartheid and has outlived it.

It is also the case that the ANC did not lead the struggle for freedom, rather rode it into office. Apartheid was ended because the randlords and the high command of the racial capitalist state considered it unviable in the face of revolt from black workers and youth. They took the opportunity of the collapse of the Stalinist bloc to cut a deal with the ANC.

The new South Africa is new, but not new. The formal apparatus of racial oppression has been removed. Two elections have taken place under universal suffrage; pass laws and racial categorisation of the population are history. Yet the racial division of wealth is virtually unchanged bar the growth of a relatively small black middle class.

Generals who are guilty of organising apartheid death squads remain free, white police beatings continue and all black people distrust what they see as a basically unchanged police.

So, what of the black working class, the force that brought De Klerk to the negotiating table?

They have been betrayed. They still invest enormous trust in the ANC, but

that trust will melt away. Mandela's authority has prevented this inevitable conflict between the black majority and "their" government. But now Mandela has gone.

The ANC will find it increasingly difficult to continue ruling as a monolithic national liberation movement. Mass unemployment and grinding poverty will provoke growing disillusion with the "people's government".

The key question is whether or not the working class will emerge as an independent force. So far the ANC has been relatively successful in enticing not just opportunists and careerists but all the organic leaders of the trade unions in its orbit — and into high government office. Continued success, however, is not guaranteed. There are only so many cosy posts in the state machine for union officials. No real basis exists for a labour aristocracy in South Africa and so we can expect this working class movement to start to assert its independence in relation to the ANC. When that starts to happen we really will be in the new South Africa, but so long as the working class remains in the sway of the ANC everything will stay the same.

Ann Mack

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As we saw it

The nature of South African capitalism

SOUTH African capitalism's profits are based on the system which reduces black people to cheap labour devoid of rights. If progress depends on the feeble proposals made every so often by South African big business for some liberalisation, then it will be a very long time indeed coming. South African capitalism needs the racist system

But capital does not always get what it needs. The black workers are and must be the driving force of the struggle against white supremacy; they will conduct that struggle by the rhythms and methods appropriate to their own class interests combining it with their own direct class demands, and fighting for a victory which will merge a democratic and socialist revolution. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the flexibility of capitalism.

That mistake was already made by many South African leftists in the 1970s, when they underestimated the new non-racial unions or condemned them as economic and reformist because they

thought that the apartheid state could not possibly allow genuine non-racial unions to exist for any time at all.

The state did not tolerate the unions out of generosity. But it was force to let them develop.

There are a number of possibilities now other than socialist revolution or total defeat.

Since the 1970s especially a small but real middle class has developed in the black townships.

The overthrow of white supremacy could be followed by the black middle class establishing their rule and suppressing the black workers. Or, under extreme pressure, the white regime might reform itself drastically and manage to stabilise that reformed version by use of repression.

Both the CP theory of "two stages" and the scholastic theory of socialist revolution or nothing fail to grasp the reality of what is happening now or the range of possible outcomes.

Workers' Liberty, September 1985

Setting the record straight

By Bernard Regan and Pat Murphy

Bernard Regan

YOUR last *Workers' Liberty* contains a report from Pat Murphy of the NUT Conference. In it he reports on an incident involving myself and the Industrial Organiser of Workers' Liberty. The report is in fact inaccurate. The facts of the matter are these:

Following a debate about the situation in Kosova, outside the meeting, I was called a "Chetnik" by this individual, whose name I don't know. He refused to withdraw this statement which he had made in front of a number of other individuals from different political groups.

In a subsequent private meeting Paul Hampton, an AWL member, apologised to me on behalf of Workers' Liberty saying that the remark was wrong and unjustified — (an apology repeated in private by other members of the organisation since). I accepted that apology and said that since the remark was made by one individual from Workers' Liberty I did not hold the whole organisation responsible and did not regard it as something which would stop me working with Workers' Liberty at the conference or in the future. I considered the matter finished with.

I was therefore shocked to read the story, written by Pat Murphy, published in your journal and on your website. Pat Murphy was neither present when the incident took place nor was he present when Paul Hampton apologised on behalf of your organisation. However I took in good faith that Paul Hampton's apology was made on behalf of the organisation and that it therefore was known about and understood by Workers' Liberty members to be an end of the affair.

To reprint the story, however, reopens the whole issue and calls into question the political sincerity of the "apology" and its worth. Despite the fact that Pat Murphy says that it was a "private" matter, publishing the story means that it has ceased to be a "private" matter and is now public.

To call someone a "Chetnik" is in fact to accuse them of being a fascist. The Industrial Organiser of Workers' Liberty understood this perfectly well and it was clear from Paul Hampton's apology that he fully understood what was meant. If Workers' Liberty think that someone is a "Chetnik" then they have a responsibility to the rest of the labour movement to denounce them as such as loudly and widely as possible and to drive such a person out of the workers' movement. It is not simply a question of putting a label on someone — no fascist should be tolerated inside the trade union movement. Either Workers' Liberty should take responsibility for calling someone a fascist and act accordingly or withdraw the accusation, making it clear to those who read your magazine and website and the rest of the workers' movement that you unconditionally retract this attack and apologise.

This isn't a matter of name calling or some matter of personal sensitivity. When supporters of Stalin used the term "social fascist" about the Social Democratic Party in Germany in the '30s it completely miseducated their ranks and others on the whole nature of fascism and the danger it represented. People inside the trade union movement have already asked me what this is all about. People who don't know me might also want to know whether I can be trusted. Part of my work is actually with refugees from Kosovo. It is a matter of political responsibility. It is not some matter of bourgeois prejudice about my "good name" it is a matter of political accuracy as well as my political record and whether it will damage the relations with others with whom I work. To cite examples of



Bernard Regan



Pat Murphy

how other people might refer to Workers' Liberty is not a justification for your action in writing and publishing this story. I assume you defend yourselves against such attacks when they are made. I do not belong to a political party. I have to defend myself.

At a recent meeting of the Socialist Teachers Alliance members of Workers' Liberty agreed with a motion that was adopted which stated, "The STA: condemns the bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO and opposes any proposal to extend the war through, for example, a ground invasion; condemns the treatment of the Kosovar Albanians by the Milosevic regime; supports the right of the Kosovars to return to Kosova and their right to self-determination including the right to independence.

"The STA further agrees to encourage support for this position within the NUT and to oppose the position adopted by the ETUC, TUC and Education International which have all backed the NATO actions."

They disagreed with the proposal that, "The STA (agrees) to affiliate to the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, to make a donation and to publicise its initiatives."

I assume that Workers' Liberty is in favour of actively opposing the imperialists. So where does the objection to affiliation to the Committee for Peace in the Balkans come from? It seems as if the AWL wants to equate opposition to US and British aggression with support for Milosevic. But this equation is not justified. One of the tragedies of the bombing campaign, for example, has been that Nevasnost, the independent trade union organisation in Serbia which is a major component of the anti-Milosevic forces responsible for the half million strong demonstration against his regime in 1998, has now been virtually driven underground by the actions of NATO, just as the opposition to Saddam Hussein was isolated by the events of the Gulf War and the continuing blockade which has resulted, by UNICEF calculations, in an increase in mortality rates in Iraq of 90,000 a year.

Imperialism is not interested in defending either the Kosovar working class or the Serbian working class. Imperialism is hypocritically wrapping itself in the humanitarian flag as a cover for its own ambitions. Socialists should have nothing to do with this charade.

I will debate you on the subject of Kosova any time you wish but I ask that you publish a retraction of what was said in the article concerning the incident at the NUT Conference.

I ask you to publish this letter in full without amendment.

A reply to Bernard Regan by Pat Murphy

"Come down off the cross
We can use the wood"

Tom Waits: *Come On Up To The House* (1999)

WHO called who what in the corridor outside a meeting is of little importance. I find the idea that it should produce written discussion pieces and collective apologies faintly ridiculous. Bernard, nevertheless, clearly seems upset by the whole thing, and that is not conducive to effective collaboration between us in the future. For that reason I would like to make some things clear:

Of course it is not the view of WL (teachers or otherwise) that Bernard is literally a "Chetnik". Given his completely accurate statement that I heard none of this at first hand, I will say nothing more about it.

To report that this remark was made (whatever it was) is not to endorse it. It was described in the offending article as "an insult". It was compared to the descriptions of us as "Unionists", "Zionists" and "pro-imperialists", remarks with which I self-evidently disagree. I find absurd the claim that anyone in the labour movement seriously thinks either that Bernard is a Chetnik or that that is our considered assessment of him on the basis of the short comment in my article. If such people exist, I would be happy to meet and counsel them.

It seems that some of Bernard's indignation stems from his own confusion about who the Chetniks were. "To call someone a Chetnik," he says, "is in fact to accuse them of being a fascist." Well only if you stretch the word "fascist" until it has very little meaning. The Chetniks were a group of Serb resistance fighters who opposed the Nazi occupation of that part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the Second World War. On one level they were very much anti-fascist, or at least anti-Nazi. They were, however, monarchists, recruited from the pre-war royal army and loyal to the Serb monarchy which ruled before the occupation. They were overshadowed by Tito's Partisan resistance, which also fought the Nazis, but on the basis of a republican Yugoslavia. To call someone a Chetnik in the context of debate about the current conflict is to accuse them of being a Serb chauvinist. That could be a legitimate, though over-the-top and no doubt irritating, comment to make in the heat of a row. The idea that Bernard was accused of being a fascist is bombastic nonsense.

Hence we find ourselves in the odd position of being asked for an apology for an implied slur that was never made. We find ourselves lectured about the need to use the term fascist in a correct and precise way by someone who has himself misunderstood it. "Workers Liberty," says Bernard, "should take responsibility for calling someone a fascist and act accordingly." Well, no doubt we will when the occasion arises. Meantime, Bernard needs to calm down. No-one has called him a fascist, or believes him so to be. Let that reassure all those Kosovan refugees and people in the trade union movement who read the last *Workers' Liberty*. I sincerely hope that, where it makes obvious sense, and that means most of the time, Bernard and his co-thinkers feel able to work constructively with comrades from Workers' Liberty in the NUT. We will, in the next few months, be working in our branches to ensure that he is elected as national Vice-President of the union, and that STA policies are well represented at next year's conference. We will do all this in the spirit of uniting in activity where we agree and debating, often sharply, where we disagree. We expect no more or less from Bernard.

One of the issues on which we quite clearly disagree and should, therefore, debate properly is the conflict in the Balkans. There is a part of the left, of which Bernard is only an example, which has lost its moral bearings in the current war. This dispute arose because of a disingenuous contribution he made to an important discussion

on the war at NUT conference. The issue at stake was whether the left, in attempting to have the war discussed on the floor of conference, would include support for the right of the Kosovars to independence. The people who insisted that no such reference be made were the SWP. Bernard spoke last in the debate and used his considerable weight in the STA to ensure that the SWP won. He clearly indicated that it might be tactically better not to call for Kosovan national rights because it could alienate the Stalinists on our NEC and in conference. In other words, we needed their opposition to NATO even if it was based on pro-Serb sentiment. This at a time when the attempt to physically liquidate the Kosovars was at its height. Then, in a cynical piece of evasion, Bernard explained how important it was to understand the difference between self-determination and independence and implied that the Kosovars might not want independence. Actually the amendment he was speaking against supported their right to independence, but in any case he was responding to an immensely important issue by retreating into pedantry and abstraction. The result, which he worked hard for, was that the first trade union conference after the outbreak of war was offered a "left-wing" policy which said nothing about the central question of the conflict — the national rights of the Kosovars. I think that is a disgrace — a good deal more worrying than the question of Bernard's reputation.

AS it happens the events at NUT conference have been repeated up and down the country, and that brings me to the question of why we voted against STA affiliation to the Committee for Peace in the Balkans. The comrades from WL who attended the last STA national meeting were quite right to do that. I have also spoken and voted against support for the Leeds Committee at my union branch and will continue to do so while the so-called "anti-war" movement keeps its current character. The plain fact is that this campaign is not really anti-war at all, and is certainly not anti-imperialist. It is against NATO's war and NATO's imperialism but says nothing about Milosevic's war and Serb imperialism. Like many of my comrades, and those of other political organisations, I have attended anti-war meetings and argued that they should supplement their "Stop the bombings" slogan with clear, public support for the central victims in this conflict, the Kosovar Albanians. I wouldn't find it so depressing if there had been an argument about how much priority to give this demand, whether it should have equal billing with anti-NATO slogans or be subordinate. No, what is appalling is that the very idea of championing Kosovar rights has been resisted ferociously throughout.

The lead role has been played by the SWP, whose record in this matter has been a disgraceful episode in their history. They have been helped by a more general culture which, it seems to me, is politically and morally corrupted. It is a culture with no consistent, positive programme on democratic and national rights, only a crude anti-imperialism. It is a moral world defined entirely by the need to negate its enemy rather than mobilise and educate new friends. The intellectual poverty of this culture has produced some grotesque spectacles in the course of this debate. I have now heard numerous "left-wingers" deny or question whether massacres have really occurred in Kosova. The SWP have put great effort into pedantic articles arguing that this is not strictly speaking genocide. The KLA is described as drug-running, criminal, Muslim fundamentalist and CIA-funded all at the same time. This, too, from people who understand all too well the variety of nationalist politics, semi-criminality and dodgy sources of weapons characteristic of virtually every national liberation movement. It is, in short, a dishonest, opportunist moral, intellectual and political worldview some have built for themselves. We want no part of it. We will give it no succour and we will continue to relate to it by way of merciless criticism, because that is the only way in which a serious thinking, critical socialist movement can be built.

We need an honest debate on the left

Alan Thornett

THE February edition of *Workers' Liberty* carried a transcript of a debate between Martin Thomas and myself on monetary and the European Union. In his reply (which concluded the debate) Martin makes great play of a remark I made during my summation to the effect that that I regretted accepting the invitation to the debate given the way the discussion had gone from the floor of the meeting — which was comprised mostly (though not only) of AWL members — and that I would not be accepting similar invitations in the future. This remark has been taken up by AWL members in various ways since that meeting.

My response to this is that political debate is a very good thing, but it needs a minimum degree of honesty if it is to be of value.

There are important political difference between the AWL and Socialist Outlook (and myself) on the nature the EU and of EMU. For example, you appear to see the creation of the EU as a progressive development in itself, despite the Maastricht Treaty, the social implications of the introduction of EMU, the democratic deficit, Schengen and everything else. In this particular meeting some of your comrades seemed to compare the creation of the EU favourably with the unification of capitalist states in the progressive period of capitalism in the 19th century prior to the rise of imperialism. We disagree with such an analysis. We think the EU is a reactionary institution aimed at increasing the exploitation of the European working class to the advantage of big business. But such things are a legitimate subject for debate. There can be misunderstandings — which have to be cleared up — and the different positions might get caricatured, but it is a useful and legitimate debate none-the-less,

My problem on that particular night was that there was no possible room for misunderstanding about the things I was denounced for from the floor of the meeting. I was denounced for holding views I was known to oppose. Speaker after speaker denounced me as a "nationalist", a "little Englander", and for being "in league with the Tory right", in the most sectarian way. One of your comrades even said: "I am not saying this as an insult, I am saying it as a considered and objective political opinion: you are a nationalist, comrade!" This was not a legitimate and honest debate. Nor was it a misunderstanding. It was a set-up. All your leading comrades present knew those allegations to be the opposite to the truth, yet not one intervened to say so. More than that, this kind of intervention was openly encouraged by Martin Thomas and others. A Socialist Outlook comrade speaking from the floor and objecting to this was heckled by your comrades.

Why do I say that the debate was dishonest? I say it because we (the AWL and Socialist Outlook) worked together in the 1997 Euromarch campaign and these issues were absolutely clear between us.

We worked together in that campaign on the basis of two points of political agreement — which were also the basis of the campaign. The first was the slogan "Single Currency, Not at our Expense" — which focused on the social effects of the introduction of EMU. We agreed that there was a clear and valid case against EMU from a working class perspective (i.e., the defence of jobs, working conditions, the welfare state, etc., opposition to racism) and that this was the basis of the campaign. The secondly was that any campaign must be internationalist in character and rigorously separated from either the Tory right or those in the labour movement who seek to defend the pound or British national sov-

ereignty. And we implemented this at every stage!

The Campaign Against Euro Federalism (CAEF) split with us because we insisted that our campaign must be separated from nationalism in any form. We intervened at the CAEF meeting at the Birmingham G7 summit demonstration to challenge them for sharing a platform with the Tory right. We argued that the Tory right may oppose EMU as we do but on a totally different agenda to ourselves. Their's is a nationalist, pro-Atlanticist, even racist, agenda. And it is advanced on behalf of, and with the backing of, a section of the British bourgeoisie. Ours was (and is) an internationalist, working class campaign based on the building of international solidarity amongst the working class and oppressed people across Europe. No Tory would touch it with a barge pole.

This issue came up again at the Cardiff demonstration last year. When a group of right-wingers arrived with "save the pound" slogans we excluded them from the demonstration on the basis that they opposed the political basis on which it was called. I asked them to leave personally, on behalf of the organisers. In the end they formed their own demonstration separated from ours by several hundred yards and a cordon of police. No grounds for misunderstanding there!

My objection at the meeting, therefore, was that given this background all your leading comrades were fully aware of the stance we had jointly taken on all this but cynically allowed the "debate" to go the way it did. Consequently I was met with knowing, wilful, distortions of my positions (and Socialist Outlook's) at a meeting to which I had been invited as a guest speaker.

Genuine difference on the EU and EMU remain between us of course.

The AWL argues that we should not be either for or against the EU (or for or against the single currency) since the EU is a capitalist institution and Britain is a capitalist country and therefore there is little to chose between them.

But it is not a matter of choosing between the EU or Britain, it is a matter of what is best for the working class — Europe-wide. From this perspective opposing the single currency is not a matter of defending the pound but of defending the working class. The Maastricht treaty, and its core provision EMU, the single currency, is the central project of the European bourgeoisie aimed at increasing the exploitation of the working class in Europe. It is difficult to see how the working class can be defended effectively without taking it into account.

The Maastricht treaty is designed to ensure the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda within the EU and to force member states to cut government spending to meet the requirements of the Stability Pact. That means attacks on jobs and welfare. It is one of the driving forces behind the massive privatisation programmes and deregulation being carried out across the EU by mostly social democratic governments, who hold power in 13 of the 15 member states.

All these governments are running tight fiscal policies and introducing extensive marketisation, deregulation and privatisation programmes. And they are being far more effective, in most cases, than their right wing predecessors — some spectacularly so. After two years in office, Jospin (seen as heading one of the most left of these governments, in France) has sold off more nationalised property than all his right-wing predecessors together managed in the previous 13 years! True Jospin is more pragmatic than Blair, and his rhetoric is different, but the end result is the same as far as pri-

atisation and the neo-liberal agenda is concerned.

It is always necessary to repeat that the pressures towards these developments are many and that everything cannot be put at the door of the EU or EMU. There is a world-wide neo-liberal offensive which is very much alive and well despite forecasts of its demise by many, including those writing in the recent one-off edition of *Marxism Today*. There is the world-wide economic crisis of over-production which remains unresolved despite the current spin being put on it by the representatives of capital. And on top of this there is the crisis of (and political evolution of) European social democracy itself — which is rooted in the lack of reforms available today and the overall success of the neo-liberal offensive. This crisis has led European social democracy to assume the leadership of the central project of the European bourgeoisie — European integration through the EU.

To say that the EU and EMU are far from the only factors driving the neo-liberal agenda forward in Europe, however, does not diminish the role they are playing in any way or suggest that we should be neutral as to their effects. What EMU is doing is co-ordinating and systematising the neo-liberal offensive and providing the best framework for its introduction. It also gives cover to national governments to introduce austerity programmes or cuts in welfare since they can argue that they are only meeting their obligations to the EU.

The most militant sections of the working class across Europe have been pretty clear about the role of EMU whilst the conditions were being created for its introduction. That is why the Convergence Criteria, and the various austerity programmes designed to meet it, created the biggest wave of struggles across Europe for over 20 years. It triggered general strikes, direct action and mass protests — right across the EU (France, Spain, Belgium, Greece, Germany)

“Debate involves dispute and contradiction”

Martin Thomas replies

WE have argued against the “no to the EU” position held by Alan and his friends as nationalist for over 30 years now. Of course we continued to do so at the London debate! Several AWL speakers stressed that we were not questioning Alan’s good intentions. To protest to someone “Your position is nationalist!” has no bite if you think they will reply: “Yes, of course it is! I’m a chauvinist and proud of it!”

Debate involves dispute and contradiction! If you enter a debate, you must be prepared to have your opponents say that your position is undesirable in some way or another: nationalist, pro-imperialist, reformist, ultra-left, whatever. The requirement for a proper regime of debate on the left is not that we all promise never to say anything impolite or wounding about anyone else’s ideas — if we did, there would never be any debate — but open argument on equal terms with the widest possible audience.

We freely gave Alan equal speaking time before an AWL audience — including new AWL members, friends and contacts unfamiliar with the Europe debate and with no or little previous “conditioning” against his point of view. We gave further speaking time to Alan’s friends on the floor of the meeting, who were limited in numbers only by Socialist Outlook not being keen to expose their members and sympathisers to the debate. The best way to improve debate would be for Socialist Outlook to adopt a similar open regime, and to debate with us both at meetings attended by members of both organisations and in the publications of both groups.

following the mass strikes and huge demonstrations in France at the end of 1996 (the demonstrations were bigger than in 1968).

Although the AWL has been rewriting the history of this because it did not fit the script (Martin Thomas has repeatedly argued that mass demonstrations against the Juppé plan were not aimed at the effects of the convergence criteria at all — based on left leaflets he read whilst on them), most of them clearly did arise from EMU in one way or another. Whether this was adequately reflected in the leaflets of the left on the day is a slightly separate matter. One person who was absolutely clear about it was Juppé himself, who said repeatedly that his plan was designed to prepare for EMU. Some of the strikes which followed, like the Greek farmers and seafarers, were absolutely explicit about it.

In any case it is hard to see how we can be neutral when the European employers reorganise to their own advantage and against that of the working class. We are not neutral when an individual employer reorganises against the workforce or when a national government takes measures which increase exploitation of or attack the working class. Why should we be neutral when this is done by the European bourgeoisie? We don’t say all employers are capitalists so we are neutral as to what they do and the employment conditions they create, so why do we say it about the EU?

Politically EMU represents the biggest single step yet towards a European super-state — the project favoured by the most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie when faced with increasing competition from Japan and North America.

The Single European Act of 1986 was designed precisely to challenge what was then Japanese pre-eminence in the world economy. It marked the transition from what had been until then a mainly economic project of a common market or customs union (aimed largely at avoiding further European wars) towards the highly political project of the European Union and eventually a super-state. EMU was the core provision contained in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. It would take away the ability of individual nation states to fix interest rates, the most important fiscal lever available to them.

Maastricht, therefore, represented not only an attempt by the European bourgeoisie to compete more effectively with rival power blocs in the world (where only the biggest and strongest can survive) but triggered a major attack on the European working class as austerity measures were introduced to meet the criteria. The various European welfare systems — now regarded by the European bourgeoisie as a luxury which could no longer be afforded — were the main target in these attacks.

To return, finally, to the issue of how debates should be conducted and how different sections of the left should relate to one another, there is a mood for unity on the left, and it is an important development. How do we create something new which can be useful to the working class and start to build a real political alternative to Blairism? The AWL is seeking to be a part of this process and you were party to the recent attempts to get a common slate on the London region for the European elections. It was a good initiative which was scuppered by the blind sectarianism of the SLP.

The AWL itself has called a forum to discuss “left unity” on Saturday 19 June and you are inviting others, including Socialist Outlook, to participate in it. Whether such a forum can make a contribution to the current unity process depends on the extent to which it is a genuine contribution to the process or simply a means to a different end for the AWL. Time will tell. And the different sections of the left will make their judgement — including the section I am a part of. But one thing is clear; if it is to make a positive contribution the AWL will have to make a break from the dishonest debating methods and macho posturing displayed at the forum I was invited to. Such methods are not the best way to promote and develop the important opportunities which exist at the present time.

After the SWP's collapse into Serb chauvinism Cliff's state capitalism in perspective

"A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not sharpen, but dull, consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation."

Lenin

"Sects change their doctrines more readily than they change their names."

Anon

"In the terminology of the Marxist movement, unprincipled cliques or groups have been characterized as political bandits. A classic example of such a group is the group known as the 'Lovestonites'. This group, poisoned and corrupted the American Communist movement for many years by its unprincipled and unscrupulous factional struggles. Able and talented people they had no definite principles. The 'political' programme was always adapted to their primary aim of 'solving the organisation question satisfactorily.'"

"Their politics were always determined for them by external pressure."

James P Cannon

"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

Lenin

Introduction

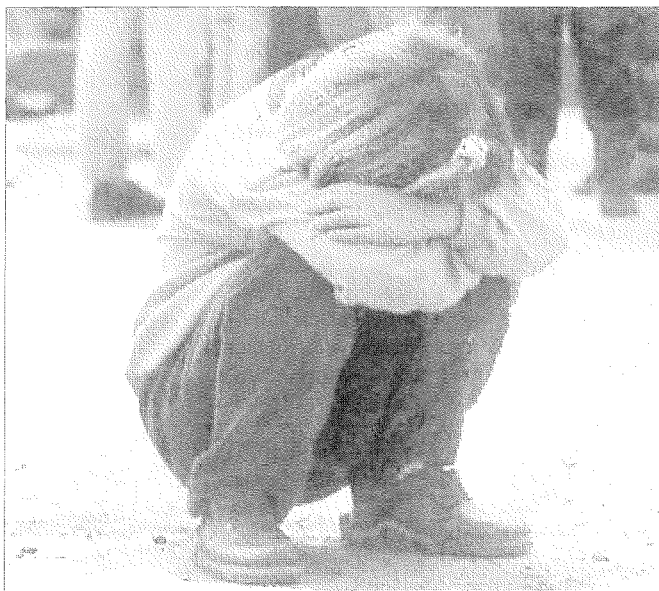
EVEN those who had thought themselves beyond being surprised or outraged by the Socialist Workers' Party, experienced a frisson of shock and initial disbelief at the role it has played during the Serb-Kosova-NATO war — that of outright apologist for the murderous Serbian drive in Kosova. Alongside Stalinists who think Milosevic's Yugoslavia (Serbia) a socialist state, confused pacifists, half-demented little Englanders and Serb chauvinists, they were the main organisers of a one-sided pro-Serb "Anti-War" movement under the slogans: "Stop the Bombing; Stop the War". Within that movement, they were, together with the Milosevicite neo-Stalinists, the most determined opponents of concern with the Kosovar Albanians who were then being massacred and uprooted. At meetings all over Britain they fought against committing those present to demanding "Yugoslavian (Serbian) army out of Kosova", even as a subordinate slogan. Using the style and technique of a 1940s-vintage apologia for the USSR, their pamphlet *Stop the War* systematically misrepresented everything to do with the build-up to war and the fate of the Kosovar Albanians.

They did not dare say it, but their politics could most clearly have been expressed in the slogan "Victory to Milosevic". Meanwhile, in the "small print", their "thinkers" — Alex Callinicos in *Socialist Worker*, for instance — reproduced the bourgeois establishment's line, embodied in the Rambouillet agreement: Kosova Albanian independence would "destabilise" the region! They had, it seemed, one-and-the-same underlying argument for backing Milosevic as NATO had for bombing him! They did not say that what Milosevic was doing in Kosova was "all right", or that it "didn't matter", but they minimised and denied it, sometimes shamefacedly, sometimes boldly. At the NUT conference their leading teacher argued against bothering about the Kosovars on the grounds that they were now only "history" (see WL55). It was not Hitler's Holocaust, they rightly insisted, but with the obscene intention of making as little as possible of *what it was*, and of what Milosevic was doing to the Kosovar Albanians.

In a war in which many tens of thousands of Kosovars have been butchered by the Milosevicites, they turned *Socialist Worker* into a Serb war propaganda sheet, on the political, intellectual and moral level of gungho pro-NATO tabloids like the *Sun*.

The immediate origin of this behaviour is plain and easy to comprehend: they let all other political considerations be devoured by one, *negative*, idea — "Against NATO's war". Where the old pro-USSR Stalinists used to side *positively* with one bloc, that controlled by the USSR — and today's neo-Stalinists sided positively with the "socialist" Milosevic — the SWP arrived at positive support for Milosevic by an all-defining negativism: against NATO, no matter what!

They backed themselves, spitting incoherent curses at NATO, into



How did the SWP wind up in Milosevic's camp?

the company of the dark-age Serb imperialists, and turned themselves into vulgar propagandists for Milosevic!

It is, of course, likely that calculations of organisational advantage — winning the favour of the still-numerous Stalinoids in the trade unions — played a big part in what they did. But that has little political or theoretical interest for us. What interests us here is how, from being early advocates of the "Third Camp" of the working class and the oppressed, the SWP has wound up in the nearest thing to the old Stalinist "camp" in Europe — Milosevic's. How an organisation that in 50 years has not reconciled itself to the displacement of three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs in 1948 (coupled with the displacement of over half a million Jews from Arab countries), which, 50 years on, ludicrously bases its advocacy of the destruction of Israel on the tragic fate of those Palestinian Arabs — would up in this war doing vulgar public relations work for a regime engaged in premeditated mass murder and the uprooting of over 90% of the population of Kosova!

This article will argue that the arbitrary, subjective and wildly zig-zagging politics of the SWP are rooted in, or anyway can be traced back to, the incoherences and mystifications of its bedrock "position", Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism. Not to "state capitalism" in general, but to the arbitrary, subjective, inconsistent and principle-free approach which dominates this group in every sphere and is to be found also in its bedrock theory. It has always, as a political formation, decided its politics arbitrarily, and with an opportunist eye to organisational advantage. An examination of Cliff's basic "contribution to Marxism" is the best way into this subject.⁶

I will argue that, on the level of Marxist theory, Cliff's position is an inorganic hybrid of post-Trotsky "degenerated workers' state" theory and "bureaucratic collectivism", and that on the level of theory — not of politics, theory — its implications and perspectives have most of the faults of post-Trotsky degenerated workers' state theory.

For the SWP's performance in the Balkan war, the words of Trotsky which we quoted in the last *Workers' Liberty*, will bear repeating: "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

⁶ This is part three of a series which first appeared in *Workers' Liberty* Nos. 41 & 42. The first *A funny tale agreed upon*, the second *IS: Historiography and Mythology*.

condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive."

I. The great riddle of the twentieth century

WINSTON Churchill famously said of Stalin's USSR that it was a conundrum wrapped up in a paradox inside an enigma. The one-time Yugoslavian CP leader Anton Ciliga spent many years as a prisoner of Stalin. An English version of part of his book of memoirs was entitled *The Russian Enigma* (1940). Its French original was called *Au Pays du Grande Mensonge (From the Country of the Great Lie)*. The great lie was that the USSR was a socialist society ruled by the working class. That lie was supported by a vast network of subordinate lies, misrepresentations, misunderstandings and wishful thinking. The essence of the situation was expressed like this by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936):

"The means of production belongs to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy."

Among anti-Stalinist Marxists there have been three broad groupings of description and analysis of the USSR, with different names: degenerated workers' state; state capitalism; bureaucratic collectivism. Each of the groupings contains many sub-divisions. Two of these names are extensions of bourgeois society. The third, bureaucratic collectivism, sees Stalinism as a distinct new socio-economic formation.

These names denote analyses which all claim to be Marxist. All deal with the same phenomenon. They share many elements of description and analysis. That means that discussion and argument between proponents of these categories too easily becomes an incomprehensible, arbitrary bandying of words and names. This inherent tendency to confusion is made worse by the fact that within each of the "big three" names for the USSR, many often very different and at root incompatible theories have sought a home.

Worse still, there is much overlapping of substance between some variants of supposedly distinct theories, whose proponents choose to give them different names. In part this arises out of evolutions within different tendencies of analysis that retains a name it should have shed. Thus, for example, the Workers' Fight grouping (a forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*) had a variant of degenerated and deformed workers state theory, which it saw as rooted in Trotsky's analysis and political attitude to Stalinism, that had, on the level of theory, more in common in most respects — not all — with bureaucratic collectivist and state capitalist theories: its political conclusions — attitude to Stalinist expansion, for example, as for instance in Afghanistan in 1979 — often had more in common with those positions than with the position of most workers' statist. So, on the level of theory, had Ted Grant's theory of the degenerated Bonapartist workers' state. Tony Cliff's version of state capitalism had so little in common with other state capitalist theories, and in its underlying structures had so much in common with bureaucratic collectivism, that Hal Draper described its author's name for it as "a matter of terminological taste" (See WL49). As we will see below, Cliff also shared, on the level of theory if not politics, most of the essential conceptions of post-Trotsky "orthodox" Trotskyism.

Thus the argument between labels and name-tags — degenerated workers' state, state capitalism, bureaucratic collectivism — has become an almost incomprehensible babble. How can it be made sense of, translated into accessible terms? To make sense of it you must first break the subject of Stalinism down into the elements of the basic questions and issues to which all the theories in one way or another, give, or imply, answers. Each "label" — and the many very different theories and sets of politics that are to be found within each label — is an, often arbitrary, composite of such elements and answers. The theories are permutations of the answers to the series of questions posed by Stalinism. Trotsky put it like this in 1939/40:

"Let us begin by posing the question of the nature of the Soviet state not on the abstract-sociological plane but on the plane of concrete political tasks. Let us concede for the moment that the bureaucracy is a new "class" and that the present regime in the USSR is a special system of class exploitation. What new political conclusions follow for us from these definitions? The Fourth International long ago recognized the necessity of overthrowing the bureaucracy by means of a revolutionary uprising of the toilers. Nothing else is pro-

posed or can be proposed by those who proclaim the bureaucracy to be an exploiting class. The goal to be attained by the overthrow of the bureaucracy is the reestablishment of the rule of the soviets. Nothing different can be proposed or is proposed by the leftist critics. The distribution of productive forces among the various branches of economy and generally the entire content of the plan will be drastically changed when this plan is determined by the interests not of the bureaucracy but of the producers themselves. But inasmuch as the question of overthrowing the parasitic oligarchy still remains linked with that of preserving the nationalised (state) property, we called the future revolution political. Certain of our critics want, come what may, to call the future revolution social. Let us grant this definition. What does it alter in essence? To those tasks of the revolution which we have enumerated it adds nothing whatsoever."

This approach can be broken down further.

- *Who rules? The working class? The bureaucracy for the working class? A collective state capitalist class? A "bureaucratic collectivist" class?*
- *Can the working class rule socially and economically without ruling politically, that is, without democracy?*
- *Is the bureaucracy merely "parasitic" or is it a fully formed new exploiting ruling class? Is there meaning in such a distinction?*
- *What is the place of Stalinism in history? A historical blind alley?*
- *Is USSR society progressive? Regressive?*
- *Is the USSR post-capitalist?*
- *Is the USSR in transition to socialism?*
- *What are the laws of motion of the USSR economy?*
- *Is the working class in the Stalinist totalitarian states a proletariat like that of historical capitalism?*
- *If it is state capitalism, what is the working class socialist perspective?*
- *If it is bureaucratic collectivism, what is the working-class socialist perspective?*
- *If it is progressive, what political conclusions follow?*
- *Are we for the defence of the USSR by the international working class?*
- *Are we for the expansion of the USSR?*

These are only some of the questions that were embedded in the disputes about names and labels. The whole discussion within the post-Lenin Bolshevik current, since the '20s, has been an unstable series of permutations of the varying answers to these questions. Let us examine the elements, in Trotsky himself and in those who tried to build on Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism, as did all those in the post-Trotsky Trotskyist currents, whatever label they used, and whatever permutations of the elements they made. But first some essential preparatory points.

II. 1917 and Marxist socialism

FUNDAMENTAL to Marxist socialism is the idea that socialism is not possible in backwardness. Advanced capitalism brings into existence the social and material prerequisites for socialism — the possibility of an economy which provides abundance for all and thus eliminates that scarcity for the many, to escape from which ruling classes have throughout history raised themselves above the mass of the people. This idea was common to Russian Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 they differed on whether the working class should, when the possibility arose, take state power in a backward society. Those who answered yes — Trotsky since 1905, and then, in 1917, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party — did so, not in order to deny the ABC of Marxism: socialism, the Bolsheviks too agreed, was not possible in the backward Russian conditions. In a 1922 post-script to an edition of a work of his from 1915, Trotsky wrote:

"The assertion, repeated several times in the Programme of Peace, to the effect that the proletarian revolution cannot be victoriously consummated within a national framework may perhaps seem to some readers to have been refuted by the five years' experience of our Soviet Republic. But such a conclusion would be unfounded. The fact that the workers' state has maintained itself against the entire world in a single, and moreover backward, country testifies to the colossal power of the proletariat, a power which in other more advanced, more civilised countries will truly be able to achieve mir-

acles. But having defended ourselves as a state in the political and military sense, we have not arrived at, nor even approached, socialist society. The struggle for revolutionary-state self-defence resulted in this interval in an extreme decline of productive forces, whereas socialism is conceivable only on the basis of their growth and blossoming."

The Russian workers could start; the finish would have to depend on the German, French, British and other workers in advanced countries. So would the fate of what the Russian workers had started. Abnormal circumstances — war, breakdown of the state, the preparedness of the working class and the Bolshevik Party — made it possible for the Russian proletariat to take power. But socialism could not be built: the Russian workers' revolution could not even survive unless it was the first of a chain of revolutions spreading to the advanced countries of Europe. The revolution would become international, or capitalism and the bourgeoisie would be restored in Russia.

On a certain level, the Bolsheviks after 1921, with their New Economic Policy, presided over a limited and controlled "restoration" of capitalism — under a regime in which the working class, through its Bolshevik party continued to hold political power. Under this "New Economic Policy" (NEP) in with there was a revival of the bourgeoisie and of rich, labour-exploiting farmers the Stalinist bureaucracy raised itself above society, above the working class and above the NEP small bourgeoisie.

Between 1927 and 1929 they crushed first the working class and then the renaissance bourgeoisie. They destroyed both the left wing and the right wing of the Bolshevik Party. As Trotsky in 1940 summarised what had happened, the bureaucracy "made themselves masters of the surplus product" of society.

Not only did the Stalinist counter-revolution fail to restore private property, it ruptured the entire framework of the NEP, substituting for it a command economy. With great savagery and an enormous destruction of human life, they forcibly collectivised agriculture. They industrialised at breakneck speed. They subjected the workers to savage exploitation. The labour movement was utterly destroyed. The "trade unions", no longer working class agencies for self-protection, were made into state agencies for controlling the working class. The bureaucracy extended its tentacles into every nook and cranny of the economy, brooking no competition at any level, however petty.

What, in class terms, was this system? Lenin in 1920 in the course of defending trade unions independent of the workers' state, had called it a "workers' state with bureaucratic deformations". Under Stalin, it still seemed to be rooted in the October revolution, as its rulers claimed it was. Indubitably, the working class revolution had cleared the way for it, overthrowing the old order, and establishing working class rule, which the bureaucratic Stalinist counter-revolution had, in turn, by 1930, completely destroyed and replaced by the rule of a bureaucratic "caste" or class. The key question for those who struggled to understand the USSR was: did the bureaucracy, which maintained and massively extended the property of the state it collectively "owned", "represent" a monstrously distorted working class rule ("degenerated workers' state"); did the bureaucracy collectively play the role of the bourgeoisie in history and therefore personify "capital" and, if it did, did that make the bourgeois-free USSR capitalist? Or did the bureaucracy rule over a distinctly new form of class society ("bureaucratic collectivism")?

Was there, in fact, continuity between the working-class revolution of 1917 and Stalinism? The Stalinised Communist International said there was: this was the Russian revolution triumphantly enduring and developing; its norms and practices were from now on the norms and practices of working class socialism. Old socialist terms and ideas were adapted to radically new meanings that were often the opposite of their old meanings. "Democracy", for example, came to be used as a name for fascist-like state tyranny. Workers' power was

the name given to savage bureaucratic rule over a brutally exploited working class that had less rights than the workers in Britain or France, in fact — no rights at all.

The totalitarian power of the state over society and especially over the working class came to be identified with the rule of the working class over society; prolonged totalitarian state arbitrariness against the workers and the peasants was equated with the dictatorial rule of the working class in 1919 fighting against the old "entrenched" — in fact now long extirpated — ruling class and its agents. The goal of state collectivism replaced all other considerations. To all pre-Stalinist socialists the class character of economic state collectivism was understood as being determined by which class exercised political power. It was axiomatic *collective working class power could not but be democratic*. In Stalinised "communism", these elementary programmatic ideas of working class socialism were replaced by the arbitrary ascription of a working class character to the dictatorship of a "parasitic" or exploiting minority.

The idea that for real socialism the working class has to take over the achievements of advanced capitalism, that socialism is impossible except as the historical offspring and legatee of advanced capitalism, was replaced with the idea that it was the job of socialism to develop backward parts of the world until they could catch up with and compete with advanced capitalism. This became the dominant idea of what "actually existing socialism" — as certain ex-Stalinist intellectuals, making their peace with capitalism, would put it in the

'70s — was. The idea, rooted in the most basic notion of Marxism, that socialism could not happen from backwardness without "all the old crap" reappearing, as Marx had written, was simultaneously denied by the Stalinists and proved true by the grotesque bureaucratic parodies of socialism produced by the Stalinists. The Marxian idea of socialism itself was pulped and internally disrupted in this process. It was poisoned, it is plain at the end of the twentieth century, to such an extent that the old "socialist" movement would have to die before authentic working

class socialism could be reborn.

III. Trotsky

WHERE Trotsky stood is incontrovertibly clear. The revolution in Russia would — Trotsky had argued from 1905, and after 1917 — either spread to advanced countries, or be destroyed by bourgeois counter-revolution. Until close to the end of his life, believing that Stalinist collectivised property was a horrible mutation of the October revolution, he took it as certainty that outright destruction of "the gains of the 1917 revolution" would take the form of bourgeois restoration.

The counter-revolution that destroyed the power of the workers was not a bourgeois counter-revolution, but the rise to power of a type of collectivist ruling class which maintained state — their state — property. Trotsky and his co-thinkers such as Rakovsky chronicled the bureaucratic counter-revolution and stage by stage elaborated a working class programme of action against it. From 1933 Trotsky advocated what he would call after 1936, a new working class revolution against the bureaucracy. He called that revolution a "political revolution", because it would maintain state property; but the measures he advocated — the working class seizure of power, smashing the bureaucratic state and replacing it with a democratic Soviet (Council) working class state, the seizure of the economy out of the hands of the bureaucracy — amounted to a full social revolution. The term "political revolution" has been the source of much mystification.

Political power — bureaucratic or working class — was seen as central in an economy that was statified and politically controlled and not market regulated. For Trotsky, it was an "interregnum economy", degenerating from the worker's power of the revolution, but not yet overthrown by bourgeois forces. It retained the potential of being regenerated by way of a new working class "political revolution". It was not, in Trotsky's view — and this is central — a degenerated workers' state in stable equilibrium, still less what it became for post-Trotsky workers'

statists, a “degenerated workers’ state” in irreversible “transition to socialism” — but a continually degenerating workers’ state. It could not survive or go on degenerating indefinitely. If it achieved stability, as for many decades it did, then a set of new conclusions would be indicated.

Part also of this complex of ideas was the refusal to designate the ruling bureaucracy a ruling class. Trotsky had chronicled and anatomised this bureaucratic ruling group as it developed. Far from his refusal to call it a ruling class expressing softness towards it, or the idea that it “wasn’t so bad”, Trotsky compared it, in 1938, unfavourably with (pre-Holocaust) Nazism, from which its political rule differed, he said, only in its “more unbridled savagery”.

In what, essentially, did the degenerated workers’ state character of the USSR consist for Trotsky? His thinking evolved through many stages in the 1930s and in his writings one finds many qualifications, but, irreducibly, the survival and extension of the fully nationalised economy was decisive. For Trotsky this could not have come into being without the 1917 revolution. His approach was historical, tracing the evolution and degeneration step by step. The qualitative break, he thought, would come either with the rupturing of the collectivist forms rooted in the revolution and the restoration of capitalism; or, alternatively, with the rupturing of the bureaucracy’s political power by the working class, which would then go on to organise a radically different collectivist economy. Not theoretical extrapolation, but the test of war, he would come to say, had to pronounce this system more than an ephemeral freak of history.

That the bureaucracy had all the negative features of the worst ruling class in history was not disputed. For Trotsky, the bureaucracy was a parasitic growth on the continuously degenerating forms of collectivised economy rooted in the 1917 revolution.

Where, for Trotsky, did the USSR stand in the Marxist notion of the historic sequence of class societies? In the west that had been a dialectical progression from ancient slave society, to feudalism, to capitalism. After advanced capitalism, Marxists believed, would come socialism. The USSR was a backward, though developing, annex to world capitalism, under threat of engulfment by the more advanced capitalist world, either by way of military destruction or by the influx of cheaper goods produced by the vastly more productive system of advanced European capitalism, or a combination of both. The idea of the Stalinist state as “socialism” encroaching from the “periphery to the centre”, in competition with advanced capitalism, Trotsky dismissed in its original Stalinist form — the idea of building “socialism in one country” — as a foolish totalitarian variant of utopian socialism, fundamentally at odds with both the root ideas of Marxism and the guiding idea of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. He would have accused those of his comrades who, later, propounded the idea that the Stalinist state was “in transition to socialism” of endorsing “socialism in one country”.

For Trotsky the USSR’s economic forms — collectivised economy and planning, albeit bureaucratic planning — remained post-capitalist, the bureaucratically distorted product of the 1917 revolution, a promissory note for the post-capitalist organisation of society which the Russian working class, in partnership with the workers of the advanced capitalist countries, could develop as a democratically planned economy. Because of backwardness, however, those forms were filled with an antagonistic content. In substance, despite the forms of property and his way of seeing them, the USSR for Trotsky was *not post-capitalist* in the context of and in relation to world capitalism, *and could not be*; the very basics of Marxist socialism, of socialism’s necessary relationship to capitalism in history, ruled it out.

At the radical heart of this contradictory socio-economic formation, stood the ineradicable antagonism of the bureaucracy with the people, and, in the first place, the workers. Because of this contradiction, planning was vitiated. Democracy, without which rational planning was impossible, was incompatible with bureaucratic rule. Thus the terroristic bureaucrats ruled in the dark by way of a system of planning deprived of popular democratic social monitoring and workers’ self-rule. In the early days of untrammelled bureaucratic rule, the Stalinist terror functioned as a crude substitute instrument of control and of monitoring.

IV. Trotsky’s picture of the USSR

TROTSKY was distinguished in the early 1930s by outright partisanship for the Stalinist regime in foreign policy, upholding one-party rule, and blazing 1920-vintage scorn at its Social Demo-

cratic critics. Trotsky’s place in the very broad spectrum of non-Stalinist socialism changed steadily through the 1930s and the change is indicative of his evolution.

In 1936 in *The Revolution Betrayed* he came to Karl Kautsky’s position in his formulation quoted above (the state owned the economy, but bureaucracy owns the state). Trotsky dotted the outlines of a plain picture, but refused “yet” to draw clear lines through the outlined picture. By the mid-1930s, the implacable and unrepentant defender of the USSR regime against Social Democratic and vulgar-democratic critics was scornfully castigating the pro-Stalinist Bauerite social democrats and their ex-Communist International alter ego, the “Brandlerite” Right Communists, for being apologists and defence lawyers for Stalin and Stalinism — and enemies of the suppressed workers of the USSR. Trotsky was essentially consistent.

Paradoxical though it seems, everything in Trotsky’s evolution here was self-consistent.

Two excerpts from concrete descriptions of USSR society by Trotsky will show what Trotsky saw as the reality of the degenerated workers’ state. The first is from April 1933 (*The Theory of Degeneration and the Degeneration of Theory*). In USSR history the period was an interregnum between the convulsions of forced collectivisation and the beginning of *The Great Terror* (December 1934). He links the state with a discussion of inflation and money: like the state, money has a necessary social function. It is a measure of value and means of exchange. Like the state, its role will diminish with social development. It too will finally wither away.

Trotsky examines the nature of Stalinist society from two sides: the state and the economy. His picture does not at all match with the historical and theoretical framework that he insists on. The society he describes is unmistakably a new form of class society, neither capitalism nor socialism, or in transition to socialism. It is what will, at the end of the ’30s, be called bureaucratic collectivism.

“The soviets have lost the last remnants of independent significance and have ceased being soviets. The party does not exist... the trade unions are completely crushed... under the cover of the struggle with the right deviation.

“The state not only does not wither away... but... becomes ever more openly the instrument of bureaucratic coercion... The apparatus of the trade unions themselves has become the weapon of an ever-growing pressure on the workers”.

Referring to the “regime of terror against the party and the proletariat”, Trotsky asks: “Where does such a terrible, monstrous, unbearable exercise of the political regime come from?”. He finally answers: “The intensification of repression is necessary for the defence of the privileged positions of the bureaucracy”.

Trotsky describes the reality of bureaucratic arbitrariness and inflation. “Money regulated by administrative prices fixed for goods loses its ability to regulate plans. In this field as in others, ‘socialism’ for the bureaucracy consists of freeing its will from any control: party, Soviet, trade union or money... Economic planning frees itself from value control as bureaucratic fancy frees itself from political control. The rejection of ‘objective causes’... represents the ‘theoretical’ ravings of bureaucratic subjectivism... The Soviet economy today is neither a monetary nor a planned one. It is an almost purely bureaucratic economy. To support unreliable and disproportionate tempos, a further intensification of pressure on the proletariat became imperative. Industry, freed from the material control of the producer, took on a supersocial, that is, bureaucratic, character. As a result it lost the ability to satisfy human wants even to the degree to which it had been accomplished by the less-developed capitalist industry...”

“From this and from this alone... flows the necessity for the introduction of coercion into all cells of economic life (strengthening of the power of [factory] managers, laws against absentees, death penalty for spoliation of collective-farm property by its members, war measures in sowing campaigns and harvest collections... the [internal] passport system, political departments in the villages, etc. etc.)... The dictatorship of the proletariat withers away in the form of bureaucratic inflation, that is, in the extreme swelling of coercion, persecutions, and

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Remaking socialism: part 2

By Boris Souvarine

In WL55 we printed the first part of Souvarine's history of the Communist International in which he outlined the collapse of the Second International when the bulk of its leaders backed their "own" governments in the First World War. Here he describes how a new International was shaped out of opposition to that war. Souvarine was a founding member of the French Communist Party.

THE Swiss and Italian socialist parties multiplied attempts to re-establish contact between international socialists, and determine a basis of common action against the war. In September 1914, the conference of Lugano confided to the Swiss party the task of re-establishing relations between the parties which were formerly linked in brotherhood, but who had now become belligerents or neutrals. Similar efforts were attempted by Troelstra. The Socialist Party of America suggested the reunion of a Congress at Washington undertaking at the same time its organisation and its cost. These prospects failed in consequence of the hostility of the French and Belgian parties.

The Swiss party attempted to assemble at Zurich the socialists of neutral countries. This resulted in another failure. At the same time the Italian Party sent Morgari to France, charged with the mission to request the International Socialist Bureau to meet. The 19 April 1915, Morgari had, at the headquarters of the Socialist Party in Paris, an interview with Vandervelde, the President of the ISB, and with the leaders of the party. He found himself up against the systematic refusal of the French and Belgium Socialist-patriots. Renaudel declared that the International was the hostage for right and justice (sic). And in reply to Morgari, who stated that, in spite of opposition, the socialists who were faithful to socialism would find means of meeting, Vandervelde said, "We will prevent it."

It was thus apparent that all attempts to reconstitute the International from the elements which had betrayed it would be useless and sterile.

All that could be done was to call together the parties and the fractions which had remained socialist and internationalist. On 15 May 1915, the congress of Bologna decided to convoke an international conference in spite of the hostility of the official parties. On 11 June, a preliminary session took place at Berne, at which the nature and the object of the conference were established: it was agreed that this initiative on the part of the Italian and the Swiss parties was not taken with the intention of forming a new International. At this epoch only Lenin and the Bolsheviks had sufficient insight to discern the necessity of founding a third international. But their influence was not yet felt. Their help, however, was precious in the organisation of the conference.

From the 6 to 8 September the Conference was held at Zimmerwald which was the first manifestation of the life of the renascent international and which uttered the great call for peace. A few days before the meeting, Morgari had made a supreme attempt among French socialists to obtain their participation in the conference, or at least that they should send a delegate without mandate or vote who would exercise, as Morgari put it, the duties of "an honest spy", at the same time assuring them that only German "minority socialists" would be present. He only met with a fresh refusal, including that of Pressemane.

The conference, at which only Bourderon and Merrheim represented French socialism and syndicalism, issued a manifesto denouncing imperialism as the cause of the war, disclosed the real

objects of the war on the part of the two capitalist coalitions (thefts of territory, grabbing of oil and mineral wealth, the conquest of markets and of ports, pillage and spoliation, the subjection of other races to bourgeois oligarchies) all this hypocritically baptised under the name of national defence; and called upon the proletarians of all countries to take united action on the basis of the class struggle, in order to impose peace.

The "majority socialists" of France and of Germany attacked the Zimmerwaldians with hatred and fury, covered them with insults and sarcasms, after first having attempted a conspiracy of silence. But the international and pacifist idea had made a start, and nothing could stop it. Not all the accumulated blame heaped upon it could prevent the awakening of the proletariat.

From 24 to 30 April 1916, a second Zimmerwaldian conference was held at Kienthal. Three French deputies, Brizon, Blanc, and Rafin Dugens, represented French socialism, passports having been refused to militant organised workers. The Kienthal Conference confirmed and solidified the Zimmerwaldian resolutions. It insisted on the fact that real peace could only come about as a consequence of socialism, and invited the proletariat to fight resolutely against the capitalist regime. But, while attacking the International Socialist Bureau, it did not go as far as to announce the necessity of breaking with it. At the same time as future action was decided on, a divergence of views made itself felt; among the Zimmerwaldians two tendencies appeared.

The left, whose interpreter was Lenin, looked upon the break up of the socialist-patriots as inevitable, and foresaw the necessity of founding the Third International.

The right held that joint action was still possible with repentant traitors.

The left was revolutionary. The right was merely pacifist. Events have irrefutably proved that the left were right in the position they took up: it was revolutions which ended the war, and it is quite clear that the world war will break out again if world revolution does not forestall it.

Although the left was in a minority at Kienthal it forced its views upon the third Zimmerwaldian Conference, which met at Stockholm in 1917. The resolution which was then passed called upon the workers of the world to join in the permanent struggle for the liberation of humanity. Two months later, the circumstances favouring, and their will inciting, the Bolsheviks, forming the largest element of the Zimmerwaldian left, passed from theory to practice, and undertook the realisation of their programme.

The Bolshevik revolution has helped us to interpret socialist parties and men. The war had been the touchstone of their GOOD WILL; the revolution was the touchstone of their WILL. The formal organisation of the Third International — it being practically in existence — is an inevitable consequence of this revolutionary WILL.

By taking the initiative of organising at Moscow the First Congress of the Third International, with the assent and the active help of the members of the commission elected by the Zimmerwaldian conferences, the Bolshevik Party accomplished a necessary task in agreement with all those international socialists who believe in the necessity of a proletarian revolution and who desire it.

What does it matter that men who subscribed to the action taken at Zimmerwald and at Kienthal are today opposed to the Third International, in which they fail to recognise the logical consequences of the ideas which they expressed in the past? At a given moment they did reflect the spirit of the advanced guard of socialism, others translate today its revolutionary and liberating

aspirations; men pass away, ideas remain, become clarified, and find new interpreters.

On 2 March 1919, at Moscow, the Congress of the Communist Parties (named thus to distinguish them from the reformist socialists) decided to constitute themselves into the Third International, and founded the "Communist International", the official name of this new organisation.

This Congress further decided:

That the definite constitution of the Communist International would be the work of the next Congress (the present formation being only provisional).

That the direction of the CI is confided to an Executive Committee composed of a representative of each affiliated party.

That the parties adhering to the CI before the Second Congress takes place have a right to a seat on the Executive Committee. Thus the First Congress of the Communist International was careful not to impose too rigid conditions on the parties whose affiliations they invited, and reserved the definite foundation of the Third International for this purpose, with the co-operation of all the adherent groups.

The Communist International, its programme and forces

WE do not presume to give a complete exposition of, or to study deeply, the problem of the International, but only to emphasise its essential points, and rapidly to translate in concise form the ideas proclaimed by the Communist International. These are defined with vigour and clearness in the manifesto and in the resolutions of the First Congress.

The CI declares that the hour of the "final struggle" between proletariat and bourgeoisie, as expressed by the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, has arrived.

It assigns to us the following task: "To gather up the revolutionary experience of the working classes, to rid the movement of the unhealthy blend of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unite the forces of all the truly revolutionary parties of the world proletarians, and thus to pave the way for and to hasten the Communist revolution all over the world."

It imputes the responsibility for the war to the capitalist regime and to the conscious will of the governing classes of Russia, Germany, Austria, England, France, Italy, and the United States, a responsibility which is amply proved by the Russian diplomatic archives.

The CI sees in the consequences of the war surprising revelations of the contradictions of the capitalist regime, the condemnation, without appeal, of the theory denoting "the progressive steps of capitalism towards socialism", upheld by the reformists. These latter contested the Marxist theory of the "pauperisation of the masses" as being the provocative cause of revolution; war amply demonstrates this pauperisation, this material impoverishment to which physiological poverty must be added.

Besides this, the state ownership of the economic life inevitably accomplishes its ends. It remains to be seen who will be master of state-owned production, the bourgeois or the proletarian state. If the working class does not wish to pay tribute to the capitalist clique, it must "seize hold of economic life, even though it be disorganised and destroyed, in order to ensure its being rebuilt on a socialist basis".

In order to "shorten the time of crisis through which we are passing" we must establish, "the dictatorship of the proletariat which does not look backward, nor does it take count of hereditary privilege or right of property, which, contemplating solely the salvation of the starving masses, mobilises to that end by every means in its power, decrees the necessity of work for each individual, institutes discipline as an urgent need of the workers, in order

not only to heal in a few years the horrible wounds made by the war, but finally to raise humanity to great and undreamed of heights."

The Communist International repudiates as a snare so-called bourgeois "democracy". Facts prove that, in all fundamental questions on which the destiny of man depends, it is a financial oligarchy which rules, by virtue of, "the weapons of falsehood, demagoguery, persecution, calumny, corruption and terror, which centuries of slavery have placed at their disposal and which the privileges of capitalist technique have multiplied."

Bourgeois democracy has but one aim — to disarm the exploited by giving them the illusion that they dispose of legal methods by which they can impose their claims.

The Communist parties should endeavour to create that proletarian democracy which would abolish classes in abolishing economic privileges; their political expression must be soviets, that is to say Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, a new type of proletarian organisation which will be self-governing. These soviets represent political power; the organisations of industry and of production being vested in professional syndicates that are in direct touch with the technical organs of power of the soviets. Such are the principal outlines of the Communist International defined in detail by the voted resolutions.

In short, these are the terms of the Manifesto itself:

"If the war of 1870 dealt a blow to the First International by the revelation that behind its revolutionary and social programme there was no organised force of the masses, the war of 1914 has killed the Second International by demonstrating that over and above the powerful administration of the workers were parties subservient to bourgeois control.

"If the First International foresaw and prepared the way for approaching developments, if the Second International collected and organised the proletarian millions, the Third International is the International of the action of the masses and of revolutionary realisation."

The principles, the programme and the appeals of the Communist International have been systematically hidden from the masses by bourgeois speakers and their press and by social opportunists.

In France the facts are still unknown to the masses, and the prominence of the opportunists is due to this ignorance. But where facts were known and advertised the socialist workers' organisations joined the Third International, which gathered together the elite of the proletariat of the world.

In the space of a few months, in spite of obstacles opposed to the delivery of the message, in spite of the difficulties placed in the way of its propagandists, the Third International is grouping the whole of the organisations of the revolutionary proletariat. And the rallying of those who are still waiting to affiliate is only delayed because the masses are deceived by their leaders.

In France, the active forces of the workers' syndicates, and of the Socialist Party, are already affiliated to the Third International, and these forces grow daily in numbers. We have reason to believe that the hour is not far distant when their influence will pervade the whole organisation.

"We recognise one another," said the Communists assembled at Moscow, "as the continuators of the direct efforts, and of the heroic martyrdoms accepted by a long series of revolutionary generations, from Babeuf down to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg." May those workers and socialists who recognise one another as the continuators of the work undertaken at the commencement of the last century by the first militant Communists march under the banner of the Communist International, and recognise as their rallying point the purple standard on which shine the sickle and the hammer crossed, the emblem of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia.

Secret diplomacy in wartime

By Raymond Challinor

IN his well-known work *History of the Second World War*, the distinguished military authority Captain Liddell Hart wrote, on page 510: "In June 1943, Molotov met Ribbentrop at Kirovgrad, which was then within the German lines, for a discussion about the possibilities of ending the war. According to German officers who attended as technical advisers, Ribbentrop proposed as a condition of peace that Russia's future frontier should run along the Dneiper, while Molotov would not consider anything less than the restoration of her original frontier." On this disagreement — basically, a Kremlin insistence of a return to the old imperialist frontiers of Tsarism — the negotiations foundered. For months the Eastern Front had been quiescent. Once the talks failed, the battle of Kursk, the biggest tank battle of all time, ensued.

But the background to Molotov-Ribbentrop discussions needs analysing. The early Nazi dreams of quick victory had vanished on the vast Russian steppes. Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad had not been captured. On the Volga, the entire German 6th army — the victors over the French and British troops in 1940 — had been either killed or captured. A commitment of resources, both of men and materials, much more than Hitler ever envisaged now appeared essential. Yet, the same was true of the Soviet Union. Its losses had been immense, the sufferings of its peoples indescribable. Was there no way of ending the agony?

To both sides, two salient facts stood out. Such was the destruction, whichever ultimately emerged as the victor, would have won only a pyrrhic victory. The fruits would have been obliterated in the fighting. Far from being the conquering hero, strutting about with pride, the winner would lie prostrate on the ground, groaning and nursing its wounds, incapable of asserting itself as a world power. Many American and British politicians cherished this prospect, though few would be as indiscreet as Harry Truman. The *New York Times* of 24 July 1941 reported him as saying: "If we see that Germany is winning the war, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and in that way kill as many as possible."

The real winner, of course, would be neither the Third Reich nor the Soviet Union but the United States. Keeping out of the murderous mayhem, the USA had waxed stronger while other countries grew weaker.

The spectre of Pax Americana may well have prompted the Kirovgrad negotiations. Yet there could also be other considerations. May not Hitler have felt like a world boxing champion, perhaps able to defeat one contender to his title but definitely not two, fighting him together? Victory only became possible if he reached an agreement with one or other of his enemies — those in the East or those in the West. Could not another possible explanation have been that Ribbentrop entered negotiations not to secure peace but merely to sow discord between the Allies? And might Stalin not have thought, if doubts about the Soviet Union's determination to continue the fight disturbed the West, that the United States and Britain would seek, as an encouragement, to bolster up Russia's resolve to continue to resist, with extra aid — perhaps more military equipment or, better still, a Second Front? Hidden threats and blackmail are not unknown in imperialist wars.

To the best of my knowledge, the only detailed examination of the Russo-German peace moves was Professor H. W. Koch's article which appeared in the *Journal of Contemporary History* in July 1975. This suggests that the talks extended over three years, embracing numerous people on both sides. Interestingly, some of



Stalin and von Ribbentrop look on as Molotov signs the non-aggression pact.

these who participated had been involved in the earlier negotiations that led to the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact of August 1939. A key figure among these was Dr Peter Eleist, of the German Foreign Office. He mentions the 1943 talks as well as the 1939 pact in his book *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin* (Bonn, 1950).

Diplomatic manoeuvring undoubtedly had political consequences. A German Communist Party refugee, Wolfgang Leonhard, worked in Moscow during the Second World War. He was employed on a German language publication intended to foster resistance to Nazism. In his memoirs, *Child of the Revolution*, he describes how a League of German Officers was formed in wartime Moscow. General von Seydlitz became its president. Then he goes on to say how *Free Germany*, the journal for which he worked, was suddenly presented with a leading article entitled "Armistice — the Need of the Hour": "it was not primarily addressed to those generals and other officers who had taken an attitude in opposition to Hitler; on the contrary, it was virtually an offer of armistice, however indirectly made, to the officials of Hitler's government" (pp.256-7).

At the last moment, the content of this article was changed. The call for an armistice was deleted. Nevertheless, there is no doubt, as the highest possible authority attests, that attempts to secure at least a limited peace continued. Significantly, Stalin stated that many overtures for peace had come from Germany. It desired peace with the Soviet Union so it could defeat the West. Alternatively, he said, it desired peace with the West so that it could destroy Russia: "The Germans would like to obtain peace with Britain and USA on the condition that the latter would break with the Soviet Union; or, on the contrary, that they would like to obtain peace with the Soviet Union on the condition that it broke with the USA and Britain."

This quote from Stalin appeared on the cover of a pamphlet published by *Russia Today*, a British Communist Party front organisation. The pamphlet, written by George Audit, was entitled *The Polish Conspiracy: Full Story of the Polish-Goebbels Plot to Save Hitler, April 11-April 30 1943*. It dealt with the Katyn massacre of 10,000 Polish army officers. While this atrocity had been perpetrated by the Red Army, the Russian Foreign Office refused to acknowledge the fact, arguing it was a lie manufactured by the Nazi propaganda machine. The Kremlin made it clear Russia would

regard it as a distinctly unfriendly act for Britain to accept the German version of Katyn. By placing Stalin's quotation on the front cover at a time when the Molotov-Ribbentrop peace negotiations were underway, the pamphlet uttered a none-too-subtle hint about the possible dire consequences of truthfulness.

Bowing to pressure, the British government failed to denounce the Soviet crime any more than the Russian press denounced the murderous and savage crimes perpetrated by General von Seydlitz and his fellow Nazi officers in the course of their invasion of Russia. Far from calling for their prosecution as war criminals, the British continued as obedient tools of the Kremlin bosses and their propaganda machine. Truth remains the first casualty of war.

Suppression of information remains another means of deception. Undoubtedly, while the general public of all the belligerents remained ignorant, the German-Russian negotiations were widely known about among the top Allied personnel outside the British government. Robert Bruce-Lockhart, an individual prominent in British intelligence operations against the Soviets for almost 30 years, refers to them in volume two of his diaries, published by MacMillan. His entry for 12 July 1942 reports a conversation with Dr Edvard Benes, the Czechoslovakian prime minister. He reported that the Soviet Union's grave military position, the fact that the Red Army appeared close to collapse, had compelled Moscow to make peace overtures. As the fortunes of war later changed to the disadvantage of the Nazis, pressures for peace, culminating in the Kirovgrad negotiations, acquired a greater urgency for Berlin.

Though deprived of the most vital facts, British socialist journals, such as the *New Leader*, *Left* and, to a lesser extent, *Tribune*, could still discern the general drift of events and draw tentative political conclusions from them. The dismal consensus reached was that the Soviet Union did not strive for a socialist or even mildly progressive peace; it wanted to see the maintenance of the old capitalist order. In October 1943, *Left* pointed out that *Freies Deutschland*, organ of the Free German Committee, published from Moscow, flew a German flag on its masthead: not the red banner of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, nor the black, red and gold flag of the Weimar Republic; no — the red, white and black of Imperial Germany, the beloved symbol of Alfred Hugenberg, the Stahlheim, the Reichswahr and the Junkers!

This indicated that all the Allies wanted was a few cosmetic changes, not a root-and-branch destruction of Nazi society. Enfolded in Italy, as Allied soldiers laboriously fought their way up the mountains of the Apennines, were the same principles that the Allies intended to apply to Germany as well as Italy. Italian businessmen, the loyal backers of Mussolini for 20 years, retained their

power and influence, as did the senile King Victor Emmanuel, who had welcomed Il Duce to power in 1922. General Badoglio, responsible for gassing the civilian population in the 1935 Italian invasion of Abyssinia, was selected as the Allies' choice to head the new government in Rome.

In its quest for a German equivalent for Badoglio, it may be the Churchill government hoped the Wehrmacht might be beguiled by the pampering of captured top-ranking German officers. The *Daily Herald* (18 May 1943) reported captured German generals had been installed in a beautiful English country house. They were able to stroler freely around its 1,000 acres. "Apart from the fact that they will be confined to the mansion and its garden, the German generals will have a normal life," the newspaper declared.

WHETHER or not any of these German generals were involved in the peace talks of 1944, which resulted in an unnamed Nazi army officer being given free passage from Berlin to London, remains unclear. His visit was reported in the British press, the *New Leader*, as well as historically in F. L. Carstein's interesting book *The German Workers Against the Nazis* (Scolar Press, London, 1995). However, if this German guest did visit his captive colleagues, he would have seen from their five-star treatment Britain harboured no animosity or ill-will to Nazi generals. His main purpose, however, appears to have been to investigate if a basis for ending the war existed. His visit was mentioned in British newspapers of the time as well as being in the German archives.

Yet, undoubtedly, after this episode, at various levels, surreptitious contacts continued. In his memoirs, *Justice not Vengeance* (p.50), Simon Wiesenthal mentions a secret meeting that occurred in 1944 when German industrialists sought to reach an accommodation with the Allies. Among those present were the coal baron Emil Kirdorf, the steel magnate Fritz Thyssen, Georg von Schitzler of IG Farben, Gustav Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach, and the Cologne banker Kurt von Schroeder. All of them, having been the first to turn to Hitler in 1933, were now also among the first to turn away from him. Even if Nazism were to survive — which all of those at the conference hoped — it would be Nazism without Hitler.

Similarly, in roughly the same period, Allen Dulles, the US intelligence chief located in Zürich, recounts the numerous frantic efforts of the Italian business community to reach agreement with the Americans. The British even appointed senior officers, with experience in the City of London, to liaise with Italian capitalists once Sicily had fallen.

One of the most intriguing had been that established with General Reinhard Gehlen, head of Wehrmacht intelligence on the

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Russian front. In his *Memoirs* (p.119) he states that MI6 sent him a copy of the document appraising him of its secret assessment of the situation on the Eastern Front. It was a confidential memorandum that had gone to Churchill in February 1945. It might seem an extraordinary move to provide an enemy with information which could be of value in the prosecution of the conflict. Gehlen gives the following explanation: "It is the duty of every sophisticated intelligence service to keep open a channel of communication with the enemy's intelligence service."

It remains a matter of speculation what Gehlen gave MI6 in return for the Churchill document. With his deep knowledge of developments inside the Soviet Union, he would be aware of the wild disorder, the mass opposition that existed to the re-imposition of Russian rule in the Baltic States and the Ukraine. He would be in a position to put the Allies in touch with valuable contacts. Extensive resistance movements existed that had no prospect of survival unless they received resources from elsewhere. Apparently these were supplied by London once Hitler had been eliminated.

FOR a long time, successive British governments sought to keep quiet about their private efforts to undermine the Soviet Union. A young British conscript, subsequently an Oxford undergraduate, wrote about his own role in these cloak-and-dagger operations in an Oxford University student magazine, *Isis*, and was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act. Soon afterward this form of subversion came to an abrupt stop. Soviet agents had penetrated the organisation and, as Tom Bower describes in his book *The Red Flag*, it was destroyed completely.

Gehlen merely remained a representative of a political trend, an example of an influential section of the Nazi leadership who sought a new orientation once it accepted downfall of the Third Reich. These political waifs and strays now sought to sell themselves, for as much as possible, to the West. For the Anglo-American alliance, they had much of value to offer. Their personnel in key positions helped to man vital German state posts. They also provided the official screen behind which German industrialists, men who had financed the Nazis, could assume new democratic robes.

Of course, this was only one aspect of the drama. The Allied governments understood the ruling classes, if they were to survive, needed a new image. This led to the manufacture, mysteriously at the same time, of Christian Democratic parties encompassing the whole of Western Europe. An insignificant scribe like Pietro de Gasperi, one of 800 employed in the Vatican, suddenly found himself catapulted into being the Christian Democratic Prime Minister of Italy.

Yet, still there remained the unpleasant task of controlling the unruly multitude. The angry mass of the workers wanted to create a new society. They needed to be persuaded to forego such romantic conceptions. Nevertheless some awkward workers stayed unconvinced. Other kinds of brutal medicine remained necessary. Both in Germany and Italy the police stayed unpurged and unaltered: basically the Allies kept Hitler's and Mussolini's repressive apparatus in place.

In January 1946 Ignazio Silone visited London as a honoured guest of the Labour Party. He pleaded in vain with the Attlee government, then one of the powers involved in the military occupation, to stop the persecution of the Italian left. Sixty thousand resistance fighters had had their homes blown up by armed fascist gangs, aided by the same police who had served Mussolini. Naturally, the Labour government did not respond. It equally remained unmoved by the Yugoslav request for the return Ante Pavelic. The Yugoslavs even gave the number of the street in Innsbruck, part of the British occupation zone, where he was hiding. Yet this monster, the head of the hated Croatian Ustashe, who kept by his office desk a wastepaper basket full of Serbian eyeballs, never had to stand trial as a war criminal.

Just as scientists like Verner von Braun were scooped up by the Allies because of their specialised knowledge, there must be the suspicion that the likes of Pavelic were protected because they, too, had specialised knowledge. Had, in the immediate post-war period, the Western allies been confronted by a workers' revolution or a conflict with the Soviet Union, then their expertise in mass murder would have come in useful.

The above consideration of the Second World War, as well as the analysis contained in my short book *The Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, leads me to draw certain general conclusions:

First, that, if war is a continuation of politics by other means, then it behoves the rulers not to continue the conflict a moment longer than necessary. To fight once one's objectives could be achieved, and therefore to cause needless destruction, would be an act of senseless vandalism.

Second, that war is fought, to put it in Hegelian terms, to achieve its dialectical opposite: one fights war to establish peace. Conflict arises because the protagonists have clashing conceptions of the peace they want to establish.

Third, that in this process of trying to re-establish normal politics, neutral countries play a vital part. It is here that friend meets foe. In particular businessmen and journalists on opposing sides can chat, perhaps have a convivial meal together, where views can be swapped. Their observations could then be passed back to their respective embassies.

War results not from the evil of this or that individual or country. It results from the developments of world capitalism. While there are periods of harmonious growth, where the expansion of one does not harm another, yet there are also periods where the struggle for scarce nourishing profit pits one against the other. It becomes the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest. Individual financiers and gigantic corporations take their conflict from the market place to the battlefield. Whichever side wins in war, the workers are the losers — they fall at the front whoever profits rise.

Bastilles

The Bastille, long the prime symbol of monarchical tyranny, fell on 14 July 1789, at the beginning of the French Revolution. The people of Paris then dismantled the prison, stone by stone, until there was nothing left of it.



The Berlin Wall

Two hundred years on from the day
They levelled down the wall
Of the glowering, empty, grim Bastille,
There comes to us by long relay
This plainest truth of all:
The class which lives by what it steals,
Yet rules Elysée, Bank and Dail
Proves Tyranny does not depend upon a prison wall.

The bourgeoisie soon learned to kill
New Freedom in its caul:
The monied Tyrants rule today,
Class law, recast, enslaves us still,
It did not die or fall;
And Liberty's fight goes on, I say,
It ceases not at all:
And Freedom won is more, much more, than the absence of a wall.

Sean Matgamna

Women in the Irish nationalist movement 1900-1916

By Janine Booth

Constance Markievicz and the other women who fought in the Easter Rising struggled to be accepted on equal terms by the Irish labour movement and among nationalists. Their experience holds many lessons for today's socialists and feminists.

ENGLISH rule in Ireland was established in the early 17th century. A feature of this rule soon became the persecution of the native Catholic population. A Catholic revolt in 1641 was followed eight years later by Cromwell's re-conquest of Ireland, in which Catholics were forcefully driven off their land. This was further reinforced in 1695, when penal laws began to be introduced to strengthen Protestant rule.

The first uprising which aimed to establish an Irish republic took place in 1798, uniting Catholics with some Protestants under the banner of the United Irishmen. This was followed two years later by the union of Ireland with Britain under direct rule from a single Parliament, at Westminster.

The famine of 1845-49 saw millions of Irish people starve to death, or leave the country to escape starvation. Thirty years later, a "land war" raged between tenants and farmers¹. The Irish National Land League, which fought for the rights of the tenants and against evictions had, by the end of the 1870s, 200,000 members organised in 1,000 branches².

In the 1890s, a movement began to revitalise Gaelic culture. In 1893, Douglas Hyde founded the Gaelic League³. With organisations such as the Celtic Literary Society and the Irish National League both barring women from membership — Maud Gonne applied to join both and was refused⁴ — the Gaelic League was the first nationalist society to accept women as members on the same terms as men⁵.

In 1900, Maud Gonne set up Inghinidhe (or Inine) na hEireann (meaning "the daughters of Erin"). The motivation for the group's establishment can be seen in Maud Gonne's description of the first meeting as "a meeting of all the girls who, like myself, resented being excluded, as women, from national organisations"⁶. The organisation grew rapidly, establishing branches in Limerick (1901) and Cork (1902)⁷.

Maud Gonne was the daughter of a British Army officer who had been involved in the Irish National Land League in the 1880s, believing that "the Irish masses would rally around the cause of national freedom only if they believed it would guarantee them permanent possession of the farms they tilled"⁸. She became convinced of the importance of mobilising women into the struggle for Irish independence, since "without the participation of her women, Mother Ireland was going into battle with one arm tied behind her back"⁹.

It was a meeting of Inine na hEireann which planned the publication of a newspaper specifically aimed at women. *Bean na hEireann* (meaning "women of Ireland"), the first women's news-

paper in Ireland, was launched in November 1908. With Helena Moloney as editor, the paper's expressed aim was "to be a women's paper, advocating militancy, Irish separatism and feminism"¹⁰.

1908 also saw the launch of the Irish Women's Franchise League, set up by Hanna and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington to campaign in Ireland for women's suffrage. In 1912 it began publication of the *Irish Citizen*, a suffrage weekly. Until, and indeed after, the appearance of the *Irish Citizen*, suffragist women were regular contributors to the columns of *Bean na hEireann*.

Bean na hEireann provided a forum for debate between various of the newly emerging women's groups. Writers put forward arguments over priorities for Irish women: which was more important, national independence or winning the vote for women?

Suffragists felt that women should not simply champion the cause of Irish independence if in an independent Ireland they remained disenfranchised second-class citizens, "mere camp-followers and parasites of public life"¹². Conversely, nationalist women believed that women's suffrage whilst Ireland remained under British rule would not liberate Irish women, but would simply provide women with a say in a parliament whose legitimacy they did not recognise. Republican women appealed to supporters of women's suffrage to join their struggle against British rule:

"Hitch your wagon to a star. Do not work for the right to share in the government of that nation that holds Ireland enslaved, but work to procure for our sex the rights of free citizenship in an independent Ireland."¹³

For some republican women, it was also becoming clearer that there were other issues besides votes for women and freedom from British rule, in particular the appalling conditions of poverty endured by the Irish majority. It was perhaps not convincing that this could be entirely blamed on British rule. By 1910, Constance Markievicz was beginning to address these questions, and to become more attracted to socialism:

"What was the best way to tackle the problems of huge unemployment, exhausted workers, wages at starvation level and wretched accommodation? Nationalism alone might not be the answer, since in England the same conditions existed although to a much lesser extent."¹⁴

The appeal of socialism and of the labour movement for Irish women has to be seen in the light of the attitudes of labour movement leaders to questions of women's liberation, in comparison with other sections of the nationalist movement.

The Irish — or Home Rule — Party had been reunited in 1900 after a split precipitated by allegations of adultery against its leader Charles Stuart Parnell¹⁵. A Party of Irish members of the Westminster Parliament, it was anti-feminist, attracting criticism on this score from Francis Sheehy-Skeffington¹⁶ and others. In 1912, holding the balance of power in Parliament on this issue, Irish Party MPs defeated the Conciliation Bill — legislation which would have granted limited suffrage to women, with a property qualification.¹⁷ In July 1912, Prime Minister Asquith — "that large obstacle to women's suffrage in England"¹⁸ — visited Dublin, and the Irish Women's Franchise League organised protests. At one of these, at



a meeting addressed by Irish Party leader John Redmond, feminist protectors were attacked by stewards and Home Rule supporters¹⁹.

Sinn Fein (meaning "we ourselves") had been founded in 1908 by Arthur Griffith, uniting the various clubs in the cause of Irish independence, and hoping also to accommodate republicans²⁰. It appeared that Sinn Fein did not oppose the demands of women in the way that the Irish Party did, and indeed that nationalist women found it a fairly accessible movement in which to be involved. However, what support it gave to women's rights could perhaps be considered inadequate:

"Sinn Fein was not actively anti-feminist; in fact it was a fond tenet recently among nationalist women that in the nationalist movement women were treated with an equal seriousness and 'a greater courtesy' than the men... Sinn Fein women were elected frequently to the executive. Nonetheless, support for women's rights, which at this time centred on getting the vote, was never one of Sinn Fein's priorities."²¹

Arthur Griffith himself had little time for the feminist cause. He also showed great hostility to the labour movement — he "was virulent in his opposition to Larkin and labour generally, and was hardly more accommodating on women's issues"²². He had opposed higher wages for factory workers, claiming that this would hold back the growth of Irish industry²³. At the time of the Dublin Lockout in 1913, Griffith called for the strikers to be bayoneted, and Sinn Fein denounced the SS "Hare", which brought food aid from the British labour movement to the locked out Irish workers, because its cargo was made up of non-Irish goods²⁴.

It was in James Connolly and Jim Larkin, that the Irish labour movement possessed the two leaders who gave the most commitment and vocal support to women's aspirations of all male

political figures.

Connolly was born of Irish parents in Edinburgh in 1868²⁵. After involvement in the British Marxist movement in the early 1890s, he moved to Ireland and established the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896²⁶. In his analysis of capitalism, Connolly described women's position: "The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave."²⁷

He seems to have been widely recognised as a champion of women's rights. Francis and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, founders of the Irish Women's Franchise League, described Connolly in the *Irish Citizen* as "the soundest and most thoroughgoing feminist among all the Irish labour men"²⁸. Connolly argued forcefully in support of women's rights, and urged the labour movement to actively take up this support.

"None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off."²⁹

In practice too, Connolly was known for his support of working class women's struggles. He led a strike movement of Belfast mill-girls in 1911, protesting at the system of petty fines imposed by employers to drive down wages³⁰.

Jim Larkin was a trade union organiser who, having begun his union activity in Liverpool, moved on to Belfast and then Dublin. Larkin advocated women's rights, and, like Connolly, included in political practice work to organise women. Together with his sister Delia, Larkin established the Irish Women Workers' Union in September 1911³¹.

How did the attitudes of the various political movements to women, located within the dynamic of the struggles taking place, affect the relationship between the labour movement and the feminist movement? Connolly believed that these factors were bringing feminism and labour closer together towards a common cause. He wrote in 1915 that:

"The politicians' breach of faith with the women, a breach of which all parties were equally culpable, the long-continued struggle, the ever-spreading wave of martyrdom of the militant women of Great Britain and Ireland, and the spread amongst the active spirits of the labour movement of an appreciation of the genuineness of the women's longings for freedom, as of their courage in fighting for it, produced an almost incalculable effect for good upon the relations between the two movements."³²

It is interesting to note that Connolly, in referring to "politicians", clearly excludes the labour movement and its leaders from the meaning of this term. He appears to be drawing a line between bourgeois politicians — upon whom women could not rely — and the movement of the workers. Most significantly, though, Connolly identifies struggle as the arena in which labour and feminism find common ground. Unity between women and male workers is something which is not theorised into existence, but develops from mutual experience of the processes of struggle. This experience includes on both sides "martyrdom", "courage", "fighting" — difficult and laudable qualities which engender respect and understanding between different movements which demonstrate these qualities.

The events of the Dublin Lockout of 1913 are a good vantage point from which to assess the tensions between feminism and labour. From 1907 onwards, Jim Larkin had been building the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. By 1913, the union had 10,000 members, and had achieved significant increases in the standard of living for workers in Dublin³³.

On 2 September 1913, over 400 firms — working together through the Employers' Federation — announced a general lock-out of their workers. Employees were issued with a statement to

sign, pledging themselves to resign membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (or never to join it) and to obey all instructions from their bosses³⁴. In opposition to the employers' actions, support for the union seemed to be uncompromising, not only from its own members, but from members of 28 other trade unions³⁵.

Food provision for the locked-out workers was organised in Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the union. Constance Markievicz was appointed to administer the huge operation. Women from the suffrage movement were actively involved, and it is reported that they maintained their profile as suffrage campaigners during their volunteer work, wearing the badges of the Irish Women's Franchise League³⁶.

It would be mistaken, however, to imply that women's involvement in the Lockout was restricted to the traditional, "feminine" role of cook. Fox reports that on 13 September 1913, a women workers' demonstration marched to Inchicore, site of a tram garage which was a Larkin stronghold, held up tramway traffic³⁷. It seems also that women took an active part in mass pickets and demonstrations.

As the locked-out workers and their families suffered deeper financial hardship, concern was heightened about the welfare of their children. In late October, social worker and feminist Dora Montefiori suggested that children who were suffering a great deal might be sent to stay with families in England³⁸. However, the Catholic Church reacted by denouncing the plan for fear of the children's religion being undermined. Archbishop Walsh attacked the mothering qualities of women who were prepared to allow their children to be cared for in England whilst they fought on against the employers:

"In a rather hysterical outburst he asked the mothers of the children if they had 'abandoned their faith'. He answered his rhetorical question with a 'surely not', and claimed that 'they can no longer be held worthy of the name of Catholic mothers if they so forget that duty as to send away their children to be cared for in a strange land...'"³⁹

The Church organised to physically prevent the children leaving Ireland. Priests seized children from the Corporation Baths where they were being washed in preparation for their departure. Each evening, priests led many Catholics in pickets of Dublin Quays⁴⁰.

During the Lockout, Jim Larkin travelled to England, Scotland and Wales to campaign for support from the British labour movement for the Dublin workers. Donations of food and money were generous — more than £100,000 was raised for the fund⁴¹ — but a special conference of the Trades Union Congress voted down a proposal for sympathetic strike action.

Many analysts at the time and since have blamed this decision for the eventual defeat of the locked-out workers.

"As James Connolly put it bitterly at the time: where the British working class organisation could have delivered a decisive blow at the employers, they held their hand, contenting themselves with giving aid in money and food, where they could not possibly deal a comparable blow at the ruling class."⁴²

The role played by the women who were active during the Lockout did not go unappreciated by the labour movement leaders. In 1916, Constance Markievicz was made an Honorary Member of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, when the union and the Irish Citizen Army presented her with an address commending her relief efforts during the Lockout⁴³.

Involvement in the Lockout proved to be an educational process for the women themselves. Levenson claims that:

"It was during this struggle that Constance [Markievicz] learned from James Connolly that national freedom would be worthless without the overthrow of the exploiting class."⁴⁴

And those women who disagreed over the relative priorities

of nationalism and women's suffrage, were able to work together in support of labour.

"The labour movement was proving to be a meeting-ground for women who, though always amicable, were divided on the issue of whether national independence or the franchise should come first."⁴⁵

Constance Markievicz was by this time living in Surrey House in Dublin, which she used as an organisational base for campaigners in the labour, suffrage and republican movements⁴⁶. Despite conflicts, there was a common ground developing between these three movements which enabled them to work together so closely.

Simply "working together" might not necessarily overcome differences of political opinion. However, such united action could not have happened without political discussion and the development of the political ideas of those involved. Farrell, for example, considers the effect on Constance Markievicz of her involvement and interest in the labour movement:

"It was an interest that brought her to serve soup in Liberty Hall during the dark days of the 1913 strike and mixed a strong socialist strain into her synthesis of nationalism and feminism."⁴⁷

A further development during the Lockout was the formation of the Irish Citizen Army, "a workers' militia to defend the working class against the police"⁴⁸. The proposal to form a Citizen Army was put forward by James Connolly at a strike meeting in Beresford Place, Dublin, in November 1913⁴⁹.

Part of the motivation would surely have been the workers' experience of police brutality, notably a baton charge in Sackville Street after Jim Larkin had delivered a brief speech from a window of the Imperial Hotel on Sunday 31 August. Around 500 people were treated in hospital for their injuries⁵⁰. A further influence was that, in the North Eastern county of Ulster, an armed body called the Ulster Volunteer Force was being built, with the aim of armed resistance to any move to create a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. By this time, it already had around 50,000 members⁵¹. Connolly asked: "Why should we not train and drill our men in Dublin as they are doing in Ulster?"⁵²

The Irish Citizen Army was to be organised by Captain Jack White. It was properly established on Sunday 23 November, when Captain White enlisted men and women to the Army, and began to organise drilling and training.⁵³

Two days later, the Irish National Volunteers was formed, led by Eoin MacNeill, and prompted by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Volunteers drew their membership from the more "moderate" nationalists of Sinn Féin and the Gaelic Leagues⁵⁴. The National Volunteers was a straightforwardly nationalist force, designed to defend the Home Rule Bill, and without the labour movement association of the Irish Citizen Army. Growing rapidly at first, it was later to split over support for Britain in the First World War.

The third stated objective of the Volunteers was "To unite... Irishmen of every creed and of every party and class"⁵⁵. Thus excluded, women who sought involvement in the Volunteers formed a separate women's branch, Cumann na mBan (meaning "women's society") As Haverly outlines, it appears that even having shown this level of commitment, the women were not afforded equal treatment:

"The Volunteers... had a macho ethos... The members of Cumann na mBan at this stage tended to be sisters, wives, sweethearts, etc. of the Volunteers, and the Volunteers stated in no uncertain terms that their role was what they themselves saw it as, by and large — an auxiliary branch. They could be helpmeets, nurses, messengers, fund-raisers for arms and equipment, but they would have no voice."⁵⁶

Francis Sheehy-Skeffington protested the exclusion of women from the Volunteers, and at the same time warned against its mil-

itarist ethos. In an open letter to Thomas MacDonagh of the Volunteers⁵⁷, Sheehy-Skeffington expressed his deeply-felt repugnance at killing, and appealed that the aims of the Volunteers — with which he was entirely in sympathy — could perhaps be fought for without recourse to militarism.

Sheehy-Skeffington did not make these two points separately, but drew a link between the exclusion of women and the dangerous (in his view) inclination towards militarism:

“It is in the highest degree significant that women are left out. Why are they left out? Consider carefully why; and when you have found and clearly expressed the reason why women cannot be asked to enrol in this movement, you will be close to the reactionary element in the movement itself.”⁵⁸

Although he does not say so explicitly, but rather by suggestion, Sheehy-Skeffington appears to imply that a military approach in itself prevents the involvement of women. His conviction of a definitive link between the exclusion of women and the commitment to military struggle of the Irish National Volunteers should be questioned.

It is useful to consider comparisons in this respect between the Irish National Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army. In the Citizen Army, women and men drilled together, and took first aid classes together. Inine na hEireann women joined the Citizen Army, including in their ranks Nellie Gifford, Madeleine Ffrench-Mullen, Kathleen Lynn, Constance Markievicz and Rosie Hackett⁵⁹. It would be disingenuous to suggest that equal numbers of men and women took part in the Citizen Army on equal terms. However, the contrast of its attitudes and regulations towards women with those of the Volunteers illustrate that Sheehy-Skeffington’s rhetorical questioning about the exclusion of women simply does not apply to the Citizen Army as it does to the Volunteers. We may consider a significant factor in this the roots of the Citizen Army in the labour movement.

Although we can argue that it was (and remains) the case that military action was considered a “male” pursuit, and that the Volunteers’ programme does indeed exclude women, those such as Constance Markievicz, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Helena Moloney and Maragaret Skinnider — all of whom took an active role in the Easter Rising — showed that women can indeed be involved in military action. Taking a longer historical view of Irish women’s involvement in military aspects of struggle in Ireland, Gerardine Meaney contends that:

“Women are not... essentially more peaceable, less dogmatic, uninfected by blood-thirsty political ideologies. Women have been actively involved in every possible variant of both nationalism and Unionism... Women have supported and carried out violent actions. They have gained and lost from their involvement. If patriarchal history has portrayed us as bystanders to the political process, it has lied.”⁶⁰

There are perhaps broader issues to consider in the question of the role of military action, or “physical force” republicanism. Francis Sheehy-Skeffington’s argument expresses his intense opposition to killing, but does not appear to discuss the question as to whether military action may be necessary for the achievement of the republicans’ aspirations — beyond a hope that it might not be. A converse criticism may be levelled at a strand of Irish nationalism which may be considered to have organised around physical force as a principle, disregarding wide differences of political principle between members. James Connolly criticised this approach, writing in 1899 that:

“Women are not... essentially more peaceable, less dogmatic, uninfected by blood-thirsty political ideologies. Women have been actively involved in every possible variant of both nationalism and Unionism... Women have supported and carried out violent actions.”

“Socialists believe that the question of force is of very minor importance; the really important question is of the principles upon which is based the movement that may or may not need the use of force to realise its object.”⁶¹

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party in Westminster, immediately announced the support of Ireland for Britain⁶². Although many have claimed that the majority of Irish people did indeed support Redmond in his stance on the war, there was still opposition within the republican movement. Shortly after the outbreak of war, Maud Gonne wrote that:

“This war is an inconceivable madness which has taken hold of Europe. It is unlike any other war that has ever been... Could the women, who are after all the guardians of the race, end it?”⁶³

With Redmond’s declaration of support for Britain, the Irish National Volunteers split. The majority followed Redmond, while a minority of around 16,000 opposed the war. Led by Eoin MacNeill, and now known as the Irish Volunteers, they began to work more closely with the Irish Citizen Army⁶⁴.

For some, for example Jim Larkin and James Connolly, the engagement of Britain in war with Germany was an opportunity to strike a blow for Irish independence. Connolly believed that the time was right for an armed uprising, in particular in view of the weakness of the labour movement

across Europe on the question of the war.

“Grievously disappointed by the failure of the European labour movements to stop World War One or even to resist it, he turned his attention to organising an Irish nationalist revolt against British rule. He saw this work as part of an international movement against imperialism.”⁶⁵

By late 1915, the Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was also planning an uprising. The IRB had been founded in 1858, led by James Stephens and John O’Mahony, and was also known by the name of its American branch, the Fenians⁶⁶. The IRB was a highly secretive organisation which excluded women⁶⁷.

In early 1916, the IRB’s Military Council invited James Connolly to join its preparations for an uprising. This may have seemed an unlikely alliance, since the IRB was not a socialist organisation, and did not share Connolly’s commitment to social issues of the living conditions of working class people or of the emancipation of women. However, Connolly remained convinced that an armed uprising was a vitally important strategy to pursue, and joined the IRB’s Military Council in its preparations.

The Rising began on Easter Monday 1916. The insurgents published a Proclamation⁶⁸, which was read out on the steps of the General Post Office, which had been seized as the headquarters of the rebellion. There are several interesting aspects to the wording of the Proclamation. It is addressed to “Irishmen and Irishwomen”, and claims “the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman”. Further, the Proclamation declares the intention to establish a national Government for the Republic of Ireland, “representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women”. It promises “religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens”.

In addition to the General Post Office, the insurgents, including members of both the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, occupied Boland’s Bakery (led by Eamon de Valera), the Four Courts (Edward Daly), Jacob’s biscuit factory (Thomas MacDonagh),

The ambivalent politics of Yeats

WILLIAM Butler Yeats, who died 60 years ago, early in 1939, was for a while in the 1930s a "card-carrying" fascist. But Ireland's fascists were atypical — the Fine Gael party of today, the 26 Counties' second largest political party and, arguably, the more liberal of the two big parties, is their lineal descendant. And, in Yeats there was much of what Marx and Engels called "reactionary socialism" — someone who yearned for a half-imaginary past in recoil from the horrors of capitalism. In his youth, around 1890, Yeats used to attend William Morris's Hammersmith Socialist Society. He wrote that "socialism is good work", adding "though it is not my work". In a BBC radio broadcast in the mid-'30s, he still referred to William Morris as his "chief of men". Yeats was a member of the underground secret society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. His memoirs recall an incident during a counter-demonstration against some British Empire festival, at the end of the 19th century, in which he escaped from the police in a horse and cart driven by James Connolly. He had perhaps dreamed that an independent Ireland would be a splendid place of poets and scholars and high-mindedness. The pre-World War One reality of huxtering, venal and hypocritical Home Rule politicians, narrow-souled farmers and a lumpen bourgeoisie repelled him. During the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14, Yeats sided with the workers and their union, which the Dublin bosses were set on destroying. He

wrote an article supporting them in Jim Larkin's *Irish Worker*. His poem "September 1913" is usually explained as an expression of Yeats's anger that the Dublin bourgeoisie, offered a priceless collection of paintings, was too mean and mean-spirited to supply an art gallery for them. This poem, which bitterly contrasts the wretched Irish bourgeoisie, whose police were beating workers to death on Dublin's streets, with the heroic tradition of revolutionary nationalism is, I think, an expression of Yeats's feelings about their war on the long-starved Dublin workers.

As a senator in the 1920s, he opposed Catholic encroachments on such civil rights as the right of divorce (abolished in 1925). Like a tragically confused hero out of one of his own creations, Yeats sought an orderly world in which culture, which he understood as necessarily a cultured elite, could flourish, while the elite discharged their responsibilities to "the poor". Yeats wound up backing the Blue-Shirt movement, which represented the interests of hard-faced big farmers and ranchers, and was led by Eoin O'Duffy*, a former Chief of Police, who notoriously was not very bright! His comments on Eva Gore-Booth's "Dim Utopia" (she was at one time secretary of the Salford Trades Council) is ill-advised. Yeats was the greatest English-language poet of the 20th century.

Paddy Dollard

September 1913

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer until
You have dried the marrow from the bone?
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind,
The names that stilled your childish play,
They have gone about the world like wind,
But little time had they to pray
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all the blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,
And call those exiles as they were
In all their loneliness and pain,
You'd cry, "Some woman's yellow hair
Has maddened every mother's son":
They weighed so lightly what they gave,
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

In memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz

The light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.
But a raving autumn shears
Blossom from the summer's wreath;
The older is condemned to death,
Pardoned, drags out lonely years
Conspiring among the ignorant.
I know not what the younger dreams —
Some vague Utopia — and she seems,
When withered old and skeleton gaunt,
An image of such politics.
Many a time I think to seek
One or the other out and speak
Of that old Georgian mansion, mix
Pictures of the mind, recall
That table and the talk of youth,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.

Dear shadows, now you know it all,
All the folly of a fight
With a common wrong or right.
The innocent and the beautiful
Have no enemy but time;
Arise and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch;
Should the conflagration climb,
Run till all the sages know.
We the great gazebo built,
They convicted us of guilt;
Bid me strike a match and blow.

* Footnote: Even if the idea seems a contraction in terms, O'Duffy was not an entirely bad fascist! O'Duffy had led a big contingent of Irish would-be warriors for Christ to fight for Franco during the Spanish Civil War. They did not, to put it gently, cover themselves with glory, and were sent home early. Frank Ryan, Ireland's leading Stalinist Republican, after Peadar O'Donnell, took a contingent to fight for the Spanish Republic and they acquitted themselves very well; half of them left their bones in Spain. When Ryan was captured by the Francoites, he faced the prospect of being shot. Ryan had been O'Duffy's political opponent in the civil war, 1922-3, and through the 1920s, in the street fights with fists and guns of the early mid-'30s and in the Spanish Civil War, yet immediately Ryan's

plight became known in Dublin, O'Duffy turned up at Ryan's family home and offered to do anything he could, and anything they asked of him, to help save Ryan's life. This was an entirely private act, not, as today it might be, a stunt. He appealed for Ryan's life to the Francoites; for various reasons Ryan was spared. Frank Ryan wasn't "typical" either. In the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact he got to Germany and there, an honoured guest of the government until he died in 1944, served simultaneously as an analyst of Irish affairs for the Germans and an unofficial representative of the Dublin government to the Germans! There is a Republican song lamenting Ryan "who died in Hitler's cruel jail"...

the South Dublin Union (Eamonn Ceannt) and St. Stephen's Green (Michael Mallin and Constance Markievicz)⁶⁹. Of the 120 Irish Citizen Army personnel at St. Stephen's Green, 15 were women⁷⁰.

They met initially with some opposition from the civilian population of Dublin. In particular, a group of women whose husbands had enlisted with the British Army for the duration of the First World War, and who were paid "separation allowances" to compensate, were afraid that they would lose those allowances. Known as the "separation women", they were "vituperative in their hostility to the rebellion"⁷¹.

The British responded with fierce military force. Gunboats were stationed on the River Liffey, and bombarded the buildings which had been occupied. After the headquarters at the General Post Office had been set on fire, running desperately short of food and supplies, and knowing they would suffer further loss with no chance of victory, the rebels surrendered on 29 April.

The picture of the involvement of women in the Rising is as follows. In the Citizen Army, there were two women commissioned — Constance Markievicz and Dr Kathleen Lynn, medical officer. Nine women were involved in the attempted capture of Dublin Castle. Thirty-four women took part in the occupation of the General Post Office. A party of Cumann na mBan women were stationed in Jacob's. During the Rising, 77 women were arrested and five women interned.⁷²

For women involved in the Rising, as well as the aspiration for national freedom, there was the added motivation of the struggle for women's liberation.

"For many women involved in the Easter uprising and subsequent civil struggles, visions of women's rights and women's place in the new Irish republic made their commitment to the cause all the stronger."⁷³

In the aftermath of the Rising, 16 men — including James Connolly — were executed by the British. These executions began to turn the tide of opinion towards the rebels. Constance Markievicz was sentenced to death, but had her sentence commuted to life imprisonment "solely on the grounds of her sex".⁷⁴

It has been claimed that after the Rising, with many of the leading men killed in action or executed, and others interned or perhaps demoralised, that it was women who continued the existence of the nationalist struggle:

"For nearly a year after the rising it was the women who were the national movement... now again it was left to the women of Irish-Ireland to keep the movement going."⁷⁵

Ireland at the beginning of this century was a country ruled — and exploited — by Britain. From the 1890s onwards, there

began the growth of three important new trends — Gaelic revivalism, socialism and trade unionism, and the campaign for women's suffrage. For many, involvement in one issue led to consideration of others. Many women — and men — who were attracted to the idea that their country should be free from British rule soon began to ask themselves deeper questions about what they wanted their "independent" Ireland to be like, and responded with demands that it be free from sexism, from poverty and exploitation. Similarly, some women who first became involved in campaigns for the vote would begin to question the sort of society in which they wanted an equal share.

"My first realisation of tyranny came from some chance words spoken in favour of women's suffrage... That was my first bite, you may say, at the apple of freedom, and soon I got on to the other freedoms, freedom to the nation, freedom to the worker."⁷⁶

For these women, an approach was needed that transcended "single issues", that offered a more complete picture of the better society to which they aspired. Indeed, without that "more complete picture", it was inevitable that tensions and disagreements would arise over priorities, as we have seen did occur over the relative weight which Irish women should give to questions of national independence and of women's suffrage.

For Constance Markievicz and others, the approach which resolved these issues was socialism. One reason for this is that the Irish labour movement had amongst its leaders men who far surpassed other male political figures in their support for women's rights. We should be wary of painting the Irish labour movement as a paragon of virtue on the question of women. Indeed, it would surely be impossible for any movement functioning within a society in which women's unequal treatment is such a strong feature to be devoid of all traces of sexism.

However, much of the evidence suggests that some women were able to find a place in the labour movement in which they could fight assertively for their demands as part of the fight in the cause of labour. If a stronger commitment to building a working-class women's movement alongside — and as part of — the labour movement, had been present yet greater involvement and representation may have been achieved.

Arrival at a socialist viewpoint would not be something that women would simply "think" their way to, however. They need to be caught up in a struggle. It was not a simple path that all Irish women followed. It is not the case that the majority of Irish women or Irish men followed this path. Perhaps we can only speculate as to how different Ireland's history may have been if more had.

Notes

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- 42 Matgamna, *op cit*, p.9
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- 46 see *ibid* p.103
- 47 Farrell, *op cit*, p.232
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Learn from history? No! repeat it

By Lucy Clement

IT'S 1943. We're at a socialist meeting. I won't tell you whose meeting it is just yet. Four years into the Second World War. For two years the Nazis have been systematically killing Jews. They've organised the slaughter into a modern industry. Trains from all over Europe deliver cattle truck-loads of Jews to the death factories. Of those who survive the journey some — all children under 12 — are killed immediately. The others are worked and starved and beaten near to death. Then they're gassed.

British imperialism, at war with Germany, decides to do what Jewish groups have been asking for. They bomb the rail approach to Auschwitz. And more — they systematically bomb railway lines across Germany.

Back to our meeting. The speaker stands up, to considerable applause from the assembled comrades.

"Comrades. There is one thing above all else that we must say tonight. Stop bombing German railways! Stop this bloody war!"

Cheers from the front row.

"It's a war about British imperialism. Britain and her ally America are responsible.

"The British ruling class are a disgusting bunch of hypocrites. Churchill: no way! Britain helped boost and stabilise Hitler in the '30s. If Britain had taken in enough Jewish refugees before the war, there would be fewer Jews on mainland Europe. Britain, even now, is stopping the Jews getting into Palestine, killing and internment those who do. Britain is the same — and worse — than the Nazis!"

A neatly orchestrated spontaneous chant of "Churchill, no way!" arises from the floor.

"And why are they really bombing? Not because they want to save anyone from the gas chambers! Because the railway lines are important to their military campaign. The humanitarian motive is just a mask. How do we know the Jews are really being killed? It could just be bourgeois war propaganda. Hitler isn't Genghis Khan — to say so is an insult to every one of the victims of that genocidal Mongolian monster. There was only one Genghis Khan!"

"Of course the ruling class say Hitler is a genocidal maniac. They would say that, wouldn't they? Before Britain declared war on Germany, Hitler hadn't attacked a single Jew. British imperialism has killed a lot more people than Hitler has — it's Britain and America that are responsible for what Hitler's doing to the Jews.

"And these imperialist governments are killing German *civilians*. Last week, the bombers 'accidentally' killed 50 Jews. The week before, 100. Some saviours! They are destroying the German economy, bombing Germany back to the Stone Age.

"Socialists must say to the Jews — Don't be tools of British imperialism! Wait for the German opposition to stop Hitler and join us in a principled campaign. Unite around the slogans: Stop the Bombings! Stop the War!"

Rapturous applause. One hundred and seventy copies of top-selling pamphlet *Stop the War* sold to the eager punters. Several young people join the party.

Who organised this marvellous meeting?

Take your pick... Might it be the CPGB? The Anti-Anti Nazi League? The Socialist Workers' Party? The League of Unprincipled Bandits Against (One) Imperialism? The Socialist Labour

Party? The Who-Cares-If-It-Helps-Build-The-Party Party?

Moving on, we have contributions from the floor. Just a few, mind — wouldn't like to encourage debate.

A comrade stands up. He addresses the meeting, broadly accepting the policy of the first speaker. But he likes to think he's the sophisticated type. So he dresses his policy up. "Stop bombing rail lines", he says, but "Save the Jews" too. "Bombing kills Jews too!", "Bombs will only help Hitler", "Leave Hitler to the German opposition", "Yanks out", "Socialism is the only answer", "Britain keep out of Europe". All the possibilities nicely covered. Oxymorons R-US?

And he was from... the Socialist Party? Fuckwits for International Socialism? Armchair Generals for Pleasant Wars? Workers' Power? Incoherents Against Compromise? Morons for Marxism?

ENOUGH fun. It's now November 1939. This is a real meeting, or near enough. On 1 September 1939 the German Army invaded Poland from the West. On 3 September Britain declared war on Germany. Two weeks later, Stalin sent his army in from the east. The German and Russian soldiers met as the friendly allies the Stalin-Hitler pact (August 1939) had made them, and divided Poland between themselves.

Our meeting is that of a small political party, which for four to five years has been frantically agitating against Hitler and Hitlerism, advocating an alliance of the USSR and the British Empire against Nazism and German imperialism.

But now they've changed sides.

"Who started this war? Britain! Britain declared war first: Britain is the war-monger! Hitler, now that he is an ally of the USSR, only wants peace.

"Germany is a victim of the Versailles Treaty, dictated in 1919 by the imperialist victors of World War One. Now, those imperialists make war to destroy Germany.

"They don't give a damn about Poland! They should make peace!"

"We must organise the broadest possible peace movement against this war.

"Poland? What Poland? Poland is already done for, finished. There is nothing left to fight about!"

This is a meeting of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The story about the Poles being finished, so what was there to fight about, comes from the historian Brian Pearce (*Labour Review*, April-May 1959), a member of the CPGB at the time.

Karl Marx famously commented that history tends to repeat itself: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

The Whitehall Theatre would be proud to present the British "Left".

THE ultra-left German pre-Hitler's victory Stalinists argued that the Nazis and the Social Democrats were the same — that is, if the Social Democrats weren't worse. Trotsky argued back.

A woman stands facing two men. The first, she has just discovered, is slowly poisoning her. If she doesn't stop him, in time, she will die. The second has a gun at her head and is squeezing the trigger. She cannot beat off both simultaneously. She has to choose which of them she will go for first.

Which one will she choose?

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violence. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not dissolved in a classless society, but degenerates into the omnipotence of bureaucracy over society”.

Six years later (June 1939) he wrote in *The Bonapartist Philosophy of the State*.

Trotsky depicts Stalinism as a system more akin to Dark Age feudalism or to the rigidifying Roman Empire of about 300 AD than to either socialism or capitalism, or anything in between.

“The realities of soviet life today can indeed be hardly reconciled even with the shreds of old theory. Workers are bound to the factories; peasants are bound to the collective farms. [Internal] Passports have been introduced... It is a capital crime to come late to work. Punishable as treason is not only any criticism of Stalin but even the mere failure to fulfil the natural duty to get down on all fours before the ‘Leader’. The frontiers are guarded by an impenetrable wall of border patrols and police dogs on a scale heretofore unknown anywhere... Foreigners [in fact, communists, and especially communist refugees from capitalist police states] who had previously managed to get into the country are being systematically exterminated.

“The... soviet constitution, ‘the most democratic in the world’, amounts to this, that every citizen is required at an appointed time to cast his ballot for the one and only candidate handpicked by Stalin or his agents. The press, the radio, all the organs of propaganda, agitation and national education are completely in the hands of the ruling clique... How many have been shot, thrown into jails and concentration camps, or exiled to Siberia, we do not definitely know. But undoubtedly hundreds of thousands of party members have shared the fate of millions of non-party people”. Though the “official edict” is that “socialism has been realised”, Stalinism has “brought the state to a pitch of wild intensity unprecedented in the history of mankind”.

Trotsky pictures the life of the “ruling caste”. In addition to publicly acknowledged salaries, “they receive secret salaries from the treasuries of the Central Committee or local committees; they have at their disposal automobiles... excellent apartments, summer homes, sanatoria, and hospitals. To suit their needs or their vanity all sorts of ‘soviet palaces’ are erected”. Trotsky shows that the bureaucrats can pass on to their children, if not property in the means of production, then status and future membership in the elite: the ruling caste “almost monopolise the highest institutions of learning”.

Trotsky summarises: “The Bonapartist apparatus of the state is thus an organ for defending the bureaucratic thieves and plunderers of national wealth”. And Stalin is “the spokesman of privileged parasites. In the land that has gone through the proletarian revolution, it is impossible to foster inequality, create an aristocracy, and accumulate privileges save by bringing down on the masses floods of lies and ever more monstrous repressions”.

Is this strange social system, in which 170 millions of people live, which is neither capitalist nor socialist, a new form of society? But what sort of society?

V 1933: Trotsky discusses state capitalism

PEOPLE and groups linked to Trotsky’s Left Opposition in the late 1920s and early 1930s, denied that the USSR was a working class state and called it state capitalism or what would later be called bureaucratic collectivism. Inside the USSR, the Democratic Centralists, allies and factional comrades of the Trotskyists in the opposition to Stalinism, were state capitalist. Trotsky polemicalised against them.

Let us examine Trotsky’s polemics against an early ‘30s ex-Communist International proponent of a theory that Russia was state capitalist, Hugo Urbahns, and against Lucien Laurat, a proponent of a “bureaucratic collectivist” view. Trotsky separated from Urbahns and the biggest Left Opposition group outside the USSR, the German Leninbund, in 1929 because the Leninbund opposed Russia in the Chinese-Russian conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway. In 1933, in *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, Trotsky dealt in detail with Urbahns’ attempt, from within a broadly Left Opposition framework, to interpret the USSR as “state capitalist”. State Capitalism as the proper classification of the USSR then meant something very different, for everybody concerned, from what it came to mean in Trotskyist circles in the 1940s, in the work of, seriatim, CLR James, Dunayevskaya, Chaileau and Cliff, those theorists of “state-capitalism” whom readers

will know best.

Trotsky, secure in his own concrete analyses and political responses to Stalinism, and in the working class programme of action against it which he and the Left Opposition had elaborated in the previous ten years, in 1933 rejects all “theoretical and terminological experiments” (all that differ with his own theoretical and terminological experiments — which consist in stretching old terms and existing theory to incorporate new phenomena). He regards attempts other than his own to summarise and conceptualise the USSR’s social relationships — which he himself has and will continue to describe honestly — as mere playing with “terminology”. His concern is, by holding the Stalinist phenomenon in the old framework and the revolutionary perspectives that go with it, to limit the theoretical and intellectual disruption caused by the realities of Stalinism. Trotsky’s insistence on doing this until the eve of his death will only complicate and make worse the intellectual and theoretical havoc amongst revolutionary socialists that he is trying to avoid.

Debating with the state capitalism Hugo Urbahns, Trotsky welcomes Urbahns’ “descent” “from his [earlier] terminological exercise in the sphere of the political superstructure down to the economic foundation”. In 1939 he will “welcome” Bruno Rizzi’s “clarity” too.

What Urbahns calls “state capitalism”, and Trotsky discusses in 1933, is remarkably like what Bruno Rizzi will call “bureaucratic collectivism”, the discussion of which in 1939 will be the occasion for Trotsky’s tentative and incomplete shifting of the entire conceptual framework in which he has so far seen Stalinism. In 1933, by contrast, nothing shifts. “State capitalism”, as discussed by Trotsky, is Urbahns’ term for the manifold forms of initiative by existing bourgeois states — Italy, Germany, the USA — to superintend, stimulate and “organise” the sick capitalist economy, thereby playing a role in economic affairs not known in modern capitalism until World War I. It was part of the inter-war drift to the neo-mercantilism that divided the world into more or less walled-off imperialist trading blocs. In this world trend Urbahns seeks an explanation for Stalin’s USSR.

Trotsky agrees with Urbahns that the trend is real and very important. “Monopoly capitalism has long since outgrown the private ownership of the means of production and the boundaries of the national state. Paralysed, however, by its own organisations, the working class was unable to free in time the productive forces of society from their capitalist fetters. Hence arises the protracted epoch of economic and political convulsions... The bourgeois governments are obliged to pacify the mutiny of their own productive forces with a police club. This is what constitutes the so-called planned economy. In so far as the state attempts to harness and discipline capitalist anarchy, it may be called conditionally ‘state capitalism’.”

Trotsky recalls that the broad use of this term, in 1933, differs from the original Marxist meaning of it: “only the independent economic enterprises of the state itself”. Now it signifies “all the varieties of state intervention into the economy; the French use the word *etatisme* (statification) in this sense”. Urbahns, according to Trotsky, pronounces this “state capitalism” to be “a necessary and, moreover, a progressive stage of the development of society, in the same sense as trusts are progressive compared with the disparate enterprises”. But Trotsky thinks Urbahns’ appraisal of such capitalist planning a “fundamental error”. During the historical epoch of capitalist upswing, “state capitalism” — state enterprises — might act “to lead society forward and facilitate the future economic labour of the proletarian dictatorship”. The present capitalist “planned economy” is “reactionary through and through”.

Describing the drive for national self-sufficiency by, for example, in newly Hitlerised Germany, he writes that “state capitalism drives to tear the economy away from the worldwide division of labour; to adapt the productive forces to the Procrustean bed of the national state; to constrict production artificially in some branches and to create just as artificially other branches by means of enormous, unprofitable expenditures. The economic policies of the present state — beginning with tariff walls upon the ancient Chinese pattern and ending with the episodes of forbidding the use of machinery under Hitler’s ‘planned economy’ — attain an unstable regulation at the cost of causing the national economy to decline, bringing chaos into world relations, and completely disrupting the monetary system that will be very much needed for socialist planning. The present state capitalism neither prepares nor lightens the future work of the socialist state but, on the

contrary, creates for it colossal additional difficulties.”

This description of the destructive work of state capitalism in economics is also an anticipatory full summary description of the “statism” of Stalinism, and of its real relationship to socialism. Everything said here is 100% true of Stalinism. Trotsky regarded the Stalinist drive to cut international economic links, as distinct from controlling them through the state monopoly of free trade, as downright reactionary.

Trotsky concludes: “It remains a deep secret what concrete economic content Urbahns himself puts into his understanding of the Soviet ‘state capitalism’.”

At noted, this exchange is important in that it essentially covers the same ground as the 1939 dispute about “bureaucratic collectivism”, and in terms of world trends has exactly the same factual basis as the later covering of the same ground, at the start of World War Two. We will see the later Trotsky better in this light.

Trotsky will in 1939 submit the hypothetical idea of world bureaucratic collectivism to the same criticism, but with an important variant.

“Even if we grant that Stalinism and fascism from opposite poles will some day arrive at one and the same type of exploitative society (‘bureaucratic collectivism’ according to Bruno R’s terminology) this still will not lead humanity out of the blind alley... Even if the various fascist governments did succeed in establishing a system of planned economy at home then... the struggle between the totalitarian states for world domination would be continued and even intensified. Wars would devour the fruits of planned economy and destroy the bases of civilisation...”

But where the 1939 criticism assumes, or concedes, that the various planned economies produce net progress — “fruits” — in their own countries, except that that progress is annulled by war and international conflict, the 1933 criticism focuses on denouncing the evil effects of the “planning” in each country. In *The Revolution Betrayed* and frequently elsewhere, Trotsky contrasts the reactionary economic effects of capitalist partial-statism with the alleged progressive results of Stalinist total-statism. Yet elsewhere again he denounces, and rightly, the excessiveness of Stalinist-statism... “The monstrous centralisation of the entire industry and commerce from top to bottom... was determined not by the needs of socialism but by the greed of the bureaucracy to have everything without exception in its hands. This repugnant and by no means necessary violence against the economy...” (p.146.) The unresolved contradiction here arises from Trotsky’s decision in the early 1930s, once his predictions of speedy collapse of Stalin’s forced collectivising and breakneck industrialising “left course” have been confounded, to attribute the successes of industrialisation to the allegedly proletarian property forms.

The Trotsky of 1933 then discusses variations of what will later be called the theory of “bureaucratic collectivism”.*

VI. 1933: Trotsky discusses “bureaucratic collectivism”

THIS discussion too is very important for “tracing” Trotsky’s evolution. In 1933, the experience of full-blown “industrial” Stalinism has been so short that Trotsky’s belief that it will, be one way or another, only an interregnum, is reasonable. Trotsky therefore treats “bureaucratic collectivism” as a notion derived from anarchism and discusses and judges the new phenomenon of Stalinism essentially in terms of the old frame of bourgeois-proletarian class alternatives — the frame which Stalinism is in the process of breaking.

He discusses the view of the Social Democrat, ex-Communist Lucien Laurat that the USSR is “neither proletarian nor bourgeois” but “represents an absolutely new type of class organisation, because the bureaucracy not only rules over the proletariat politically but also exploits it economically, devouring that surplus value that hitherto

fell to the lot of the bourgeoisie”. Laurat invokes Karl Marx’s *Capital*, but his, says Trotsky, is a “superficial and purely descriptive ‘sociology’.”

Contemptuously, Trotsky equates the Social Democratic “compiler” Laurat with “the Russo-Polish revolutionist Makhaisky” who “with much more fire and splendour” had, over 30 years previously, “define[d] ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ as a scaffold for the commanding posts of an exploiting bureaucracy”. Makhaisky “only ‘deepened’ sociologically and economically the anarchistic prejudices against state socialism”.

Trotsky does not here pause to distinguish between the subject under discussion, the USSR in its Stalinist degeneration, which Trotsky will soon recognise as having been totalitarian “for several years”, and the dictatorship of the proletariat in Lenin’s time. But that is just what is at issue between himself and Laurat. Trotsky does not distinguish between the USSR under Stalin and the “state socialism” — the regime of a profoundly democratic workers’ state — in dispute between Marxists and anarchists. It is still an argument about old theories and perspectives.

Marxist politicians and historians had interpreted and tried to shape history. The tragic task of those of Trotsky’s generation who survived to the ‘30s was to rework Marxism in the light of Stalinism and define both Stalinism and their own place in history and in Marxist theory. It was less unreasonable for Trotsky to hold back from doing this in 1933 than it would increasingly come to be — glaringly and increasingly at odds with the facts that Trotsky himself dealt with — as the years wore on.

Trotsky argues with Laurat not about facts, but about the interpretation of agreed facts. Laurat’s argument about the bureaucracy’s “uncontrolled appropriation of an absolutely disproportionate part of the national income” is, says Trotsky, based on “undubitable facts”; but it “does not... change the social physiognomy of the bureaucracy”. There is a parasitic bureaucracy in every regime. The fascist bureaucracy, “straddles the boss’s neck, tears from his mouth at time the juiciest pieces”, is still only a bourgeois hireling. Thus too with the Stalinist bureaucracy. “It devours, wastes and embezzles a considerable proportion of the national income. Its management costs the proletariat very dearly. In the Soviet society, it occupies an extremely privileged position not only in the sense of having political and administrative prerogatives but also in the sense of possessing enormous material advantages. Still, the biggest apartments, the juiciest steaks and even Rolls Royces are not enough to transform the bureaucracy into an independent ruling class”.

The supposed ruling class, the USSR working class, is not here merely interfered with, as the German ruling class sometimes is by the fascist gangsters who preserve its social rule; it is in every detail of its life the dragooned and slave-driven source of the surplus product, in an economy organised by the bureaucracy and controlled by the bureaucracy. This is a bureaucracy that fills all the roles ever played by any ruling class, and therefore unlike any auxiliary bureaucracy of any previous ruling class. This bureaucracy is, at the very least, the bureaucratic analogue of all previous ruling.

Later Trotsky estimates that the bureaucracy takes half the national income, and that it thereby pauperises the workers. Is not the bureaucracy the ruling class where there is no other elite? In truth, when he answers “no”, Trotsky here is close to mere pettifoggery.

There is no other ruling group, no other elite, no competitor for the bureaucracy’s place in the social hierarchy. Against this fact, the political and juridical fiction of the working class as ruling class and the supposed roots of the nationalised economy in the revolution are, on the level of theory and “perspectives”, raised by Trotsky to overwhelming preponderance. Meanwhile in practice he draws the necessary revolutionary working-class political conclusions from the USSR working class’s real position, and the real — not juridical and formal — relations in the society. With the turn to “political revolution” he will, in outline at least, draw all the practical conclusions for the anti-bureaucratic struggle; these as Trotsky will say again and again, would not differ seriously were Trotsky to identify the bureaucracy as a new ruling class. For Trotsky, the rest is a matter of defending the theory and the perspective and of warding off conclusions he can still argue are premature and unnecessary.

The bureaucracy, he insists practices “not... class exploitation, in the scientific sense of the word, but... social parasitism”.

* The term bureaucratic collectivism predates Stalinism. It occurred before the First World War in polemical exchanges between the British Marxists — of the SDF/British Socialist Party, forerunner of the Communist Party of Great Britain — and the Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc, who continued a tradition going back to Herbert Spencer of branding socialism as the new “servile state”. Bureaucratic collectivism was contrasted with “democratic collectivism”, that is, working-class socialism, conceived as democratic self-rule; in parallel, socialists dismissed as “state capitalism” municipal state enterprises glorified by middle-class reformists, including Fabians, as socialism by instalments.

Thus though Trotsky rejects the Stalinist programme of "socialism in one country", he is nonetheless drawn into its logic, at one remove, by way of his recognition of the USSR as a working class state, degenerated: he accepts its development ("for now") as — not, as the Stalinists said, the development of socialism — but the construction of a society with a socialist tendency.

Trotsky does not dispute Laurant's facts. Instead he appeals to theoretical generalities. "A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone, but by its independent role in the general structure of the economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class (the feudal nobility, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat) works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political technique of class rule. The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterises every class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with a ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it".

But the issue here is whether the Stalinist bureaucracy has become something qualitatively more than previous bureaucracies. Here Trotsky assumes — in effect, simply by using the common word, "bureaucracy" — that it has not, though he acknowledges elsewhere (*Revolution Betrayed*) that it has.

The question at issue in the USSR of 1933 is of a bureaucracy that is sole ruler and monopolist in the organisation of this society, combining all the roles of all previous ruling classes. It is sole custodian of the surplus product and organiser of production. On the other side the nominal ruling class, the working class, is designated the ruling class because it is *a priori* identified with a form of property — yet is it a class which plays the role of all previous subordinate, exploited classes, combining characteristics of slaves, serfs and proletarians. By a series of class struggles which Trotsky fought in and chronicled, the bureaucracy has subjugated the proletariat and worked out the "special property relations" which Trotsky denies it possesses, namely nationalised property in a totalitarian state which is the bureaucracy's own property.

On the issues as posed by the development of the USSR and by history, Trotsky still only brings to bear the general precepts of Marxism, that is, generalities derived from past history. The "necessity" or otherwise of the bureaucracy's role in the economy has to be derived from an account of the society as it is; but Trotsky derives it from the general theory of previous societies, using that general theory against the facts he himself has recorded. Such arguments from Trotsky will become additional layers of scholastic dogmatic obfuscation, counterposed to the proper method of Marxism, long after it ceases to be reasonable to do as Trotsky does here in 1933 and regard the USSR as a freakish short-term variant of previous forms.

Between his concrete analyses and descriptions of USSR reality and his programme of working class action against Stalinism, worked out since 1923, on the one side, and his theorising about it, on the other, there is a great gap. After about 1933 Trotsky puts "theory" on hold. Having declared in 1933 for what he will call "political revolution" — this will be developed and hardened in the next 3 years — Trotsky entered a theoretical limbo: everything is fixed and frozen on the level of basic theory, while dramatic events unfold on the level of real history, Trotsky, expecting either bourgeois counter-revolution or a new working-class revolution, believes that nothing will change *basically* as long as nationalised economy remains.

Even when in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) he articulates a summary description of the USSR remarkable for its clarity and stark truth ("The state owns the economy, but the bureaucracy, so to speak, owns the state.") he draws no conclusions and unconvincingly argues against those who begin to — Carter, Craipeau, Burnham. They are only parallel things: Trotsky's generalising theory is about the past, his analyses and programme of action in the USSR about *now*. So it will be with Trotsky, despite many shifts within that frame until September 1939. In 1939 in a great rush, Trotsky's long restrained need to theorise and reconceptualise the facts will jump over his head and appear before him as a nightmare possible future.

VII. Perspectives: before World War Two

WHAT, according to Trotsky, were the possible perspectives for the Stalinised USSR? Despite the impressive early economic successes in crude industrialisation, it was a system characterised by convulsive social disintegration, bureaucratic arbitrariness and precipitate decline. Trotsky understood and said (*Revolution Betrayed*, 1936) that though the bureaucratic economy could assimilate western technology, it could not, in a society without freedom of speech, research or initiative, develop its own self-sustaining advanced technology. It was an inherently unstable and untenable system.

The contradiction between bureaucratic rule and the democratic imperatives of planning was, he thought, increasingly sharp and unmitigable. He thought the Moscow Trials (1936, '37, '38) and the great purges were the beginning of the "death agony of Stalinism". Elements of the bureaucracy were crystallising out into a nascent bourgeoisie — what Trotsky called the "faction of Butenko", after a Stalinist functionary who defected to Mussolini. It was a system in stark and accelerating decline from October, that could end only in either bourgeois restoration or in a new working class "political" revolution.

It was, it is clear from what he wrote, — in for example *In Defence of Marxism* — only because he rejected the idea that the Russian system at the end of the '30s was a stable form of collectivist society, that Trotsky rejected the idea that the bureaucracy, though it had all of the worst features of a fascist ruling class, was a fully formed stable ruling class with a necessary role in the economy. It lacked the historic legitimacy bestowed on past ruling classes because they were necessary to that stage of the development of the means of production in humankind's evolution from ape to social self-control in socialism. The Stalinist system could not last, said Trotsky.

Far from having realised socialism, as the idiotic lies of the Stalinist rulers contended; or, as post-Trotsky Trotskyism — and in his own way, as we will see, the "state capitalist" Tony Cliff — contended, being in transition to socialism, the USSR under the bureaucratic dictatorship was evolving naturally towards catastrophic breakdown. Only a new working class revolution could prevent the restoration of capitalism. The time span Trotsky projected was very short ("in a few months or years").

His refusal to draw conclusions about the ruling bureaucracy as a ruling class was fundamentally and explicitly tied to and dependent on this timescale. In turn Trotsky linked this time scale to empirical tests: if the USSR survived the war.

It was not until the last 11 months of his life that Trotsky publicly developed the theoretical possibility — a tremendous break with the past — that the USSR might prove to be not a freak formation between capitalism and a degenerated workers state but a socio-economic formation "*in itself*" — a relatively stable system, a socio-economic formation different from capitalism and socialism; either the barbarous alternative to socialism after the capitalist epoch, or a historical cul-de-sac. This was in *The USSR and War* (September 1939) and *Again And Once More on the Class Nature of the USSR* (October 1939).

"Let me recall for the sake of illustration, the question of Thermidor. [Counter revolution: the reference is to an even in the French Revolution]. For a long time we asserted that Thermidor in the USSR was only being prepared but had not yet been consummated. Later, investing the analogy to Thermidor with a more precise and well deliberated character, we came to the conclusion that Thermidor had already taken place long ago. This open rectification of our own mistake did not introduce the slightest consternation in our ranks.

"Why? Because the essence of the processes in the Soviet Union was appraised identically by all of us, as we jointly studied day by day the growth of reaction. For us it was only a question of rendering more precise a historical analogy, nothing more. I hope that still today despite the attempt of some comrades to uncover differences on the question of the 'defence of the USSR' — with which we shall deal presently — we shall succeed by means of simply rendering our own ideas more precise to preserve unanimity on the basis of the program of the Fourth International.... Here Trotsky plainly means: if we have to conclude that the USSR is after all a new form of class society, it will be an organic conclusion from what we have done and are

doing. By way of concrete description and the elaboration of the concrete revolutionary tasks posed by the reality of Stalinism.

"Our critics have more than once argued that the present Soviet bureaucracy bears very little resemblance to either the bourgeois or labor bureaucracy in capitalist society; that to a far greater degree than fascist bureaucracy it represents a new and much more powerful social formation. This is quite correct and we have never closed our eyes to it. But if we consider the Soviet bureaucracy a 'class' then we are compelled to state immediately that this class does not at all resemble any of those propertied classes known to us in past; our gain consequently is not great. We frequently call the bureaucracy a caste, underscoring thereby its shut-in character, its arbitrary rule... But even this definition does not of course possess a strictly scientific character. Its relative superiority lies in this... the make-shift character of the term... The old sociological terminology did not and could not prepare a name for a new social event which is in process of evolution (degeneration) and which assumed stable forms. All of us however, continue to call the Soviet bureaucracy a bureaucracy, not being unmindful of its historical peculiarities. In our opinion this should suffice for the time being.

"Scientifically and politically — and not purely terminologically — the bureaucracy represent a temporary growth on a social organism: or has this growth already been transformed into a historically indispensable organ? Social excrescences can be the product of an 'accidental' (i.e., temporary and extraordinary) enmeshing of historical circumstances. A social organ (and such is every class, including an exploiting class) can take shape only as a result of the deeply rooted inner needs of production itself. If we do not answer this question, then the entire controversy will degenerate into sterile toying with words.

...bureaucratism, as a system, [has] become the worst brake on the technical and cultural development of the country. This was veiled for a certain time by the fact that the Soviet economy was occupied for two decades with transplanting and assimilating the technology and organization of production in advanced capitalist countries... But the higher the economy rose, the more complex its requirements became, all the more unbearable became the obstacle of the bureaucratic regime... Thus before the bureaucracy could succeed in excluding from itself a "ruling class", it came into irreconcilable contradiction with the demands of development. The explanation for this is to be found precisely in the fact that the bureaucracy is not the bearer of a new system of economy peculiar to itself and impossible without itself, but is a parasitic growth on a worker's state...

The crisis of capitalism is central to Trotsky's way of assessing Stalinism. *"The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible. The productive forces must be organized in accordance with a plan. But who will accomplish this task — the proletariat or a new ruling class of 'commissars' — politicians, administrators and technicians?..."*

"The second world war has begun. It attests incontrovertibly to the fact that society can no longer live on the basis of capitalism. Thereby it subjects the proletariat to a new and perhaps decisive test.

The war is the great test: *"If this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution, it must inevitably lead to the overthrow of the bureaucracy in the USSR and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918. In that case the question as to whether the Stalinist bureaucracy was a 'class' or a growth on the workers' state will be automatically solved. To every single person it will become clear that in the process of the development of the world revolution the Soviet bureaucracy was only an episodic relapse. If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not, revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime... This would be, according to all indications, a regime of decline,*

signalizing the eclipse of civilisation...

"Then it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting regime on an international scale..."

"The historic alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class..."

"Bruno has caught on to the fact that the tendencies of collectivization assume as a result of the political prostration of the working class the form of 'bureaucratic collectivism.' The phenomenon in itself is incontestable. But where are its limits and what is its historical weight?..."

For Trotsky, the Stalinist USSR is inconceivable apart from October 1917. *"The Kremlin oligarchy... has the opportunity of directing economy as a body only owing to the fact that the working class of Russia accomplished the greatest overturn of property relations in history. This difference must not be lost sight of.*

"The October Revolution was not an accident. It was forecast long in advance. Events confirmed this forecast, because Marxists never believed that an isolated workers' state in Russia could maintain itself indefinitely... Degeneration must inescapably end at a certain stage in downfall.

"A totalitarian regime, whether of Stalinist or fascist type, by its very essence can only be a temporary transitional regime... If contrary to all probabilities the October Revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts — then we should doubtlessly have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving force. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copybook label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of re-evaluating the world historical perspective for the next decades if not centuries: Have we entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or on the contrary the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?"

"The twofold error of schematists like Hugo Urbabns and Bruno R. consists, first, in that they proclaim this latter regime as having been already finally installed; secondly, in that they declare it a prolonged transitional state of society between capitalism and socialism..."

Trotsky explains what he "defended" and does not defend. *"We defend the USSR as we defend the colonies, as we solve all our problems, not by supporting some imperialist governments against others, but by the method of international class struggle in the colonies as well as in the metropolitan centers.*

"We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition, not only in capitalist countries but also in the USSR. Our tasks, among them the 'defence of the USSR,' we realize not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. Such a 'defence' cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not even pretend to be miracle workers..."

"The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending conquests and accomplishing new ones..."

"We must build our policy by taking as our starting point the real relations and contradictions... Our 'defence of the USSR' will naturally differ, as heaven does from earth, from the official defense which is now being conducted under the slogan: 'For the fatherland! For Stalin!' Our defence of the USSR is carried on under the slogan: 'For socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!'"



Some Trotskyists froze Trotsky's thinking on Stalinism, right up until the collapse of the Stalinist bloc

Trotsky finds that he has to answer the charge that his provisional endorsement of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism has alarmed dogmatists on his own side of the escalating factional struggle in the SWP(USA).

"Some comrades evidently were surprised that I spoke in my article ('The USSR in War') of the system of 'bureaucratic collectivism' as a theoretical possibility. They discovered in this even a complete revision of Marxism. This is an apparent misunderstanding. The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity has nothing in common with fatalism. Socialism is not realizable 'by itself' but as a result of the struggle of living forces, classes and their parties. The proletariats decisive advantage in this struggle resides in the fact that it represents historical progress, while the bourgeoisie incarnates reaction and decline. Precisely in this is the source of our conviction in victory. But we have full right to ask ourselves: What character will society take if the forces of reaction conquer?"

"Marxists have formulated an incalculable number of times the alternative: either socialism or return to barbarism. After the Italian 'experience' we repeated thousands of times: either communism or fascism. The real passage to socialism cannot fail to appear incomparably more complicated, more heterogeneous, more contradictory than was foreseen in the general historical scheme. Marx spoke about the dictatorship of the proletariat and its future withering away but said nothing about bureaucratic degeneration of the dictatorship. We have observed and analyzed for the first time in experience such a degeneration. Is this revision of Marxism?..."

"What social and political forms can the new 'barbarism' take, if we admit theoretically that mankind should not be able to elevate itself to socialism? We have the possibility of expressing ourselves on this subject more concretely than Marx. Fascism on one hand, degeneration of the Soviet state on the other, outline the social and political forms of a neo-barbarism..."

"If we are to speak of a revision of Marx, it is in reality the revision of those comrades who project a new type of state, 'non-bourgeois' and 'non-worker'. Because the alternative developed by me leads them to draw their thoughts up to their logical conclusion, some of these critics, frightened by the conclusions of their own theory accuse me... of revising Marxism."

Nonetheless, the charge of "revisionism", fuelled by ignorance, malice and theoretical poverty will reverberate down the decades!

VIII. The results of World War Two

AFTER its survival and vast imperialist expansion following Trotsky's death, the USSR could no longer be described in the terms Trotsky had used and for the reasons he had given, as a degenerated workers' state, nor the Stalinist bureaucracy as a parasitic growth and not a social organ, as a caste and not a ruling class. When the Stalinist state proved capable of replicating itself in societies where there never was a proletarian revolution; where, as in China, the bureaucracy repressed the proletariat before and during the bureaucratic revolution, and not 10 years after a proletarian revolution, as in the USSR, Trotsky's workers' state theory died. Anybody who wanted to go on using Trotsky's name for the USSR, or its clones had to find another set of reasons. "Workers' state" theory had either to disappear or to put a new and radically different analysis into Trotsky's verbiage: the "Orthodox" could now maintain "Trotsky's" position only by the most thoroughgoing "revision" of the whole of revolutionary Marxist theory, elaborating a radically new set of theories within Trotsky's familiar old terms.

In the very long term — 50 years — Stalinism proved an unviable system and a historical blind alley, but far from collapsing "in a few months or years" before capitalism or working class revolution, as Trotsky was sure it would, Stalinism survived and seemed as late as the early '80s, to friend and foe alike, to be a viable system: it seemed in some respects better equipped than capitalism to win the long Stalinist-capitalist competition. It was still expanding (into Afghanistan) at the beginning of the 1980s.

In 1940, in *Stalin*, Trotsky had defined the bureaucratic counter-revolution after 1928 as the bureaucracy making itself "sole master of the social surplus product", what, in capitalism, Marxists name "surplus value". Trotsky thereby arrived at a clear *description* of the bureaucracy as exploiters of the working class. He still, before the USSR was submitted to the test of the looming war, hesitated to name what he described with an appropriate name, though he rendered the old name, degenerated workers' state, nonsensical.

Once the survival and expansion of Stalinism in World War Two had destroyed, root and branch, Trotsky's theory that the USSR was a deformed workers' state, what then, for Trotskyists? It was not possible rationally to go on arguing, as Trotsky had, in essence to postpone giving the indicated answer, that it was too soon to decide! He himself had set the temporal and empirical tests to reconceptualise the given USSR as a new form of class society. At the end his refusal to do so rested on the one central argument: it should be left to the test of war. By the time war had put the system to the test, Trotsky was dead. But his tentative reconceptualisation in September-October 1939 had cut through the cable binding Trotskyism to the Stalinist USSR and the idea that so long as nationalised property survived, the USSR was a degenerated workers' state rooted in October.

Instead of developing from Trotsky, the orthodox held on to the letter of Trotsky. They abandoned his methods of analysis. Post-Trotsky neo-Trotskyists froze Trotsky's interim and increasingly tentative degenerated workers' state theory. They substituted the name for Trotsky's method of analysing evolving USSR reality. They substituted analogy for class analysis.

From 1937, Trotsky had, for the sake of argument, separated the idea that the USSR was progressive — because it developed the means of production while world capitalism in the great slump and after was in marked decline — from the characterisation of Russia as a workers' state. He had asked more than once (in reply to Burnham, Carter and Yvan Craipeau, for example, in 1937): are we not, whatever its class character, compelled to see it as progressive? The post-Trotsky Trotskyists built new workers' state theories on this.

If, in terms of Trotsky's 1939-40 reasoning, no theory of the USSR as a workers' state was possible after World War Two, except a Stalinist one, this idea — the USSR is progressive no matter what — was transmuted by his followers into the idea that the survival of the USSR *proved* it was a workers' state, thus turning Trotsky inside out; and further, that the creation of Stalinist states elsewhere by the Russian Army or by autonomous Stalinist forces which created societies modelled on the USSR, such as Tito's and Mao's, meant that they too, by analogy, had to be classified as workers' states — "deformed workers' states". Thus did Trotsky's followers, committing political suicide, hold to the letter and form of his defunct old conclusions.

For Trotskyism, history was repeating itself. USSR Trotskyism in

1929 was faced with the fact that the expected bourgeois counter-revolution did not happen, but instead the bureaucracy uprooted the feeble shoots of bourgeois counter-revolution, destroyed the labour movement and emerged as “master of the surplus product”. Now, with the emergence after World War Two of a new external bureaucratic Russian Empire, something analogous happened on a vast international scale. The bureaucracy not only survived the war, but as, in the crisis of 1928 and after, it vastly expanded its spheres of operation; this time, way beyond the borders of the USSR. Stalinism was replicated in other countries by way of peasant movements that could by no twisting of language properly be construed as working class, as rooted in the working class or as making a workers’ revolution.

The bureaucracy in the USSR and now elsewhere continued to develop the means of production in its own savage, murderous and immensely wasteful way. The new bureaucratic formations in China, Yugoslavia, etc., could not, as Trotsky had insisted was the case in the USSR — it was central to his analysis and to his theory of the degenerated workers’ state — be said to be in conflict and contradiction with the collectivist property. They created it: collectivised property could not now be identified even obliquely with 1917, and even residually as a form of working class property. The old basic notion of socialism, that political power was decisive, which had been set aside, *pro tem*, as Trotsky grappled with the USSR’s contadictariness, logically now should have come into its own. Trotsky in 1936 had posed the issue clearly. In fact “totalitarian economism” swept all before it (see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*).

Within the verbiage of Trotsky, which they turned into a sacerdotal language, as remote from life as any sacerdotal jargon frozen in time ever was, they radically altered Trotsky’s ideas. Why did the post-Trotsky Trotskyists freeze ideas derived by Trotsky from continued analysis of the Russian reality? Because of the superficial and disorienting formal resemblance of Stalinist society to “socialism” — nationalised economy and the elimination of both the capitalist mode of economic activity, and the bourgeoisie which personified it. Because attempts to analyse the world afresh threatened to collapse what they saw as the whole Marxist system. Though Trotsky, when he tentatively reconceptualised the USSR as it was in 1939, had shown them how to escape from this trap, they let themselves remain imprisoned by Trotsky’s “totalitarian economism” — “full” nationalisation is a workers’ state — and the idea he developed with increasing prominence after 1937 — as the idea of the USSR as any sort of workers’ state became less and less tenable — that the property forms in the USSR were, in face of the semi-collapse of capitalism, progressive even if Russia was not a workers’ state of any sort. They added a new adjective, “deformed”, for, e.g., China, to Trotsky’s now utterly defunct workers’ state designation.

Where Trotsky had argued convincingly that if the USSR could be defined as a stable social formation and not a freak short-term once-only formation created for a short time by the swirling cross-currents of history, then it would have to be seen as a new form of socio-economic formation, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists, faced with hard facts, chose to break with Trotsky’s reasoning. The post-Trotsky Trotskyists insisted that states that arose by a conquering army subjugating the working class — in Yugoslavia and China for example — were working class dictatorships. Any state modelled on the USSR, in which the bourgeoisie was destroyed and replaced by a Stalinist bureaucracy, was a workers’ state, irrespective of the workers.

The Stalinist USSR had, said Trotsky’s self-designated “best disciples”, miraculously changed the direction of its social and class evolution, as Trotsky had seen them in the last years of his life. Stalinism in the USSR and in the USSR’s clones across an additional sixth of the world, was now “in transition to socialism”.

In this way, Trotsky’s ideas, proclaimed as “official” orthodox Trotskyism, were turned on their head, inside out and upside down. Socialism in one country — or “socialism in a number of backward countries”, was proclaimed to be the vindication of the “permanent revolution” of Trotsky. The Stalinists had in spite of themselves been forced to carry out Trotsky’s programme. Leaders of the neo-Trotskyist “Fourth International”, Pierre Frank, for example, proclaimed Mao and Ho Chi Minh and Tito, unconsciously to be Trotsky’s political legatees, not Stalinists!

The evolution of the “official”, “orthodox” Trotskyism shows that

the complex of problems — the nature of statified economy, of the ruling elite, of this system’s place in history and of its relationship to capitalism was capable of a very wide variety of answers and of many permutations and combinations of the elements that made up the answers. There was a great freedom and scope for whatever answer sympathy, mood, impression or revulsion indicated to you. The post-Trotsky Trotskyist workers’ state label was only a way of calling these states post-capitalist and progressive.

Because of the importance of the foregoing, it is worthwhile to schematically nail down exactly what was changed in “mainstream” “official Trotskyism”. It was, we will see, also incorporated in Cliff’s state capitalism.

1. The idea used by Trotsky from 1937, against demands to abandon the workers’ state idea, that workers’ state or not, the nationalised economy of the USSR was progressive, was now used to wipe out most of the pre-1940 Trotskyism. For eastern Europe in the 1940s, China or North Vietnam in the ’50s or Cuba in the ’60s, Stalinist statism was, it would be argued — by Ernest Mandel, for example — progressive because it shielded the economy from the world market and the dictates of the untrammelled law of value, which would have kept those states as mere suppliers of raw material to the advanced countries and hindered their economic development. Stalinist planning, which Trotsky had from the beginning called chaos and anarchy, multiplied by the subjectivism and ignorance of the totalitarian bureaucracy, was now allotted an enormously progressive historical role.

More: for these ideas to make any sense at all capitalism had to be seen as Trotsky saw it in the ’30s, as a system in historical reflux and terminal decline. Trotsky’s picture of capitalism in the ’30s was one-sided and exaggerated even then, but world capitalism was indeed in tremendous decline in the ’30s. The idea that Stalinism was progressive in the USSR and was the only way to develop backward countries was propounded now in a world where capitalism was experiencing a long, long economic expansion, and in which whole new areas of the world were drawn into fully capitalist relations. The verdict of history does not support the idea that Stalinist state slave-driving was the most effective way of developing backward countries.

2. The Stalinists’ basic programmatic idea, “socialism in one country”, was in its fundamental assumptions incorporated into post-Trotsky Trotskyism. The USSR’s claim to great economic progress was accepted. The new “Trotskyism” — codified at the 3rd World Congress in 1951, which was in fact the first congress of a political current new in “Trotskyism” — minimised such things as the contribution of slave labour and an atomised, driven working class to Stalinist progress. Trotsky’s early political objection to “socialism in one country”, that it implied no revolution other than that of 1917 for the whole historical period that it would take the USSR to “catch up” was deemed to be outmoded by the fact of new “revolutions” (Yugoslavia, China, etc.), the expansion of the USSR post World War Two and the status of the USSR as one of the world’s nuclear-armed great powers.

Stalin had, they now decided, built a historically viable socio-economic formation that could compete with capitalism, and with increasing success, for as long as the workers’ revolution was delayed in the advanced capitalist countries. And the old arguments against “socialism in one country”? It was, they (Ernest Mandel, for example) said, no longer one country, but a cluster of countries! Most, though not all, of them — Czechoslovakia and East Germany — were backward: yet they were now seen as evolving toward socialism. Socialism was — “for now” — evolving not out of advanced capitalism and as its spawn and replica, but as capitalism’s competitor, moving “from the periphery to the centre”.

Conflicts with the capitalist states would force even the big Stalinist parties in Europe — France, Italy — to take power. Trotsky’s fear of bureaucratic counter-revolution was also outmoded: the bureaucracy was committed to nationalised property. Russian and its allies were strong against international capitalism; so were the liberation movements in the colonies. Stalinism was stabilised, expanding and developing economically — “in transition to socialism”.

The “actually existing revolution” was a matter of “one, two, many socialisms in one country”. None of this — even if they were deformed and degenerated workers’ states — made sense in terms

of the Marxism of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. On an international scale, it bore more than a passing resemblance to the vision of Michael Bakunin in the First International and after about the effective movement for revolution coming from the social fringes and the social depths — not from the proletariat of advanced capitalism, on the basis of the best achievements of that capitalism, but now on an international scale from the “wretched of the earth” on the edges of capitalism.

A “political” revolution — now usually defined as something far more shallow than Trotsky had defined it — was, of course still necessary in the USSR. But China? When it decided in 1955 that China was a workers’ state, the SWP/USA said yes; the Mandel-Pablo group, no until 1969. Yugoslavia? No. Vietnam? No. Cuba? No. The result was chronic instability and a rabbit-like fecundity in generating competing groups.

3. For all practical purposes Stalinism was, without acknowledgement, accepted as the next, or probably the next, progressive stage in backward countries, in the space pre-1917 socialists had given to the bourgeois revolution in backward countries. The inescapable tendency of support for Third World revolutionary Stalinists was to write Third World Stalinist revolutions into Trotskyism as a necessary, or anyway probably inescapable, first stage. The different tendencies varied in their crassness about this and in their proportion of delusion (Maoism, Castroism is *not* Stalinist) to crassness. The expansion of Stalinism in any new area was accepted as historically progressive as against any other possibility except working class power.

4. The new post-Trotsky workers’ state theory was in its essentials identical to the ideas of Trotsky’s make-weight antagonist in 1939, Bruno Rizzi, who held that both Stalinism and fascism were all part of a great historically progressive — though unfortunately harsh and brutal — bureaucratic and collectivist world wide revolution. They had much in common with the perspectives of the Rizzi-ite James Burnham (who had in 1939 argued against Trotsky that capitalism had more or less been restored in the USSR: see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*) in his very widely circulated 1941 book, *The Managerial Revolution*. The neo-Trotskyists pasted Trotsky’s terminology, like a well-known label slapped on a bottle of bootleg whisky, over their version of Bruno Rizzi’s and 1941-James Burnham’s theory, and applied it to Stalinism. They themselves had defined the new Stalinist states of Eastern Europe as fascistic and reactionary, at their second World Congress (April and May 1948). They were under no illusions about *what* they were; in late 1948-9 they just reclassified them. “Workers’ state” came to indicate neither working class self-rule, nor, as in Trotsky’s degenerated workers’ state, some supposed remnant of a workers’ revolution, but that *Stalinism* was progressive.

5. Even in their own terms, Pablo-Mandel never produced a coherent theory to cover all the Stalinist states. They retained a variant of Trotsky’s programme for the USSR and its direct clones; but it was diluted, qualified by all the changes above, and essentially an afterthought, something for the future: the USSR, etc were progressive and progressing; were stable and in a new bureaucratic equilibrium; the bureaucrats’ USSR, as both model and source of material help, was not, or not consistently, hindering other Stalinist revolutions, but helping them, if only by acting as a counterweight to the USA.

In sum, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists answered the questions posed by the Stalinist conundrum in this way. Stalinism, though it could be better and needed stern remodelling by the working class, was progressive; it was post-capitalist, in transition to socialism; it was the “wave of the future” at least in the backward countries (and for Michel Pablo in the early ‘50s everywhere, perhaps for “centuries of degenerated workers’ states”, as he tentatively put it); it was to be supported against capitalism, even though its triumph would extirpate liberty and every vestige of a labour movement, lock the proletarians of capitalism in a totalitarian vice, and drive them like slaves.

The post-Trotsky “orthodox” Trotskyists accommodated to the survival and expansion of Stalinism by turning all of Trotsky’s ideas and perspectives into their opposite. Like a civilian population fooling an invader, they turned all the road signs in the wrong direction. Except the invader was already inside their heads in the form of false

ideas about Russia. They turned the signs around to fool *themselves*! If Stalin had emptied the old forms and old words and terms of socialism of their old content, refilling the old socialist wine bottles with poison and corrosive acid, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists imported the basic Stalinist counterfeits of socialism into the camp of the rearguard of Bolshevism. It was the ultimate ideological triumph of Stalinism.

IX. The other Trotskyists: the Workers’ Party

BUT there were other Trotskyists — those who had in ‘39-‘40 opposed Trotsky. Before we discuss the theory of state capitalism Tony Cliff developed in 1948, we need to discuss the other Trotskyists (Max Shachtman, etc.) who in the last year of Trotsky’s life and throughout the 1940s, logically and systematically developed in their analysis of world politics what was, on the evidence of Trotsky’s last articles, and despite the fierce polemics he had hurled at their troublesome heads (collected in the one-sided and misrepresentational 1942 book, *In Defence of Marxism*) the real logic of Trotsky’s position. Explicitly, they followed through on his political innovations of September-October 1939 and in the last six months of his life when he wrote “The USSR in War” and “Again and Once More” and the “Communist International and the GPU”, accepting for the first time the theoretical possibility that the USSR could be seen as it was and as it had been for a decade as a new form of class society, “bureaucratic collectivism”.*

From the split in the SWP (April 1940), or a bit before it, Trotsky resumed the trajectory of the ideas he had been following in “The USSR in War” and “Again...” The violent polemics against Shachtman and Burnham — which his “disciples” will fraudulently turn into his legacy, by suppressing for 30 years much that he wrote at the same time and after — are, if his work from the *Revolution Betrayed* (1936) to his death is depicted as a straight line, only a short violent blip. At the end, in an article dated 17 August 1940, 3 days before he was struck down, Trotsky described the leaders of the Communist International parties as people aspiring to be in their countries what the Russian bureaucrats are in theirs. Even during the faction fight, Trotsky’s more public writings on Poland and Finland are closer to what Shachtman was saying than to what Cannon and Goldman were saying.

Those who in 1939-early ‘40s fought Trotsky in the name of a democratic response to the USSR invasion of Finland and what they saw as the better extrapolations from his own ideas (see *Fate of the Russian Revolution*) elaborated during the ‘40s a viewpoint radically different from that of the official Trotskyists, with whom they interacted continuously until the end of the decade, and later.

Yet the tendency that formed the Workers’ Party in April 1940 was thrust before its time half-formed into independent existence. Some of its members — James Burnham (who ceased to be a member almost immediately), Joseph Carter, Hal Draper and others had long been at odds with Trotsky over the idea that Russia was any sort of workers’ state. Before the dispute about how to respond to the Stalinist invasion of Poland and Finland, they had had no *political* differences with Trotsky. The USSR, whatever it was, was progressive *vis à vis* capitalism, they said, and therefore it should be defended. Trotsky, while asserting that the USSR was a degenerated workers state, virtually conceded after 1937 that the precise class character could be left in abeyance provided there was agreement on such political questions.

The most important of the Workers’ Party leaders, Shachtman, and Martin Abern, agreed with Trotsky’s degenerated workers’ state framework. The sharpest presentation of the anti-workers’ state position in the 1939 dispute was made by Trotsky himself, using the unknown “Bruno Rizzi” and his unknown work as a theatrical mask that allowed Trotsky himself to play more than one role. Rizzi’s gen-

* In October 1939 he defended himself from the charge that such an idea was a “revision” of Marxism. His much misquoted charge in the subsequent faction fight of “revisionism” was directed not at the idea of “bureaucratic collectivism”, but at the position that the USSR was a society with no ruling class. Max Shachtman was a workers’ statist with undisguised “doubts” (as was Trotsky!). In October Trotsky argued in effect, that the bureaucratic collectivists in the party, Joseph Carter, Hal Draper and others were as good Marxists as anyone else.

eral ideas are not summarised or discussed by Trotsky at all, only his view that the USSR is a new form of class society. This, literally, was Trotsky debating with himself, and, against "Bruno Rizzi", arguing with what he saw as the only viable alternative to the workers' state position.*

While his orthodox disciples counterposed Trotsky's concrete interim conclusions as dogma to Trotsky's method, which, in his hands, had led him by August 1940 quite a way beyond the "Orthodox" positions of late 1939 and early 1940, the heretics adopted both Trotsky's spirit and his methods. What Trotsky wrote in "The Communist International and the GPU" — that the CPs were incipient Stalinist state bureaucracies — would come to be seen by the "disciples" as one of the greatest heresies of the Workers' Party/Independent Socialist League. Nothing but the reconceptualisation of the USSR as it was, which Trotsky had indicated, and roughed out, could save them from this fate. For the "disciples", nothing did save them.

What the split bestowed on the Workers' Party was the freedom to follow the impulses that had led them to recoil from Trotsky's subordination of the right to live of the Finnish labour movement, to the USSR and its defence**, and thus the freedom to follow Trotsky's own trajectory unhindered by religiosity towards Trotsky's conclusions.

In 1941 they decided that the USSR was a new form of class society, bureaucratic collectivism. They did not mistake the literal transcription and litany-like repetition of Trotsky's words for their proper work of *translating* and adopting revolutionary socialist politics to reality.

The Workers' Party saved itself and rational revolutionary politics. They kept out of the hole Trotsky's too-faithful followers dug themselves into after Trotsky's death. The precondition for what they did was that they organised themselves as a democratic collective,*** with freedom to explore, discuss and argue politics and Marxist theory.

It fell to the Workers' Party to draw the conclusions about the USSR Trotsky had indicated. I am not arguing here that nobody but Trotsky ever had an idea on these questions — Carter, Draper and others preceded him. I do say that the record proves that the Workers' Party absorbed and developed the ideas and trajectory of Trotsky's last period — which the "disciples" suppressed in themselves, just as for decades they buried the articles in which they were expressed. This entire dimension of Trotsky's thinking on the level of theory fell to the inheritance of the Workers' Party, which developed and augmented it.

Before the USSR was tested in war, the Workers' Party made the reconceptualisation Trotsky had refused to make — "yet". They made it on the only lines possible, and these had already been marked out by Trotsky (and by others from other tendencies before Trotsky) — bureaucratic collectivism. This meant that they made the changes as a development within the weighty Bolshevik tradition, and within Trotsky's defence and development of Bolshevism: in short, to repeat, they developed Trotsky in the direction Stalin's assassin had stopped him developing. To do so of course, they themselves had to analyse and think and synthesise, that is, act as living Marxists. Elements in the Workers' Party thought things through unevenly. Shachtman kept as close as he could to Trotsky for most of the '40s. For a while, he argued that the bureaucratic collectivist USSR remained progressive and should be defended. Others argued that it was reactionary and should not be defended.****

But these were free and open debates by people liberated from the compulsion to defend "Trotsky's line". The Workers' Party heretics analysed the world around them. The difference between them and the "orthodox" as it is preserved in the files of their weekly papers (*Militant* and *Labor Action*) and monthly mag-

azines (*New International* and *Fourth International*) of the '40s, is extraordinary. The intellectual and political decline that quickly set in amongst the "orthodox", self-condemned to the role of rationalising scholastics about and, increasingly, apologists for, the USSR, (often by a shameful silence about many aspects of the USSR) is as startling as it is terrifying and tragic: — it is like watching a strong and vigorous person crouching and cringing before an alter, anxiously muttering and mumbling and fiddling with a string of rosary beads. These were serious revolutionaries, some of them amongst the very best of those in the USA who responded to the call of the Russian Revolution. Yet the logic of their position *vis à vis* Stalinism compelled them to submit to the all-shaping totalitarian economism (nationalisation is a workers' state) for Russia, and then to extend it to other countries. It made them glory in the march of Stalin's army to the centre of Germany, raping, pillaging and enslaving all the peoples they imprisoned within the widening circle of military steel and concrete that marked the farthest extend of Stalin's Empire.

In contrast, the Workers' Party analysed and commented freely about the world as it was. Where nations were being overrun and enslaved, they could say so in plain English and respond with clear Communist politics. They could modify their ideas in response to unfolding evidence. The majority of them when they adopted bureaucratic collectivism as a definition had defined the USSR as Trotsky had, as a freak formation; Russia's survival, expansion and later Yugoslav, Chinese, etc., replications, forced them to modify that. Those who had at first seen bureaucratic collectivism as progressive were forced to abandon that: indeed, to face the fact that it was always nonsense. As eager as the disciples that World War Two should generate revolution, they nonetheless could look at the realities in a way that the orthodox could not.

The basic difference came to be that between two sharply distinct ways of approaching the world. One was a formation that was increasingly religious in its ways — reason in thrall to dogma: dogma outside reason, not subject to review by reason; theory and theorising that served preconceived and unimpeachable prior conclusions; real observation of the world as it was subverted by commitment to a preordained view of what was and was not, and what would be; a habit of relating to the here and now by way of reading back from an unrealised future, etc.

The other was a tendency that retained and used the capacity to reasons critically even about its own dearest hopes, wishes and preconceptions — and about itself. Politically, the Workers' Party remained a living tendency; the other slowly died, destroying many of the key ideas of the 1940 Trotskyism as it floundered about.

For example: the idea that for socialists the working class is the subject to history and, further, that working-class self-awareness and general understanding, and working class organisation in a revolutionary party are basic pillars of the outlook Trotsky represented. But if it is a dogma that revolution will certainly be the result of the Second World War, even though the working class movement, and the revolutionary movement, has been smashed and destroyed — what then? Either you face the fact that, in these conditions, working-class revolution cannot be, or is very unlikely to be, the first result of the war; or you climb up the ladders of mystification and teleology, and imagine a revolution that can somehow dispense with all the subjective prerequisites of working class revolution as understood by Marxists.

That is what the orthodox did in the war years and later in different ways by accepting other revolutions as working class and non-working class forces as surrogate for the working class for long after. In contrast, the Workers' Party could allow itself to think about the realities of the world — for the immediate prospects of socialism bleak realities.

* And here his arguments are often fantastic. The idea that for decades exerted most influence by way of inhibition was essentially fantastic: why, if the USSR was a new form of class society did this very backward country show its own future to, for example, the very advanced USA? In Trotsky it depended on the idea of an unbroken capitalist decline and on the idea of a succession of world wars that would bring civilisation to an end. Why was it necessary to rule it out as impossible that in that process of years and probably decades, the working class could take power in any of the developed countries?

** Trotsky believed from early December 1939 to March/April that the British and French would intervene in Finland, and that the USSR would be drawn into the war: he was not willing to change policy on the USSR before what he believed was the test of war.

*** In contrast, "the disciples" put their half of the pre April 1940 SWP organisationally on a stifling emergency war footing. The war would end, but the regime would get tighter and more stifling over decades. If James P Cannon himself had lived and retained his faculties a decade, or so longer, he would very probably have been expelled when the SWP's older layer were expelled in the '80s.

**** The precise details of who said what first, or who got this or that perspective right within this current is, it seems to me, matter of concern more to scholars than politicians. It can't seriously be disputed that through the '40s, the most important work was Shachtman's. In so far as arguments for the "real" primacy of Carter or Draper are, perhaps subconsciously, an attempt to disassociate the tradition from the Shachtman of the late '60s and early '70s, it is, I think, misconceived.

The orthodox "disciples" could wrap delusions around themselves for shelter. Seeing Stalinism as the first stage of victory for socialism left those Trotsky did not reduce to despair and desertion, with the ambivalently comforting idea that "socialism", the "world revolution" was, somehow, moving forward. The WP/ISL had no such encouragement. Just as their ties to Russia distinguished the Stalinists, however right-wing their policies of a given moment might be, from the social democrats, support by the orthodox for the Russian "workers' state", etc., erected a powerful barrier against conciliation with their own ruling class. Seeing the realities as they were, the others had no such barrier, but relied on an equation of "Washington" and "Moscow" as imperialist equal evils; a view that, for many of them, it became increasingly difficult to sustain.*

X. One, two, many state capitalisms

THE SWP myth is that in 1948 Cliff's theory of "Bureaucratic State Capitalism" cut through the impasse of the Workers' State theory and the futility of Bureaucratic Collectivism. It is usually presented as the first or only state capitalist theory. In Tony Cliff's recent *Trotskyism After Trotsky* for example. In fact even within the Trotskyist current, state capitalism was anything but novel.

State capitalism as an account of the USSR was as old as the USSR. The SPGB had called the USSR incipiently state capitalist from 1918 and "state capitalist" from 1929-30. The social-democrat Karl Kautsky had sporadically talked of state capitalism — in *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920, for example: "Today... both state and capitalist bureaucracy have merged into one system... industrial capitalism has now become state capitalism." Later, in *Social Democracy versus Communism*, he wrote of Lenin, "utilising his state power for the erection of his state capitalism." Kautsky thought that without democratic control of the state, the workers find themselves with respect to the problem of control of the means of production in the same situation which confronts the workers in capitalist society. In the USSR too it would be necessary for the producers "to expropriate the expropriators".

The ultra-left Communist Anton Pannekoek thought that though the new ruling class in the USSR was not a bourgeoisie, because they only "owned collectively", the ruling class was a bureaucracy and the system "state instead of private capitalism". Karl Korsch, the German Communist, who broke with the Communist International in the late mid-20s, believed that there was a worldwide movement from capitalism to state capitalism.

The followers of the Italian communist Amadeo Bordiga developed a theory according to which the USSR was state capitalist because "far from being planned the Russian economy flounders in the midst of the anarchy of the market... the Russian economy is 'planned' by nothing other than the world market!" The Bordigists were and are serious revolutionaries, but ultra-left sectarians.

The Paul Mattick school of ultra-left sectarianism also glossed over all detailed questions of historic perspective in sweeping generalisations, but from another angle. Bolshevism was "one aspect of the world-wide trend towards a 'fascist' world economy" (*Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, p.71). In these theories, what made the USSR state-capitalist was not market forces but the authoritarian plan imposed on the workers; in its planning the USSR simply represented a more complete form of what was emerging

in the West.

Of the many attempts to argue that the USSR was state capitalist before 1948, none of them solved the problem of how to locate the USSR in the historic perspective of capitalist development. They all ended up either postulating a state capitalism disconnected from any broad historic perspective of capitalist development, or they resorted to "convergence" theories according to which the differences between the USSR and the West were secondary details, fast being obliterated by a converging historical evolution.

There were state capitalists in the Siberian Left Opposition, and this was known in the west from Anton Ciliga's account of life in the USSR's labour camps (published in an abbreviated version by the Labour Book Club in 1940). Discussion of state capitalism was a feature of the broader left. In 1938 the American magazine *Modern Quarterly* published a state capitalist study of the USSR by Dr Ryan Worrel, a British Trotskyist; the ILP published a shortened version of this article in 1939. Rudolf Hilferding replied to it. The majority leadership of the RCP, in the person of Jock Haston, played with the idea that Russia was state-capitalist in 1946-7, and Cliff, who started out after he arrived in Britain in September 1946 arguing against them, took over and developed their ideas. The mere state capitalist label conveyed very little.

Versions of this school of thought were advanced by groups within the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s, by Chaulieu [Castoriades] in France, by Munis in Mexico, and by C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya in the US. All these currents became ultra-left and sectarian. The most talented of these writers were James and Dunayevskaya.

James and Dunayevskaya developed their ideas as members of the Worker's Party. (Much of their description of the USSR was similar to Shachtman's). Their chief difference with Shachtman was that Shachtman (until the mid-40s) argued that the USSR was progressive compared to capitalism, and that Stalinism was radically different from and opposed to capitalism. Raya Dunayevskaya published two big articles on Russian state capitalism in the *New Internationalist* in 1942 and a third part in 1946.

The evolution of workers' state theory into mystification was paralleled by the evolution of state capitalist theories.

By the late 1940s all the currents — workers' state; bureaucratic collectivist; state capitalist — of Trotskyism thought had in one way or another to come to terms with the fact that Stalinism was a relatively stable, war-tempered expanding system. It could no longer be seen as a transitory, hybrid, short-term historical aberration. Its capitalist character was, to say the least, not as obvious as its all-dominating "statism". Was it state capitalism produced by the evolution of plain capitalism, according to the classic theoretical model of Frederick Engels and others, discussed by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* and dismissed by Trotsky as by other Marxist before him as in practice impossible because such a system would be so close to socialism that inevitably it would suggest and foster democratic movements for its own negation — as Trotsky put it, it would make the state "too tempting an object for social revolution"?

Any argument that the USSR was state capitalist, in that sense faced, in the facts about the USSR, insurmountable difficulties. A strong feature of the USSR's "socialism in one country" Stalinism was its systematic severance of links with the world market and its all-dom-

*It is not that the Workers' Party was right on everything. In my opinion the Cannonites were right about support for China's war of liberation against Japan, despite the presence of US troops there (perhaps a hundred thousand of them by '46, when they withdrew); the Workers' Party was wrong. In the so-called Proletarian War Policy, the SWP/USA was right, at least for Britain and France. Shachtman tore Cannon's exposition of this policy to shreds; nonetheless it was true that there was for British workers after the fall of France an enormous difference between the fascist regime which German victory would bring and bourgeois democracy. The Proletarian War Policy was, as expounded by the SWP/USA and the WIL/RCP in Britain, a confused mystification that rationally added up to a policy of *revolutionary defensism*. Revolutionary defensism means that the revolutionaries want to prosecute the war but do not abate their struggle to become the ruling class in order to do so. That is what the Trotskyists, or most of them, said amounted to. To reject this because Britain and Germany were both imperialist is far too abstract to allow the enormous and decisive differences that in fact existed for the working class and the labour movement to be taken into account. The so-called proletarian war policy was right; but to not say clearly what you are nevertheless saying, is no working-class virtue. In any case, I think the Workers Party was wrong, at least for Britain. But these were political mistakes by a tendency that retained the *sine qua non* of revolutionary politics — reasoning freely and honestly about the world, and democratic organisational structures compatible with reason as the basis of revolutionary politics.

Not all the Workers' Party were bureaucratic collectivists. A sizeable minority were state capitalists, convinced by the arguments of CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya (who began by logically saying Russia was just a fascist state and in 1947 rejoined the SWP/USA which was pledged to support and defend the "fascist state capitalism"!). This tendency in the Workers' Party, known by the cultist name of "Johnson-Forest" (pen/party names of James and Dunayevskaya) had shared all the mystifications of the Cannonites about imminent revolution, despite the state of the labour movement and the working class, and some peculiar to themselves. James is now very well known and has been the subject of a number of books. Leaving aside the question of state capitalism for the moment, if James were to be judged on his political positions throughout the 1940s, it would be very hard to say anything good about him. When Johnson-Forest rejoined the SWP/USA they took a sizeable chunk of the Workers' Party with them — a fifth or a quarter, perhaps — and thus dealt the Workers' Party a serious blow. They remained in the SWP/USA virtually silent — they did publish a big position document, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, in 1950 — for about four years. Then they suddenly left the SWP, throwing a megalomaniacal statement over their collective shoulder. The nearest thing to the unreason, mysticism, cultism, pontifical pronouncements and dull philosophising you find in the Johnson-Forest documents and articles of the forties, is the British SLI/WRP in the late '60s and early '70s.

inating drive for self-sufficiency. Trotsky considered that aspect of Stalin's USSR to be outright reactionary. Not all links with the world market were in fact cut, but there was a comprehensive drive to autarky. There was a rigid state monopoly of foreign trade. On the economic facts, the USSR could not be analysed as a giant "firm" in the international capitalist market because on no level could the economic movements and deployment of resources inside the USSR reasonably be construed as being all of one mechanism with the movements of international capitalism.*

Whatever name the Stalinist states are given, this — or "high Stalinism", anyway — is predominantly a system of overweening state power, a system based on the most self-contradictory and, in the longer scale of history, most untenable of all possible socio-economic systems: not a self-regulating, but a "planned" economy under the absolute rule of an uncontrolled state, whose ruling class, its organisers and beneficiaries, cannot, for self-preservation, allow any of the prerequisites of planning — free exchange of information or opinions, honest reporting, or self-rule and self-administration either for society as a whole or for any part of it. Therefore it is in all its variants as Trotsky pointed out for the USSR in 1933 — a system of bureaucratic arbitrariness, accident, whim and subjectivism — a system without any accurate social and economic means of accounting.

Thrown back intellectually to a pre-Renaissance world of state and pidgin-Marxist state-church authority and scholasticism, it is economically a world before the invention of reliable and objective techniques of socio-economic accounting; it even lacks reliable arithmetic.

Take not the USSR, but Mao's China, for which a case in the older Marxist terms could be made for "state capitalism": the pre-Stalinist (though in some respects Stalinist-aping and Stalinist trained) Chiang Kai-Shek regime had "nationalised" much of industry. Mao led a so-called "bloc of four classes", including sections of the "national bourgeoisie", to power, and gave back industry to the "national bourgeoisie". Half a decade later, when the capitalists were pushed aside by the state, they were given 7% per year interest on their capital. They were drawing it, despite all the enormous convulsions of the years between, at the end of the 1960s; it was abolished then, but restored later. State capitalism? Yes, perhaps, in isolation. But it was only one part, and very much the subordinate part, of Mao's China.

In 1958 the Great Leap Forward a less immediately bloody variation on Stalin's forced collectivisation and industrialisation drive after 1929 was decreed. Enormous masses of people were mobilised by the state and sent to build dams and other public works. Agricultural collectivisation was carried through in conditions where the techniques and machinery that would have made it an instrument of greater agricultural productivity simply did not exist. The main "economy of scale" consisted in the fall in the cost of peasant subsistence achieved by large-scale communal feeding. Vast numbers were directed by the state, in defiance of the most elementary rules of science, technology and economics, to build "steel furnaces" in their backyards and start making industrial-quality steel. Immense, devastating social waste was the result of this arbitrariness and bureaucratic subjectivism by the all-powerful rulers of the totalitarian state.

Within three years, perhaps as many as 30 million people died as a result of this fomented chaos and waste, and then famine: the giant state overturned Chinese society as an overgrown man might kick over an ant-hill or a dolls' house.

One faction of the bureaucracy, led by Liu Shao-Chi and Deng Xiaoping, held the Maoists in check for four or five years after this fiasco, and then the "Cultural Revolution" was launched. Rampaging "revolutionary youth", ultimately controlled by Lin Piao's "Red Army", wreaked cultural, social, economic and educational havoc. Higher education was abolished for over a decade!

The idea that this was an economically regulated system, and not one of overwhelming totalitarian state power crazily out of control, cannot be sustained on the facts; nor is this whole period wiped off the records by the present Chinese economy of totalitarian state-private capitalism, seemingly evolving towards the development of plain capitalism. The fact that neither "workers' state" nor "state capitalism" made sense of full-blown Stalinism points to the rational alternative — the development and correction of Trotsky's picture of Stalinist economics: the work the Workers' Party did after 1940.

Those who wanted to argue a state capitalist thesis after the Sec-

ond World War had, given the wars' verdict on Stalinism, special problems. They had to respond to the other Trotskyism that had evolved after 1940 and had rectified Trotsky's errors on the USSR. Those who used state capitalism to hack a way out of the contradictions of workers' statism were as much under the pressure of Trotsky's dire warnings against Max Shachtman as the workers statist. They were naturally unwilling to face the idea that the USSR was something new. The workers' statist crammed it into one strange terminology; the state capitalists, including Tony Cliff into another.

The pressure of both Trotsky's formal workers' statist legacy and of the Workers Party's "bureaucratic-collectivist" arguments account for the development in the 1940s of "state-capitalist" theories of a special sort, based on analogies, special definitions and redefinitions of words and substantial meanings — what might be termed "esoteric meaning" or "prophetic insight" theories. In Cliff these were buttressed by a weighty academicism.¹²

XI. Tony Cliff's revolution in science

TONY Cliff's "Russia: a Marxist Analysis" is impressively loaded with statistics and quotations from the Marxist classics, and with numerous citations of Russian language sources. It was published in June 1948 as an internal bulletin of the RCP (he said in an introduction that it had been completed some months earlier). One third of the book is given over to an examination of socio-economic relations in the USSR. This proves only that the USSR is not a socialist society. It could lead to degenerated workers' state, bureaucratic collectivist or state capitalist conclusions.

The theoretical part of the study is much less weighty. Cliff's theory of state capitalism was in fact rooted in the politics of the British RCP majority — Haston, Grant — whose other main offshoot was the strange workers' state theories of the Militant/Socialist Party. Cliff shared the same basic ideas and translated them into a state capitalist "dialect", building on earlier work by Jock Haston.

The essential points I will argue are these:

a. The perspectives for the USSR which Cliff purveyed have been proved to be as wrong as those of the most muddled of workers' statist.

b. Despite the fact that for Cliff the USSR was "state capitalism" and not a degenerated workers' state, the logic of "socialism in one country" was accepted by Cliff, as much as by the post-Trotsky Trotskyists.

c. In Cliff's state capitalist theory of Russia, the blind alley character of the whole society which its collapse has demonstrated, is simply inexplicable.

d. Cliff's argument that state capitalism was more effective as a social-economic formation and as a way to develop a backward society was as nonsensical as its workers' statist analogue.

e. Cliff's theory was on the level of theory a pastiche of scholasticism and dogmatism: it was as bankrupt on the level of perspective as degenerated and deformed workers' statist theory.

f. The arbitrariness and subjectivism of Cliff's political conclusions from his theorising can be seen as the paradigm of all the SWP's other politics and organisational practices.

g. It was a procrustean cramming, cutting and stretching theory, inorganic and, as theory, sterile: an inert prop to be moved at will about the stage, its logical lines of development chopped off, and bits stuck on, to suit Cliff's convenience.

h. The original theory has been chopped and changed so much that there is nothing but the name left; sects change their doctrines more easily, as someone said, than they change their names!

This article is centrally concerned with the place of Tony

* Trotsky's arguments against "state capitalism" were never of the formalist "not-enough-market-regulation" type, but always of a concrete and historical type, aiming to show that the Stalinist system is located in history somewhere radically distant from capitalism.

¹² And by a considerable degree of intellectual swanking. His references to Lenin are all to the Russian *Collected Works*. Quite a lot of Lenin was in English in 1948 and by the mid 1960s his *Collected Works* were in English: in the various editions of Russia, a Marxist analysis since, references direct the reader only to the Russian. Swank: authority-building. Yet in fact every one of the impressive array of quotations from the Marxist classics in Cliff's book were taken from either Trotsky or Shachtman, with no indication of this, and had been the common coin of the Workers' Party discussion in the first half of the '40s.

Cliff's theory of state capitalism in the evolution of post-Trotsky-Trotskyism. His place in this galaxy, on examination, will prove to be very surprising. For this purpose the best place to start is in the last section of chapter 1 of *Russia: a Marxist analysis* — "Russia, an Industrial Giant" — where Cliff reveals that he harbours startling sentiments on the USSR.

"Despite bureaucratic mismanagement... the efforts of self-sacrifice of the people raised Russia... to the position of a great industrial power... from being, in terms of industrial output, first in Europe and second in the world" (Cliff doesn't notice that Europe is in ruins? He doesn't think it can be rebuilt? He thinks Russia can maintain this leading position and better it? Evidently yes!)

Russia "has stepped out of her sleepy backwardness to become a modern, powerful, industrialised advanced country. The bureaucracy has thus earned as much tribute as Marx and Engels paid to the bourgeoisie. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals... the bourgeoisie... draws all ... nations into civilisation. It has created enormous cities... and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colonial productive forces than have all preceding generations together."

This is no isolated note. Elsewhere in the book Cliff will imagine Stalin speaking in the words of an ancient Mesopotamian king:

"I have mastered the secrets of the rivers for the benefit of man... I have led the waters of the rivers into the wilderness; I have filled the parched ditches with them... I have watered the desert plains; I have brought them fertility and abundance, I have formed them into habitations of joy."

Russian Stalinism is on the high road of social development. It is, Cliff argues, in transition towards socialism. The USSR, thought no workers state is not a freak (as in Trotsky or Max Shachtman for most of the 1940s); it is not barbarism, not social regression, not a historical cul de sac...

Not least surprising is the emotional tone of what he writes, which comes after a third of the book has described Stalinist horror after Stalinist horror. On one level Cliff seems to be as reconciled to contemporary Russian "Bureaucratic State Capitalism" and its historic mission as we are to the industrial revolution of the 19th century.

This is an astonishing verdict on Russian Stalinism's place in history to find in work by one who comes from Trotsky's tradition and in this work calls himself Trotsky's disciple. Plainly there is in it an immense psychological shift from the horror Trotsky articulated and, his increasing tendency to question even the USSR's progressiveness towards the end of his life; it is a verdict in sharp contrast not only with that of the Workers' Party but — written in late '47 and early '48 — it is even at sharp odds with the mood of the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel degenerated workers' statist — the big majority of the Fourth Internationalists — at that time.

At the April-May '48 Second World Congress, of the reconstructed Fourth International, they passed a motion that the East European Stalinist states were "state capitalist and reactionary" in the spirit of Trotsky against Urbahns, and adopted a strikingly less than enthusiastic stance towards the USSR; they would only defend "what was left of the conquest of October" (implicitly, not much). They will come to terms with the survival and expansion of Stalinism, after June 1948, when Tito and Stalin fall out and within a year, will be reinterpreting Russia and Stalinism and the Eastern European states in a new light — without abandoning criticism etc — as "this stage" of the workers' revolution, representing historical progress in the mid-twentieth century.

Though he does not reach any such political conclusions, Cliff's state-capitalist idea has allowed him to be a pioneer amongst Trotskyists in the great seismic shift of 1947-9/50 towards "reconciliation" with Stalinism. How can this mix of stark class rejection and historical legitimisation be explained? By the fact that Cliff, the state capitalist, hatched out of the same political nest as those in the British Trotskyist organisation, the RCP, who would develop Militant's ideas on Stalinism.

To a considerable extent, the bold and positive exposition of

the achievements of the Stalinist bureaucracy is a riposte to the hawking and indecision on this question by Cannon-Pablo-Mandel and the majority of Trotskyists. These had been denounced by the RCP majority from the security of their own acceptance that Stalinism was stable and had made working class revolutions in all of Eastern Europe.

The Workers' Party and its co-thinkers had long ago rejected the whole workers' state notion (and the orthodox majority had seemed to be faltering and, when Cliff wrote, possibly on the road to the same conclusion).

Cliff was not alone here. Including the Workers' Party, the current stemming from the Russian Left Opposition of 1923 was by 1945-6 divided into three broad tendencies: those who rejected the idea that Stalinism had anything to do with the working class — these included both bureaucratic collectivists, and CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya state capitalists. At the opposite pole were those who had quickly come to terms with the idea that Stalinism was not a historical freak but a viable "progressive" historical formation that had Stalinised half of Europe; and that in the face of these facts, not Stalinism had to be reconceptualised along the lines Trotsky had suggested, but Trotskyism: these were on the level of theory followers of Bruno Rizzi and the James Burnham of 1941. In between, there was the vacillating majority, letting themselves be torn apart by contradictory impulses and theories.

In this, the British RCP majority, ancestors of Socialist Appeal, the Socialist Party and the SWP, played a singular if not quite a consistent role. They were by the end of the war amongst the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for the Russian Army, the "softest" on Stalinism. Then in 1946 the main leader of the organisation, Jock Haston, began to rethink the issues and the leading group decided that the USSR was state capitalist. That is how things stood when Cliff came to Britain in September 1946. He was a degenerated workers' statist and shared the views of the middle group that the Stalinist occupied states in Eastern Europe were state capitalist formations under the control of bourgeois states.

In the course of the discussion, the Haston-Grant-Lee grouping changed their minds yet again: Russia was a "Bonapartist workers state" and so were all the Eastern European Stalinist-ruled states. This was self-emancipation from the doubts and conundrums that continued to bemuse the others by way of political suicide. If the USSR could "revolutionise" half of Europe, creating as much as remained of the October revolution, what did that say about the USSR, about the character of "the epoch" etc. By finally and unceremoniously junking Trotsky's workers' state theory, and adopting a mirror-image bureaucratic collectivism — the USSR Stalinist state was a stable progressive formation — they called it Proletarian Bonapartism. They reversed all the evaluations and negative political, social and historical judgements of the Workers' Party. They were not the first to say this sort of thing — David Rousset, a future Gaullist MP — had in 1946 said that the Eastern European states were workers' states; Isaac Deutscher in 1945 had projected a Bonapartist revolutionary role for Stalin's armies

Harlem

From *A Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load

Or does it explode?

(in a series of articles in the left wing Labour weekly *Tribune*). But from 1947 the RCP majority became the champions within the Fourth International of this idea. It was their ideas — soon to become, in less crude, brutal and less truthful form, the dominant ideas of neo-Trotskyism — about Stalinism that Cliff “translated” in his theorising into the state capitalist dialect. That is the explanation for the astonishingly positive account of Russian state capitalism in history. The rest of the Trotskyist movement would not catch up with them for a while yet.*

XII. Cliff and Haston-Grant

THE most important point politically here is the remarkable extent to which Cliff’s picture of the USSR is shaped by the Haston-Grant culture of the RCP so that he is more appreciative of the great industrialising work of the Stalinist bureaucracy, more “optimistic” about the USSR’s further development under the bureaucracy, more accepting towards the USSR’s claims of “development in one country”, than the contemporary “orthodox Trotskyists.”

Again: of agricultural collectivisation and “primitive accumulation” Cliff says: “Stalin accomplished in a few hundred days what Britain took a few hundred years to do. The scale on which he did it and the success with which he carried it out... bear stern witness to the superiority of a modern industrial economy concentrated in the hands of the state, under the direction of a ruthless bureaucracy.” (p 46)

Where Trotsky saw the bureaucracy as a gangrenous social scab, Cliff sees it as Grant and Haston have come to see it, though under another name. He rests much on analogy (the marsupial is the mammal!) “The historical mission of the bureaucracy is summed up in Lenin’s two postulates: increase in the productive forces of social labour and the socialisation of labour. On a world scale these conditions had already been fulfilled... In Russia the revolution got rid of the impediments to the development of the productive forces, put an end to the remnants of feudalism, built up a monopoly of foreign trade which protects the development of the productive forces of the country from devastating pressure of world capitalism, and also gave a tremendous lever to the development of the productive forces in the form of state ownership of the means of production”. This could be any devotee of the “progressive” USSR talking! “Under such conditions all the impediments to the historical mission of capitalism — the socialisation of labour, and the concentration of the means of production which are necessary prerequisites for the establishment of socialism and which the bureaucracy was able to provide are abolished. Post-October Russia stood before the fulfilment of the historical mission of the bourgeoisie.” (p 105). This is no barbarism or historical blind alley! Trotsky’s three options: world revolution or capitalist restoration and later, bureaucratic collectivism are all beside the point: restoration? It has been progressive capitalism all along...

Remember, Trotsky’s depiction of the destructive tendencies of a hypothetical state capitalism? Here it is replaced by the state capitalist USSR’s supposed economic progressiveness. Doesn’t the subsequent history indicate that Trotsky’s hypothetical state capitalist picture was close to reality? But Cliff, under state-capitalist labels, rejects that picture in favour of a flattened-out, almost caricatured version, of the “progressive economy” picture which Trotsky adduced as evidence that the USSR was *not* state capitalist!

Presumably Cliff was simultaneously influenced by the Haston-Grant culture in the RCP (which became Militant/Socialist Party) and took refuge in his own peculiar version of state capitalist theory because it seemed to him a way of conceding the “progressiveness” of Stalinism, yet retaining a guaranteed class

hostility to it, and not having to agree with Haston-Grant that the Stalinists could create new workers’ states.

For Cliff, Russian state capitalism comes out of the workers’ revolution, and could not exist without it!

He puts a question with the answer more than implied. “Can a workers revolution in a backward country isolated by triumphant international capitalism be anything but a point in the process of the development of capitalism, even if the capitalist class is abolished” (p106).**

He sums up. “...The first step the bureaucracy took with the subjective intentions of hastening the building of ‘socialism in one country’ became the foundation of the building of state capitalism.” And as we will see, according to Tony Cliff, they succeeded in outstripping monopoly capitalism on the road to the transition to socialism — in getting to the border, and in part beyond the borders of socialism.

He records that all the Marxist thinkers have regarded state capitalism as a theoretical possibility — capitalism develops so that the state organises for the capitalists, who continue to draw on bonds and debentures in proportion to their contribution to the common capitalist pool. The state would be a giant capitalist trust engaging in economic competition on a world scale. Equally, all Marxists believed that in practice capitalism could not actually evolve to that stage. Before the evolution from monopoly capitalism to full state capitalism, either the workers would have dispossessed the capitalists, or state capitalist competition would generate terrible imperialist wars and social decline.

Tony Cliff: “It is indubitable that individual capitalists through evolutionary development will in practice never arrive at the concentration of the entire social capital in one hand.”

Here Cliff bases himself on Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*, from which he quotes a long passage. For two reasons Trotsky, who accepts the theoretical possibility of state capitalism, considers it impossible in practice: “The contradictions among the proprietors themselves” (Trotsky); the fact that if the state were “universal repository of capitalist property the state would be too tempting an object for socialist revolution”. Cliff does not dwell on why the Russian state for those living in it is not “a tempting target”, that the state is all-powerful. That points in a different direction. For Cliff, as for Trotsky, state capitalism of this evolutionary sort is a theoretical but not a *real* possibility. It is a theoretical toy. It is the workers’ revolution which makes state capitalism possible!

While, Cliff says, in reality this *evolutionary* state capitalism is “impossible”, does that, he asks, “exclude the possibility that after a ruling working class is overthrown, not traditional capitalism but state capitalism is restored (sic).” What Cliff refers to has not necessarily anything to do with capitalism. That would have to be proved by analysing the resulting economy and its place in the world capitalist economy. He uses the idea that state capitalism, impossible as an evolution of capitalism, is made possible by a workers’ revolution that is then overthrown: “the revolutionary proletariat has already concentrated the means of production in one body”.

The first Five Year Plan was “the first time that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historical mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible. A quick accumulation of capital (sic) must put a burdensome pressure on the consumption of the masses, on their standard of living. Under such conditions, the bureaucracy, transformed into a personification of capital for whom the accumulation of capital is the be all and end all, must get rid of all remnants of workers’ control... must fit all social political life into a total mould... thus industrialisation and a technical revolution (“collectivisation”) in a backward country under conditions of siege transformed the bureaucracy... into a ruling class, into the manager of the general business of socialism.”

As a resumé of history this is Stalinist apologetics rooted in fatalism. Some of the horrors, the mass murder of millions and the ruins of much of agriculture for a generation or more, were rooted in the fact that it was *not* a technological revolution in agriculture; the technology was not ready... He dismisses the alternative working class course worked out and fought for by the Left Opposition.

Cliff argues that the bureaucracy is an exploitative ruling class,

* The late — and no doubt philistine — Gerry Healy used to tell the story like this: Ted Grant was a state capitalist and Cliff a workers’ statist. Few could understand what they were going on about. So the organisation decided to lock them in a room together until they had resolved their differences. When, after 48 hours, they unlocked the door and let them out, “they had convinced each other”!

** 15 years later (‘Deflected Permanent Revolution’) he will fit this to Stalinist led peasant armies doing it — exactly parallel to degenerated workers’ statist whose theory for this phenomenon is deformed workers’ states.



With Cliff the workers' revolution prepared the way for the most advanced of capitalisms

collectively owning the means of production. He concedes most of the arguments for rejecting the notion that the USSR is state capitalist; he then produces a series of arguments based on analogies, which he takes for identities, and on vulgar bourgeois economics. (He defines "capital" as plant and machinery; he defines competition not as competition of exchange values, but of use values [arms] held in reserve). Is the working class in the USSR a proletariat, free to sell its labour power on the market? Implicitly, Cliff answers, No. Is the internal economy of the "capitalist" USSR regulated by the law of value? He answers no here too. Is the USSR to be made (state) capitalist sense of, by being conceived of, as a giant firm with the same relationship to the world market as a big British firm might have to the British and other capitalist markets? He admits that here too, there is no basis for classifying the USSR as capitalist: its links with the world market are simply too weak to shape and dominate the USSR's economy. Is the ruling class a bourgeoisie? He is careful to explain that it is not. Is there, though, a bureaucracy which administers the economy, for a superannuated capitalist class drawing dividends? Nothing like that. In what he describes and concretely analyses Cliff is miles and miles away from anything previously conceived of as capitalism.

He could on the basis of his description go on (except for having defined the bureaucracy as a ruling class) like the RCP majority whose very positive account of the USSR he shares, using his state capitalist dialect and not theirs, to describe the USSR as a degenerated workers' state. Cliff is in Trotsky's tradition in all this. Trotsky had left a pretty thorough concrete analysis of the USSR. The well-known facts all the Trotskyists confronted could only with great violence now be construed as compatible with a workers' state theory — only if everything of "1940" Trotskyism but the idea that nationalised property was progressive, was abandoned, and acceptance that Stalin had been right about "socialism in one country" added. It required scarcely less violence to the facts to construe them as proof that the USSR was state capitalist.

The key historical explanation and argument Cliff deploys to "prove" Russia is state capitalist is that just as in theory capitalism could evolve organically to state capitalism and then be seized by the proletariat, so in reverse: a working class revolution does what capitalist evolution never can do, and creates a centralised econ-

omy — which is then seized. (He doesn't explain how it is seized by "state capitalists" except by the argument that the role the bureaucrats play in history is analogous to that of capitalism — ergo: it is capitalism). Only by way of "esoteric lore" theorising can the USSR be construed as state capitalist (or a workers' state). In fact it is plain, as we have seen that Cliff's theory is a dialect of the most extreme workers' statism circa 1947.

Let us look a little closer at what Cliff says. We will focus our investigation on Chapter 5 of *Russia: a Marxist Analysis*: "The common and different features of a state capitalist and a workers' state".*

In the theoretical model of evolutionary state capitalism which Cliff thinks "most improbable" (p109, 1964 edition), the capitalists, having created a unified economy, can be expropriated by the working class; then the roles are reversed when, having created their own centralised economy, the workers are expropriated. This began as a modest question — "is the possibility ruled out?" — it has now become "proof"! He develops this to the stage where he says that the role of an isolated workers' state in a backward country is to prepare the way for state capitalism, which cannot grow organically out of even the most advanced, most monopolistic form of capitalism. If in basic Marx-

ist theory — and in the Marxist theory of hypothetical state capitalism — capitalism prepares the way for working class power, in Cliff the workers' revolution, isolated and overthrown politically, while the economic centralisation it has created is preserved, prepares the way for what he will say is the most advanced of all possible advanced capitalism: state capitalism leap-frogs the working class revolution, only in turn to eventually be leap-frogged by the workers. Where Marx wrote (*Capital*) that ultimately the death knell sounds for capitalism and "the expropriators are expropriated", Cliff would have to amend it: "the leapfroggers are leapfrogged!"

Having assessed the possibility of evolutionary state capitalism as "most improbable" (p 109) and having suggested that the old Marxist idea of the easier working-class expropriation of state capitalism into a workers' state, could work backwards, he now buttresses it. "The only argument... against the possibility of the existence of state capitalism is that if the state becomes the repository of all capital (sic) the state ceases to be capitalist": state capitalism is theoretically impossible. (He has already sketched the classic Marxist condition for a single state "capitalism" being capitalism: "while competition on the world market continued". And that condition is now, for now, ignored.)

This is close to the argument: because state capitalism is theoretically possible, therefore state capitalism, once the workers have cleared the way, is the only possible analogue for the USSR!

Cliff says, if state capitalism is oxymoronic "the name of such a society in which the competition on the world market, commodity production, wage-labour, etc. prevails will be quite arbitrarily chosen." He is here arguing for the dogmatists vain seeking for security in familiar names. This is slight of hand: he would not argue that these categories exist in the USSR. There is here too an arguing backwards. This undesirable conclusion will follow if you reject my solution. Why does the name you give it have fundamental importance? Do these categories apply to Russia? When he gets to it, he will in every case answer "no", and find analogies instead!

XIII Being arbitrary

CLIFF says: "One may call it managerial society, arbitrarily determining its laws". "Arbitrarily determining"? The name can be arbitrarily chosen; the laws would have to be explored, extrapolated from evidence and experience. That sentence, smuggling in the question of the laws, is pure Cliff. There is here in Cliff's notion of identifying the work of establishing the laws of motion of Stalinism with "arbitrariness", if you do not cram it into a famil-

*Not the least of the differences, it is now irrefutably plain from experience, is that in Stalinism the working class is imprisoned in such a system of police control, pseudo trade unions, utter lack of the freedom to think, speak, read, write, learn, organise, that it is deprived of the possibility of preparing itself to take power: this "state capitalist" system destroys the socialist working class alternative to itself: it is an aspect of the question, whether or not the working class in full Stalinism is a proletariat at all...

What Cliff took from CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya

ACCORDING to James and Dunayevskaya, "For Marx, the theoretical axis of Capital — the central core around which all else develops — is the question of plan: the despotic plan of capital against the cooperative plan of freely associated labour". The "despotic plan of capital" meant concretely that "The worker will be paid at value" [i.e. at social subsistence level] and "The means of production will far outdistance the means of consumption". The USSR became capitalist in Marx's terms in 1935-7, when "the despotic plan" eventually overcame workers' resistance.

Unlike Mattick, James and Dunayevskaya did not dismiss or disavow the Bolshevik Revolution. They presented the rise of state capitalism in the USSR as a real class struggle, not as the product of historic inevitability or of this or that wrong idea held by the Bolsheviks. They saw Stalinist state planning as a measure of class struggle against the workers, not as an abstract imperative of productive development. "All this bureaucratism, ending in the One-Party State, is rooted in the need to discipline workers in production". They argued that the Stalinist economy could not be considered progressive because it had reduced the workers to misery rather than raising their living standards, because "planned terror cements the planned economy", and because the achievements in industrialisation were anyway exaggerated and unstable.

But they were close to Mattick in their argument that "we live in the age of state capitalism", and that the USSR was only the extreme expression of a world trend. "The whole moves inevitably towards state ownership... Of capitalist barbarism Stalinist Russia is a forerunner".

Cliff took much from James and Dunayevskaya.

- The argument that production of means of production growing more rapidly than production of means of consumption showed the USSR to be capitalist.

- The linked idea that the inauguration of state capitalism in the USSR was marked by the Stalinist plans (though Cliff located the start of the first Five Year Plan as the crucial date, and James and Dunayevskaya the middle of the second Five Year Plan).

- The idea that the USSR could be state capitalist without labour power being a commodity there. James and Dunayevskaya did insist that there was wage-labour in the USSR, but argued that no, or very little, free labour market was needed to define wage labour. Cliff's position in his book seems to be similar, but is less clearly stated.

- Cliff dropped their argument about the "despotism of the plan" being the essence of capitalism. That, however, was the argument which made sense of the contention that the USSR giving priority to producer goods proved it capitalist. Cliff kept the contention without the supporting argument, in which form it became simply a theoretical blunder (equating capital with hard-

ware).

- Cliff evidently felt the need for some other supporting argument. He found it in Paul Sweezy's pioneering version, the theory of capitalist development (1942) of a "permanent war economy". Military competition, Cliff argued, gave a capitalist character to the accumulation of producer goods in the USSR. This argument also appeared in the theory of James and Dunayevskaya — "the present form of capitalist competition... is total war".

- Cliff resorted to his own dialectics, but without the manic flair of James and Dunayevskaya. "Because international competition takes mainly a military form, the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz. a striving after use values".

And Cliff did not resolve the crucial question of the

place of the state-monopoly systems in world-historic perspective. He registered "the speed of the development of the productive forces in Russia, a speed far outstripping what youthful capitalism experienced, and the very opposite of what capitalism in decay and stagnation experiences". This he explained in terms of a dialectic of form and content: "Russia presents us with the synthesis of a form of property born of a proletarian

revolution and relations of production resulting from a combination of backward forces of production and the pressure of world capitalism".

While the argument about military competition pointed towards a restrained version of the thesis that the West was converging towards the same sort of society as the USSR — "competition through buying and selling is displaced by direct military competition. Use values have become the aim of capitalist production"

Did the USSR's presumed productive superiority mean it was progressive compared to private capitalism? Cliff answered no. But he could find only the argument that the world was ripe for socialist revolution, therefore any form of capitalism was reactionary.

Cliff failed to improve on some of the major deficiencies of the theory of James and Dunayevskaya. The argument about the despotic plan, or priority for producer goods, defining capitalism seemed to rule out any sort of industrialising workers' state except the most democratic, and thus to rule out the possibility of a workers' state in an underdeveloped country.

Cliff fudged the question of the historic relation of Stalinist state capitalism to ordinary capitalism. The ideas about military competition, and the attempts at dialectics, which he had introduced into the theory, did not aid clarity. As Ted Grant pointed out at the time, Cliff effectively had a "bureaucratic collectivist" view of the USSR, but insisted on putting a "state capitalist" label on it.

iar name, a superstitiousness identical to that of the orthodox Trotskyists, a seeking of safety in the familiar, a fear of sailing on uncharted seas, of *terra incognita*: if Cliff had been the first to find America, he would have insisted it was England! If he had without warning encountered a marsupial he would have insisted that it was a mammal. The spirit here is radically the opposite of Marxism, and a mere variation on the common superstitiousness that ruined post-Trotsky Trotskyism.

What does Cliff do, instead of “arbitrarily determining” Stalinist societies’ laws? He dispenses with exploring as a means of determining the unknown laws of this system and arbitrarily fixes the labels appropriate to capitalism, derived from exploring the history of capitalism and its modes of operation, to Stalinism. Thus he fools himself by making the “arbitrary” exploration seem unnecessary. All one has to do is to cut and stretch reality and substitute analogies for concrete exploration of the reality! All Cliff’s statistics are designed to illustrate the preconceived theory: his state capitalism does not come out of an analysis. The analysis is crammed into “state capitalism”. This is every bit as scholastic as the approach of the orthodox Trotskyists — a variant/dialect of what they were doing with their stretching and cutting to fit a newly re-elaborated deformed and degenerated workers’ state theory.

Having accepted the “extreme improbability” of an evolutionary development from monopoly capitalism to state capitalism, Cliff then invokes the most concentrated capitalism known — that of Nazi Germany and contrasts it with Adam Smith’s capitalism, stresses the differences and concludes:

“It is only the absence [sic] of the gradualism of development through the stage of monopoly capitalism, which makes it difficult to grasp the similarities and differences between the Russian economy and capitalism and traditional capitalism on one hand and a workers’ state on the other”! What does the “absence of gradualism” mean in evolution? Qualitative break without prior evolution? But revolution is the product of evolution — 20 years in a day. Without it, revolution is impossible. Where the Fabians decreed “the inevitability of gradualness”, Cliff decreed the dispensability of gradualness — of evolution — for revolution! It is an example of Cliff’s reliance on analogues and parallels and cod dialectics. In Cliff’s original 1948 version, the workers make the state capitalist revolution — needing only a “supplementary” “political” counter-revolution to realise its true nature. The common patterns with Trotsky and with orthodox Trotskyism are glaring here too. Cliff is saying the same things, in a different but no less arbitrary dialect. This “state capitalism” juts into socialism.

“Seeing that state capitalism is the extreme theoretical limit which capitalism can reach, it necessarily is the furthest away from traditional capitalism. It is the negation of capitalism on the basis of capitalism itself. Similarly, seeing that a workers’ state is the lowest stage of the new socialist society, it must necessarily have many features in common with state capitalism. “What distinguishes between them categorically is the fundamental, the essential difference between the capitalist and the socialist system.” If the decisive thing is who is in power, then, are the features in common structural? So, if workers take power what happens? *This is Trotsky’s political revolution: Trotsky’s programme of specific changes covers everything.* Trotsky’s fault was theoretical mystification: so too is it Cliff’s: and Cliff had none of Trotsky’s excuse.

“State capitalism” is a transitional stage to socialism, this side of the socialist revolution; while a workers’ state is a transitional stage to socialism is the other side of the socialist revolution. So socialist revolution is a matter of the transfer of power? If a new Russian socialist revolution is primarily a transfer of power, it is Trotsky’s “political revolution”! At most it becomes a matter of arguing with Trotsky about labels.

This is “variations on a theme” by Trotsky. It is also tautological and banal: the test will be in the details he now gives. Cliff headlines this section, “State capitalism: a political negation of capitalism”.

“Regulation of economic activity by the state is, in itself, a partial negation of the law of value, even if the state is, as yet, not the repository of the means of production: the law of value assumes the regulation of economic functions in an anarchical way.” (p110) Cliff deals at length with partial negations of the law of value.

State capitalism is “a partial negation of labour power as a commodity”: for labour power to be a commodity the worker must be free of the means of production; and free of legal impediment to selling his labour power.”

Cliff’s headline is, “State capitalism — a transition to socialism”. Translated, this sub-head means: “Stalinism, a transition to socialism”. He is now comparing socialism and state capitalism, having dealt with monopoly capitalist concentration of the working class.

“The partial negation of capitalism on the basis of capitalist relations of production, means that the productive forces which develop in the bosom of the capitalist system so outgrow it, that the capitalist class is compelled to use ‘socialist’ measures and manipulate them in their own interests. This would be true of state capitalism that evolved out of monopoly capitalism, as it is to an extent true of monopoly capitalism. What has it got to do with the very backward USSR? All the “old crap” — and “state capitalism” — re-emerges there from backwardness, not overdevelopment.

Cliff quotes Lenin (*Imperialism*) that monopoly capital is a “transitional form to socialism”. (But Lenin deals with advanced, developed capitalism, Tony Cliff with a movement from primitivism to “state capitalism”!) Cliff in 1948 thinks Stalinism is so successful that it has gone as far and in some key respects further than the most advanced capitalism: state capitalism is highly developed capitalism in one country! *All this is a parallelogram of the degenerated workers’ statist for whom Russia is in transition to socialism and the Stalinists, for whom it is socialism realised.* It is Cliff’s version of the ideas of Grant and Haston but with a different label. He is psychologically so appreciative of Stalinism’s wonders because he has cut himself off from the concerns of the still uncertain others — arbitrarily, subjectively.

On p113: “State capitalism and a workers’ state are two stages of the transition period from capitalism to socialism. State capitalism is the extreme opposite of socialism — they are symmetrically opposed and they are dialectically united with one another.” The difference is political power. Again this is political revolution à la Trotsky.

“Under state capitalism, workers’ labour is partially negated in that the worker is not free to choose his employer”; and under workers’ state where work is collective self employment.”

It is, for socialism, “now or never”. Thus Cliff reflects the orthodoxy. He brings references to the H-bomb in as *deus ex machina* to back up this view. Marx said society would go towards socialism or barbarism. “The threat of barbarism takes the form before our very eyes, of hitching the productive forces of humanity, of industry, and science to the chariot of war and destruction.”

Cliff and his supporters will put it like this: the development of the means of production in a backward country cannot be progressive when on a world scale humanity is ripe for socialism”. How do we know? Since 1948, when Cliff wrote vast areas of the world have experienced capitalist development, vast new armies of proletarians have appeared etc.

Cliff quotes Lenin/Bukharin/Engels about the collectivising and centralising tendencies of advanced capitalism. Where has this come from in the USSR? From the success of “socialism in one country” in building “monopoly state capitalism in one country”. It has come from backwardness, competing with the most advanced capitalism. Historically, it is the Stalinist bureaucracy that built up industry. Historically, what Cliff describes in the USSR after 1928 is a new class creating a country ripe for socialism at miracle speed. This is the picture of the workers’ statist who have — the RCP — become convinced that the USSR is in irreversible transition to socialism. The point here is that Cliff, in his theorising about state capitalism, workers’ statism, etc., as distinct from dealing with facts of history, falsely assumes a symmetry (workers’ statism to state capitalism by political counter-revolution and vice versa). That possibility did not exist in 1928; if it exists now it is the product of Stalinism. Stalinism has indeed worked wonders.

One of the oddest things in Cliff’s long chapter 1, examining the social and class realities of the USSR is that he does not seem to know who exactly he is arguing with; Stalinists who say the USSR is socialism, or Trotsky and the workers’ statist. He argues with neither satisfactorily. His chapter on Trotsky is a shoddy travesty. This is at first sight puzzling. But the significance of Cliff not seem-

ingly knowing whether he is arguing with the idea of a degenerated workers' state or with the Stalinist claim that the USSR is socialism is that *he eliminates the notion of a degenerated workers' state to replace it with a dialect of itself, "bureaucratic state capitalism"* — a state capitalism that is not state capitalism and which incorporates most of the theoretical (as distinct from the political) implications of the degenerated workers' state position — that is being elaborated after Trotsky's theory has collapsed. All degenerated and deformed workers' state theories in reality *describe* the rule of a bureaucratic collectivist class: bestowing the honorary title workers' state is only a means of calling it progressive. Like the proponents of the notion that Russia is a degenerated workers' state, Cliff takes refuge in the redefinition of terms, in scholasticism and the over-pasting of inappropriate and in misleading labels.

In Cliff's state capitalist vision Stalin is building up our eventual legacy, and faster than capitalism could. It is in Cliff exactly as in the worst of the later deformed and degenerated workers' state theories. Like the degenerated workers' statist, he departs massively from the proper picture of Stalinism as bureaucratic arbitrariness and neo-medievalism. In the process of accepting USSR society as a thing in itself, not à la Trotsky, an ephemeral moment in history, transitional in one direction or another, Cliff too presents a glossed up picture of the bureaucracy's achievements. It is not for him a workers' state or lower socialism, but a viable monopoly state capitalism that has in key respects leapfrogged ahead of the most developed capitalism. Instead of seeing it as freakish, or barbaric, Cliff sees state capitalism in a "progressive" light that gives it historical "legitimacy"...

Side by side with reliance on bourgeois definitions of capital (as hardware) and the gross nonsense in terms of Marxist economics involved is the idea that the capitalist character of the USSR depends on competition of use values, there is the reliance on sometimes preposterous analogies. For example on page 32 he notes that the vastly extensive use of slave labour in the USSR arose because relatively Russia was so much poorer in capital than in man power. He then offers this mad analogical assimilation of the Stalinist Russian experience to capitalism: "the slaves in Stalin's camps were a crude version of 'the army of the unemployed' of traditional capitalism, that is, they served to keep the rest of the workers in their places."

Here encapsulated you have both what is wrong with his whole approach, and his spectacular capacity to convince himself of blatant nonsense. How does the "reserve army" of unemployed labour power work in capitalism? It exercises pressure on wage rates by competition with workers who are free proletarians operating in a labour market. In Russia? police state terror, one employer, no trade unions, masses of workers more or less randomly enslaved. That terror, more or less arbitrary enslavement, etc. does make labour more controllable, is indisputable. That it is the equivalent of unemployment under "free" capitalism loses all idea of quality and quantity.

XIV. Conclusion

CLIFF'S theory of bureaucratic state capitalism was *politically* superior to any theory that polluted socialism with the notion that the Stalinist states were in any sense any sort of workers' state. That needs to be said and emphasised. As theory, that is as a conceptualisation of reality that grasped its essentials, that penetrated to an understanding of its inner workings, that allowed some degree of foresight about future developments — as theory — "bureaucratic state capitalism" was utterly useless. More, it shared all the faults on the level of theory of those who thought the USSR was a degenerated workers' state "in transition to socialism". Cliff's theory too, which in origin and shaping influence was the twin of the workers' state theory of Militant/Socialist Party/Socialist Appeal, saw what it called "bureaucratic state capitalism" as in transition to socialism. It did not even have the distinction of uniquely proposing the need for a new revolution — that it took over from Trotsky and, for the USSR, shared with workers' statist. For Cliff in 1948, bureaucratic state capitalism in the USSR was naturally not "post-capitalist", as workers' statist would for decades see it. But it was

at the furthest possible point of capitalist development short of socialism. It was so "dialectically" advanced that in some respects it overlapped the margin between capitalism and socialism.

The difference in substance between this and what workers' statist said it was, on the level of theory, was scarcely discernable — at most it was a matter of semantics. In no sense was this a viable theory. It was an underdeveloped hybrid, a name as much as a theory. It has over the years been changed out of all recognition.

Michael Kidron, Chris Harman, and others developed Cliff's thesis further by eroding it and transforming it into a bland exercise in labelling. The thesis about military competition determining the economy evidently did not apply to most state-monopoly systems outside the USSR; it was faded out. Likewise the argument about Stalinist state capitalism representing a "synthesis" between world capitalist pressures and property forms created by a workers' revolution. The notion that capitalist production in the West was being geared towards use-value rather than exchange-value was also quietly dropped.

What remained after all the fading-out was not much: the notion that the state-monopoly systems were state-capitalist because despotic bureaucracies controlled production and subordinated the workers' living standards to the accumulation of producer goods.

Instead of the theory being improved by successive approximations to reality, using evidence and debate as they developed to identify errors in Cliff's original exposition and to draw lessons from those errors, Cliff's followers practiced a sort of successive distancing from reality, making the theory more bland, vague, and tenuous.

It is now an SWP shibboleth not a theory. There is almost nothing of the '48 theory left. Tony Cliff claims he was right on everything. Symbolically, when last year he wrote an article in the magazine *Socialist Review* to mark the 50th anniversary of his great work, he devoted the article *entirely* to arguing why the USSR's bureaucracy was a ruling class. He had nothing whatsoever to say about whether or not it was a state capitalist ruling class!

To try to draw any direct line between this theory and the SWP's performance during the Serb-Kosovar-NATO war would be futile, indeed foolish. Yet there is a connection. The SWP has never treated theory — any theory — seriously. For Marxists, theory is a guide to what you do and do not do. You try to work out implications and ramifications. What was remarkable about the politics derived for the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism was how little of it there was. Except for "defence of the workers' states" the SWP was, except for some years in the '60s, an orthodox Trotskyist organisation with doctrinal quirks.

Theory was always the property of a small mandrinate. And "theory" could always be bent or put into a state of temporary suspension if some advantage might be got from doing that. Tony Cliff believed that "tactics contradict principles". That meant that what the group did was entirely separable from any principles it had. This was to some degree always true.

While its "state capitalism" formally placed the organisation at the furthest pole from Stalinism, it could nevertheless even as far back as the '60s tolerate having Stalinist members (See 'A Funny Story Agreed Upon' WL41).

Today, the organisation is a rigidly run undemocratic kitsch-Trotsky sect, able at a word from the centre to undertake any zig zag or change of line in pursuit of organisational advantage. In political terms this is a "bandit group".

Beginning as proponents of the so-called "Third Camp" (working-class independent politics) they have in the recent war behaved like half-demented Stalinists. Arbitrariness, subjectivism, banditism, calculation — these are what guides the organisation.

The impulses that led Cliff to oppose the workers' state degeneration of Trotskyism were good ones. The impulses that led him to take refuge in theorising that was as artificial and as superstitious as any of the workers' state theories, betrayed his better instincts.

Today, it is the young people who mistakenly go to the SWP looking for serious socialist politics who are betrayed.

Sean Matgamna

Appendix: Cliff as critic of bureaucratic collectivism

IN early 1968 Tony Cliff published in the journal *International Socialism* an article called 'The theory of bureaucratic collectivism — a critique'. It was presented together with a curious note explaining that it dated from 1948, but that no "original" could be found... No explanation was offered as to where, then, their text came from. The 1968 text has since been added as an appendix to editions of Cliff's 1948 *Russia, a Marxist analysis*. In this odd way the IS group again began to deal openly with a theory and a tendency with which in its founding document and throughout its entire history it had been conducting a usually hidden and occasionally open debate.

Cliff's critique of bureaucratic collectivism, though its purpose is to buttress his "state capitalism", is essentially criticism from the point of view of 1940s "official" Trotskyism at the end of its tether.³ Cliff criticises "the theory of bureaucratic collectivism" under 8 headings.

1. *The place of bureaucratic collectivism in history*: "The statement that the Stalinist regime was neither capitalist nor socialist [sic] left the latter's historical identity undetermined." "Hence" Shachtman could at one point see bureaucratic collectivism as more progressive, and a few years later as more reactionary than capitalism.

Here Cliff is a jeering sectarian critic of people who are dealing with an unfolding new phenomenon, and, at the beginning of their independent existence, still carrying much of the analysis and politics of Trotsky, who argued after 1937 that the USSR was economically progressive, whatever class ruled. Some of them have already abandoned the idea that this system is progressive (Carter, Draper) but the majority, led by Max Shachtman, though they have (1941) jettisoned Trotsky's name for the USSR (degenerated workers' state), have scarcely moved from Trotsky's analysis. That analysis is shot through, in Trotsky and in the Workers' Party, with the awful combination of simultaneously seeing the economic system as progressive vis à vis declining capitalism, and its totalitarian political system as identical with Nazism, "except for its more unbridled savagery".

Cliff had come through the war as part of an international tendency cheering for the Russians, seeing Russian victories as victories for the working class, indifferent to the horrible realities attendant on Russian progress in the war. Even after he'd hatched out as a state capitalist, Cliff had merely traded one set of labels for another, one dogma into which to cram the unfolding realities for another.

Ridiculously Cliff asserts that there have been only two consistent elements in bureaucratic collectivism: the conclusions that "in any concrete conditions, Stalinist Russia must not be defended (no matter that the concrete conditions change all the time)."

The name exercises Cliff overmuch. "As for the name" he repeats what Karl Marx quoted against JP Proudhon: "where there is a lack of ideas, an empty phrase will do." A lack of ideas? Cliff's large and impressive collection of quotations from the classics of Marxism in *Russia: a Marxist Analysis* are all lifted without change from articles in *New Internationalist*, where they have been the common coin of the discussion of Stalinism for a decade; much of his concrete assessment of Russia is taken from the Workers' Party! What Trotsky once wrote of certain sectarians on the fringe of the Trotskyist movement fits Cliff's relationship to the Worker's Party: he fed on crumbs from its table and "repaid with blackest ingratitude". Cliff's addition is to cram the Trotsky/Workers' Party analysis of Russian reality into categories and labels (which he can only sustain by going outside Marxist economics, using "capital" to mean plant and machines and world competition not of exchange but of use values to carry the idea that the USSR is capitalist!) By ideas Tony Cliff evidently means *names*!

He justifies himself by writing nonsense about the history of Marxism, contrasting it with Max Shachtman, etc. "In Marx's and Engels' analysis of capitalism, the fundamentals — the place of capitalism in history, its internal contradictions, etc. — remained constant from their first approach to the problem until the end of their lives. Their later years brought elaborations of and additions to the basic theme." He then repeats that Shachtman first thought bureaucratic collectivism progressive and later concluded it

was barbaric. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Capital Vol I*, (1867) were only elaborations? Karl Marx's two decades in the British Museum Library were devoted to sorting out a few details? Unless one recalls that it was not until the 1850s that Marx finally solved the great mystery of proletarian exploitation within formal bourgeois equality and the free sale and purchase of labour power, then the deep foolishness of what Cliff writes here will not get its proper appreciation. In 1948, Stalinism was 20 years old; in 1968 (when this text was "finalised") 40. Cliff is indecently eager to denounce those who have, building on Trotsky, been analysing a new historical phenomenon. Cliff's grievance is that they do this necessarily open-ended work rather than follow him into scholastic and semantic exercises which by cramming the unfolding reality into old labels would, he thinks, render work other than defining and redefining words — and collecting statistics to illustrate preconception — unnecessary.

The formidable pretentiousness here is dwarfed by the sheer disloyalty. Marx and Engels began work on the analysis of capitalism in the 1840s. According to Marx, capitalism was then already over 400 years old! It had had its bourgeois revolution in Holland, England, France. It had a very substantial analytical literature, on which Marx built — including even a number of differentiated labour theories of value. The place of capitalism in the flow of history was impossible not to see. To belabour those analysing the new phenomenon of Stalinism like this, was only possible for someone who had fled from the task, and taken refuge in word games and dogmatism, who superstitiously felt that the naming of complicated unfamiliar things with old "Marxist" names gave him the strength of Marx and Engels' analysis of a radically different system!

2. The second section deals with *Bruno Rizzi's version of state capitalism*. Why Trotsky used Rizzi is plain: he needed a foil "with" whom to discuss what he, Trotsky, plainly saw as the only serious alternative to the increasingly untenable degenerated workers' state theory. In 1948, still less in 1968, Rizzi represents nothing politically (except that some of his fundamental ideas have conquered a section of the Trotskyist movement, which has relabelled their variations of Rizzi's theory "deformed and degenerated workers' states"). There is a very substantial body of Workers' Party literature. Why go on about Rizzi? It gets the ghost of Trotsky on side!

3. *The Stalinist regime — barbarism?* He quotes Shachtman citing the old Marxist idea, "Capitalism must collapse out of an inability to solve its own contradictions: and thus either socialism or barbarism will be the result: Stalinism is the new barbarism". Cliff: if Stalinism denotes the "decline of civilisation, the reactionary negation of capitalism, then of course it is more reactionary... capitalism has to be defended from Stalinist barbarism".

But, but, but! In the 19th century capitalism was championed against quasi-feudal and feudal reaction and against, for example, the US slave states. There would be nothing new for Marxists in such a pattern if the facts led to such a conclusion; nor for revolutionary socialists would it imply self-subordination to comparatively progressive capitalism. Even in a common war front, should that make the best political sense, the revolutionaries and the workers they influenced would maintain political and even military independence from their allies. In 1851 Marx outlined the tactics of the Communists in such an alliance with bourgeois forces against reaction: "Strike (at the common enemy) together, march separately". The "Theses on the national question" from the Second Communist International Congress based its tactics in backward countries on "1851". Maintaining political, etc., independence, Communists would form a de-facto common front with bourgeois liberals against an immediate fascist or Stalinist attempt to take power. The independent Communist forces would simultaneously strive to displace and overthrow their allies. Cliff argues backwards, impermissibly: if that is true, then this unexpected and undesirable conclusion follows. Serious people, Marxists and non-Marxists, reject such an approach as inimical to rational thought. If the USSR has on the facts to be considered barbarism, what objection could be raised to the above? Marxists never thought of such a thing in such a context? Neither the Workers' Party, nor, after 1949, its successor, the ISL, backed capitalism against Stalinism. That Shachtman did in the '60s is neither here nor there: it did not follow log-

³Paul Hampton has written a detailed assessment of the original 1948 document, which will appear in this journal soon.

ically from the idea that Russia was barbarism.

In the 1940s especially the argument that Russian Stalinism was barbarism was well nigh unanswerable. Cliff himself had compiled a vast amount of evidence for it. Slave labour (10 million perhaps at any time from the early '30s to the early mid '50s); every aspect of life regulated by a savage totalitarian, utterly lawless state; the complete loss of every advance in social, legal, political intellectual and spiritual freedom, and of every right — of speech, writing, publishing, assembly, association, social organisation, working class organisation, etc., etc., etc. — that humankind had gained since the middle ages: that was the USSR and its replications. Against this Cliff argues in part by defining barbarism rather narrowly.

"When Marx spoke of 'the common ruin of the contending classes' — as in Rome after slave society disintegrated — it was associated with a general decline of the productive forces. The Stalinist regime, with its dynamic development of the productive forces, certainly does not fit this description."

This is the criterion that had led Trotsky after 1937 to maintain that the USSR was progressive, whatever its class character, in the face of the decline of capitalism. Here, against the idea that Stalinism is barbarism, Cliff comes as near as makes little difference to the idea (not the statement) that it is progressive. Cliff can be "optimistic" — can go through a very long post-1948 political life soothed by his "state capitalist" labels, ignoring most of the problems. He isolates the economic life he ascribes to the USSR from the entire complex social, economic and political network that made up the socio-economic formation that was Russian Stalinism. Trotsky had well understood the dead weight of bureaucratic rule on USSR society; he did not separate it from the economy; that was one reason why he was sure the system simply could not be viable. It survived for a qualitatively longer time than he thought, but ultimately it did not survive.

Cliff, though he is very critical of USSR economic reality (1964), has bought into the idea that this system "works" and that its problems and contradictions will serve to prepare the proletarian revolution. In fact, the verdict of history on this system cannot but be that the "embryo of the future", the working class future we all fervently hoped would succeed Stalinism until the events of 1989 and after crushed our hopes, had indeed died "in the womb of the old society".

The enormous, economic-social devastation that has succeeded Stalinism in the USSR, and, less so, in other countries — what is that? The collapse, regression, disintegration of a Stalinist society whose womb was barren of any progressive successor. A society whose conditions of life for many decades rendered its working class incapable of learning, thinking, or of understanding society, and which used Nazi-style totalitarian police state repression to prevent it from organising, debating, communicating with the different parts of itself or expressing itself orally, on the air or in print. *Trotsky understood*. He thought in 1939/40 that it would take outside working class stimulus to make Russian working class action possible.

Here, as in virtually every question Cliff has touched on, he is an "economist" — a totalitarian economist, for whom the social and political consequences are of little ultimate importance so long as the economy is "dynamic". Unlike Trotsky, he gives virtually no weight in the scale of history, or in the perspective for history, to the non-economic factors. He has only a narrow, limited, partial view of USSR society. He draws no conclusions from the rest of the picture he sketches.

4. *The motive for exploitation in bureaucratic collectivist society.*

Cliff says Shachtman explains the motive for exploitation in bureaucratic collectivist society thus: "In the Stalinist state, production is carried on and extended for the satisfaction of the needs of the bureaucracy, for the increasing of its wealth, its privileges, its power." This is the full extent of what Cliff has found in the whole of the literature of the Workers' Party in the way of explanation for exploitation! He himself explains it by international competition, which he calls capitalist competition and finds in the USSR's production of military equipment. The idea that the Workers' Party neglected to take account of the international context of the USSR and so on, is both absurd and disloyal.

No politically literate nine year old could in 1948 or 1968 write a description of the situation of the USSR and not include its struggle to catch up or keep up with other states including in the arms race. Cliff would add nothing to any intelligent description, except the insistence that arms competition is "capital accumulation dictated by the anarchic competition between capitalists". This is a) infantile sectarian pedantry: "say it as I do or it doesn't count", and b) a belief in word magic (repeat the words in quotes above!)

5. *Class relations under bureaucratic collectivism.* This section is one of the oddest things in Cliff's whole body of work, which does not lack for oddities. He belabours the bureaucratic collectivists, and Max Shachtman in particular, for holding to a position he himself essentially shares with — that is, has taken from — them!

6. *The nature of the working class in Russia.* Bureaucratic collectivists say and logically must say, that the USSR's workers are not a proletariat.

The argument that the Russian worker was not a proletarian rested on conditions in the society as a whole: the fact of one employer owning everything, who also controls what is produced or imported for the worker to buy with his wages; the worker is controlled, regimented and for decades was subject to reduction to a chattel slave by a totalitarian state, and so on. Cliff (in 1968) muddies the issue by reducing it to the high-Stalinist restriction on the movement of workers from one factory to another. "But is this a sufficient reason to say that the Russian worker was not a proletarian?"

He preposterously argues that US slavery, linked to perhaps the most advanced industry in the world, [the Lancashire cotton industry] was abolished because of its low productivity! (To be replaced for 100 years by a quasi-slave share-cropping system, and only in the last few decades by cotton harvesting machinery.)

Cliff talks about the general trend of history being against slave labour. "Hence its almost complete disappearance since the death of Stalin, since Russia reached industrial maturity." If the Russians are not proletarians, Marxism as a method, as a guide for the proletariat as the subjects of historical change becomes superfluous, meaningless. To speak of Marxism in a society without proletariats is to make a supra-historical theory. Yes, but! This is the dogmatic argument for the superstition of safe known labels: if something is so far unknown, it is therefore impossible. Close your eyes. Cliff solves the problem by defining, or rather scaring it away. Considering what he wrote in 1948, and what was in circulation, this is quite a performance. It is the political and moral measure of him.

7. *Historical limitations of bureaucratic collectivism.* Having rubbished the "competition" with such integrity and concern for truth, Cliff recommends the advantages you get if you buy his own wares, like someone on a street corner selling dud watches that have "fallen off the back of a lorry". Cliff: "if one accept the state capitalist nature of the Stalinist regime, one not only accepts its laws of motion — the accumulation of capitalism as dictated by the pressure of world capitalism — but also the historical limitations of its rule" Never mind what is true, or even plausible: look at the advantage you get. (You also get a set of picture cards reproducing guaranteed authentic colour photographs of all the great revolutionaries from Spartacus to John Ball to Thomas Munster to Gracchus Babeuf, and all the Great Moderns — Blanqui, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Cliff, Callinicos, Milosevic.)

8. *Attitude to the Stalinist parties.* (In 1968 when Cliff published this, there were members of IS in Manchester whose politics would lead them to leave the group in protest at its opposition to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968).

From the assumption that bureaucratic collectivism is more reactionary than capitalism, Shachtman argued that socialist should side in the labour movement with social democrats against local Stalinist agents of bureaucratic collectivism. There follows nearly half a column of [misdated] quotations from Shachtman arguing that Stalinists were in the labour movement but not of it; that they represented a totalitarian programme of destroying the labour movement, in contrast to reformists, who, in their own way, stood for preserving the labour movement. Cliff thinks this too shows "a lack of historical perspective", an oversimplification. The Stalinist parties are agents of Moscow and assemblies of fighting individuals "strangled by the same bureaucracies". Shachtman's attitude to the CPs would strengthen the right wing social democratic parties [who have no contradictions?] and help the CP leadership hold the militants to them. That it was necessary to adopt a more flexible attitude to the CPers than the ISL had before '56 is, I believe true. Yes! But did that mean refraining from saying clearly what was what? Trotsky, not Shachtman, wrote this, three days before he was struck down:

"The predominant type among the present 'Communist' bureaucrats is the political careerist... their ideal is to attain in their own countries the same position that the Kremlin's oligarchy gained in the USSR."

The Comintern and the GPU 17 August 1940

The Balkans war: debating our differences

Soft on NATO?

I AM uneasy about aspects of WL's line on the war in Yugoslavia. I would like to hear other comrades' views and offer these thoughts as part of a search for clarity on the subject.

Of course socialists should support the Kosovars' right to self-defence and independence. It is appalling that sections of the left have chosen to ignore Kosovan rights and campaign alongside Serb nationalists. It is essential that consistent democrats like ourselves make every effort to restore the balance and argue for people like Benn and the SWP to remove their blinkers. However, we are in danger of over-reacting to crassness and failing to give sufficient emphasis to campaigning against the NATO bombing. I don't think the slogan "no trust in NATO" is sufficient.

My experience since the bombing began is that it is the decent instinct of many people, not always particularly political either, to oppose what NATO is doing. (Even left-wingers, like Harry Barnes MP, who at first supported NATO's actions from genuine opposition to ethnic cleansing, have begun to have second thoughts as they see what the policy has meant in practice.) We must not cut ourselves off from such people. They are likely to agree with our solidarity with the Kosovars, but the killing of Serb and other civilians by NATO bombs, rightly, horrifies them too.

While Serb imperialism, like all imperialisms, should be opposed, it is nevertheless American imperialism that poses the greatest threat. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the US is the only superpower. It has shown itself more than willing to take full advantage of that. The "New World Order" proclaimed by George Bush means the US will act as a self-appointed world policeman — preferably with United Nations support, as in Iraq in 1991, but without UN support if necessary, as in Yugoslavia now. The recent bombing of Iraq and the cruise missile attacks last summer on Sudan and Afghanistan are part of this pattern.

In Yugoslavia, NATO is supporting US imperialism. It is proving what the left said throughout the Cold War, that NATO is not a defensive alliance. Our first leaflet on the current US aggression was spot on when it said, "NATO is demonstrating that the US-EU can bomb whomever they like, whenever they like." If a real revolutionary situation was to develop anywhere in Europe now who can doubt that it would be crushed by NATO. For these reasons, as well as the danger of spreading the conflict, we should also oppose the

use of NATO ground troops and continue to argue for the arming of the Kosovars to defend themselves.

I think we need to give equal emphasis to opposing both NATO and Milosevic and to expressing solidarity with Kosova. There are implications here for our attitude to pro-NATO Kosovars and, on the other hand, to the Committee for Peace in the Balkans. We could not support a pro-NATO Kosovar demonstration and still claim to be Marxists. There may be a case for intervening in the CPB to counter the Serb nationalists in it. We are more likely to influence people away from crass pseudo anti-imperialism if we make clear our opposition to what NATO is doing.

John Buckell

We condemn the SWP, Stalinoids and peacenikers for either remaining silent about, or straight out opposing, independence for Kosova and arms for the KLA — so they won't be *seen* to be on the same side as imperialism/NATO. I have no qualms about being loud and clear about that. But, equally, NATO's bombing is blatant aggression against the Serbian people, workers included. It is as unjust and inhuman as Milosevic's campaign against the Kosovars — for no good purpose. Yes, they are different forms of inhuman aggression, and causing suffering on a different scale — but unless we condemn the Serbian people for being ruled by Milosevic, (which I'm sure we don't), then the differences in aggression and suffering should be of no consequence to our opposition. So why should we be silent or equivocal about opposing NATO's bombing? We shouldn't base our position on the Balkans primarily on differentiating ourselves from the ideas (accommodation to Stalinism/anti-imperialism gone wrong/good and bad nations) of our left opponents — but on the objective nature of the conflict and the interests of the working class movements, especially in the most affected country. We shouldn't be so worried about being *seen* to be on the same side as Milosevic either, because we're not on side with either Milosevic and Moscow or NATO.

Janet Burstall

A reply to John Buckell and Janet Burstall

In our propaganda on Kosova, as on everything, we have to work out what we want to do. Do we

want to say to British workers "welfare not warfare"? Yes. But there *is* warfare. We have to say something about the ongoing war, principally Milosevic's war against Kosova. No amount of Western "welfare not warfare-ism" will stop Milosevic waging war on Kosova. Something else will. Warfare. Warfare by the Kosovars against Milosevic.

In the longer term something else will stop Milosevic's warfare-ism, and every other ruler's too — workers stopping siding with their ruling classes and recognising other workers' rights. I don't think that our prime role in this situation is to show how anti-NATO we are. It's to answer the question: what will stop war like this? And to provide an answer: workers stopping siding with their ruling classes. What will bring peace in the Balkans? Serb workers refusing to side with their ruling class would be a start. If I could choose now between persuading Serb workers to support Kosovan self-determination and persuading British workers that NATO will never solve anything I would expend my energies persuading Serb workers. I think it's a big part of our job to point that out to the British left. If we were in Serbia now, would we be sticking ourselves at the head of the anti-NATO demos? To chime in with the rest of the "left", with the workers? No, we'd feverishly be persuading Serb workers against chauvinism. I hope.

The anti-warfare-ism of the British left is on the whole crap. They can't say anything about Kosova, so busy are they being "anti-imperialist". My experience of turning up to anti-war meetings with an independence for Kosova headline is that I am being provocative! They treat us as if we were doing something outrageous.

And if the left can't say anything for Kosovan independence neither could they say anything against NATO and the West, before NATO and the West got their bombs out. "No trust in NATO" is spot on, I think. It addresses the negligence before this war and the negligence, treachery or both that NATO will serve up to the Kosovars and to the whole working class after this war by denying questions of self-determination.

Stop the bombing and what? In the contribution from John Buckell, there is an awful lot of what we are against (NATO bombing, Milosevic's genocide) and damn all about what we are for. We are for: self-determination, workers recognising the rights of workers of other nations and freeing themselves from the thinking of their ruling classes.

I might be bending the stick now, but on purpose. It seems like everyone is getting twitchy about our position now that NATO has

proved conclusively — to the Kosovars as well as other workers — that it doesn't deserve our trust, that it's crap at solving national disputes. Are we to let NATO's failings (not that it was ever trying) determine our slogans? We never did have any trust in NATO, we are not surprised that it has cocked up. I think we all hoped that, as the war dragged on, we would have more and more influence with unaligned lefties, raising our propaganda for Kosovan independence. Then that bloody NATO cock-up, it's making our job more difficult. Hard cheese for us. I think it's still our job to say not just equally but primarily: workers, oppose chauvinism and support self-determination.

Comments on John Buckell's contribution: "It is nevertheless American imperialism that poses the greatest threat..." Threat to whom? It sure as hell isn't posing the greatest threat to the Kosovars.

"If a real revolutionary situation was to develop... now who can doubt that it would be crushed by NATO. For these reasons, as well as the danger of spreading the conflict, we should also oppose the use of NATO ground troops and continue to argue for the arming of the Kosovars." Do you think that by using up NATO missiles and helicopters against the Serb army NATO will be in a better position to oppose our revolution? Did you ever doubt that NATO would oppose a revolution? Do you doubt that NATO will oppose any independent political action by Kosova which it finds inconvenient? *No trust in NATO*. That's what we need to say to the Kosovars right now. We need slogans for them as well as for... er, British workers.

"I think we need to give equal emphasis to opposing both NATO and Milosevic and to expressing solidarity with Kosova. There are implications here for our attitude to pro-NATO Kosovars and, on the other hand, to the Committee for Peace in the Balkans. I don't see how we could support a pro-NATO Kosovar demonstration and still claim to be Marxists." In about the same way that we could go on a demonstration against the Vietnam war where some people chanted "Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Minh". We go with our own slogans. We attempt to talk to the Kosovars who, believe me, have bigger all trust in NATO but are using their own sort of diplomacy in these demonstrations. They are scared that NATO is going to leave them in the lurch and are trying to make it difficult for the powers that be to do that and keep face. That's my assessment of the Kosovars' "pro-NATO" stance. Do the Kosovars' demonstrations demand invasion of Serbia, ethnic cleansing of Serbia by... NATO, themselves, any minority group in Serbia? No. Unlike the "anti-NATO" demos, the "anti-war" movement whose states aim in not

raising the question of Kosovan independence is to build the widest possible anti-war movement. So wide that it excludes Kosovans and includes Serb chauvinists. These demonstrations are not equal... we should be with the Kosovans.

"We are more likely to influence people away from pseudo anti-imperialism if we make clear our opposition to what NATO is doing." If it isn't clear after our talking to someone for a minute that we think NATO is a heap of crap then we're doing something wrong. But if we have to sidle up to them, as much of the saner left is doing, saying "Stop the bombing, psst... do you want to support Kosovan independence?" then we're cowards who won't impress anybody.

Vicki Morris

NATO has no answers

AS General Wesley Clark, NATO's supreme commander in Europe, said on 13 April: "You cannot stop paramilitary murder on the ground with aeroplanes."

He went on to explain that NATO's bombing was "...designed to serve a political purpose. That is, to persuade Mr Milosevic to sue for peace on terms acceptable to the West" (*The Economist*, 17 April).

NATO's aim is not independence for Kosovo. They have long been against it: we cannot trust NATO. It is our duty not only to be the opposition to our own ruling class but to keep alive the horrible memory of the UN abandoning the Muslims in Bosnia to massacre; of disarming Bosniacs and leaving them to be slaughtered; of the way the UN and NATO stood by and let the Serb army ethnically cleanse and only stepped in when the tide turned, when Croatian forces were regaining areas from the Serbs and there was danger of an escalation of the war. They colluded in driving 200,000 Serbs out of Croatia. Their record is of indifference to mass slaughter except when it threatens to spill over and disrupt trade outside Yugoslavia and in Europe.

If, as some comrades have argued, the key issue is the defeat of Milosevic, how can we oppose *any* of the bombing by NATO? We can only say no to civilian bombing, and we should only oppose future bombing of civilian targets defined as housing or schools but *not* roads, car plants, bridges or oil refineries. This response is driven by a desire not to be anywhere near the "Stop the Bombing" pro-Serb camp on the left. However, it is a step too far for internationalist socialists.

Kosovans have the right to get support from anywhere, and of course we should understand their support for the bombing given that it is the *only* thing being done in response to the Serbian state's race war against them. But we should oppose the destruction of the Serb economy.

I do not want to oppose the bombing of Serb tanks, military units or petrol depots in Kosovo. I accept bombing of roads, etc. may be militarily important in Kosovo and that an honest left should not call for an end to bombing that may directly stop massacre, as, for example, the bombing of the rail tracks to Auschwitz would have done.

I think our key concern right now is not the defeat of Milosevic but a victory for Kosova national liberation. The defeat of Milosevic by NATO bombing will not lead to this, but to a filthy deal as in Bosnia. The bombing has not, cannot and will not stop the killing on the ground. It is not even aimed at doing that, as the quote above proves. The bombing is aimed at hurting the Serb leaders by destroying their economy, and, as in the Gulf War, this will hurt the working class of Serbia most, and push them into the arms of the regime. Some argue that war is a dirty business and that the bombing of all economic targets should not be opposed because it will eventually make a difference, however small, in Kosovo. At the present rate Kosovo will be empty of living Albanians in weeks and even carpet bombing of Serbia seems unlikely to stop the Serb army, police and militias in Kosovo that soon.

It would be a crime to abandon the immediate right of the Kosovars to live for talk of working class unity and a Balkan federation in the distant future. But it also seems wrong to me to abandon the Serb working class to economic devastation by refusing to denounce an air war that cannot stop the destruction of Kosovo. This air war is controlled by NATO: NATO does not want independence for Kosovo; it will not arm the Kosovars. It is engaging in big power bully-boy tactics to push an old ally, Milosevic, back into line — by attacking the population of Serbia.

I want to argue for the use of the flawed slogan "Stop Bombing Serbia" alongside our other slogans — Independence for Kosovo, etc. We should not oppose bombing Serb tanks which flee over the border or wait there to attack? Our slogans cannot be detailed military advice! They are designed to position us politically. If we drop the slogan "Stop the Bombing" we will be dropping opposition to all but bombing houses and schools on purpose (accidents will obviously happen). We should use the slogan "Stop bombing Serbia", subordinate to "Independence for Kosovo", "Arm the Kosovars", "No trust in NATO bombs or troops", "Yugoslav army out of Kosovo".

We must continue to oppose bombing the Serb economy to bits.

Mark Sandell

We need an overview

ON Kosovo I agree that most of the left is talking nonsense. The SWP's pamphlet goes to absurd lengths to play down the genocide

against the Kosovars: I have leafleted Stop the War rallies where the speakers have talked about the "so-called massacre". The Stalinists have published disgusting Serb nationalist revisions of the area's history. There has been recourse to pacifism — "You can't solve the problem with more guns"; an acceptance of bourgeois liberal attitudes to the national question — "Kosovan independence could destabilise the entire area"; and a collapse into Stalinism — "We are against nations, so we are against the Kosovars".

We have a lot to do to reorientate the left. A left with such a poor understanding of Marxist ideas on war, imperialism and nationalism is in a terrible state. A left that lies about the world, which plays down tragedies committed against our class by our class enemies and rewrites history to fit their simplified model of the world will never win the respect of anything like a sizeable portion of the working class. WZ is right to make the starting point of our propaganda solidarity with the Kosovars.

But as well as reorienting the left, we have another duty. To explain to the working class as a whole what Marxists say about war, imperialism, nationalism and national liberation. And, especially so in an oppressor nation such as ours, we have a duty to explain the bourgeois, imperialist character of NATO. NATO is a world military police force, and just as we would not oppose a few (the vast minority!) of the police's actions — for example, I once called the police because I saw my neighbour beating the hell out of his partner — this does not mean we hesitate to say we don't support the police, politically or otherwise. This side of our commentary has not received the weight that I think it should have.

It is a good impulse for a worker or student militant to oppose NATO. We need to explain why they should, in this instance, first oppose Milosevic and why they should support the rights of the Kosovars. But their opposition to NATO is good: it is the start of all wisdom to oppose the brutality, hypocrisy and naked aggression of your own ruling class.

So what NATO bombings should we oppose in this war? What is a legitimate target? Are bridges, refineries, factories, roads etc. are all fair targets. No, they are not! Mainstream criticism has been of the civilian losses and "blunders". Any war will have these, although the Government and NATO talked up the "smart bombs" (some of which don't even seem to hit the right country!), "minimal collateral damage", and so on, to create the impression that this could somehow be a war without victims. But this is not our main concern. As Marxists we want a situation in the Balkans where class politics can start to rise to the fore. This cannot happen while nations like the Kosovars remain oppressed. It would also be off the cards for a very long time in a post-war situation with Serbia humiliated, its infrastructure in ruins,

its economy devastated. The result of humiliating Germany and devastating its infrastructure and economy after World War One was not exactly a decline in nationalism! If NATO cares about the Kosovars it should provide training, military hardware, etc. for the KLA. It should provide a troop force under Kosovar or joint control to liberate Kosovo. This would also minimise the civilian casualties and damage to the economy inflicted on Serbia. But NATO has refused to do this. And, absurdly, the pseudo-left would be more opposed to the war if this happened than it is to the air strikes. This is clearly because the weight of public opposition would be that much greater if there were a ground invasion, with the British and allied casualties that it would entail. In short, the opposition would be opportunistic.

What is the nature of the war? The SWP/Stalinists/pacifists are trying to portray it as an imperialist war against Serbia, like Vietnam. This is for opportunistic reasons — to recruit the "anti-imperialists". Blair and NATO say it is a "humanitarian war", to help the Kosovars. Both only talk of the NATO/Serbia war. The war with the main loss of life and most devastating effects is between Serbia and Kosovo. Kosovo's struggle is anti-imperialist (albeit not anti the big US/EU imperialism that would slot it nicely into the convenient camps that exist in the world of the British left). Serbia's aims are clearly imperialist — that is annexationist, chauvinist... But NATO's intervention is also imperialist. They don't aim to colonise Serbia, but they do want to see Serbia weakened militarily, whilst simultaneously avoiding an independent, radical national liberation movement in Kosovo. They do want to end instability on their doorstep, and force a bureaucratic, dirty compromise. They also want to prove that the US is the big world policeman. The US, with the UK in tow, wants to increase and strengthen its sphere of influence — this can be seen by the remarks from the US that one sweetener for a deal with Milosevic might be that they would allow Serbia to join NATO! And they want to cloak the imperialist, anti-working class nature of this policeman with a humanitarian veil. Just as the coppers claim to be here to stop old ladies getting beaten up or make the streets safe, NATO is claiming to be here to stop tyrants and massacres. We have a duty to point out their real class nature and that requires making unambiguously clear our hostility and opposition to NATO.

We are on the side of the working class. That class is an international class. We are on the side of both the Kosovar and Serb workers. The only chance to heal the national divisions between those sections of our class is for Kosovo to gain independence, but it also requires the bombs to stop falling on Serb towns. Our slogans and our propaganda should convey this.

Mick Duncan



Socialism and the national question

Fatherland or Mother Earth? Essays on the National Question by Micheal Löwy. IRE/Pluto, 1998

WHAT is the real Marxist tradition on the national question? The poverty of the left's attitude towards Kosovan independence is only the latest in a long list of examples of confusion on the matter. This collection of Michael Löwy's writings is a welcome exception, showing that Marxists can have serious answers in the face of national strife — though the collection is not entirely satisfactory, presenting only part of Lenin's tremendous legacy on the national question.

The first and most creditable aspect of Löwy's writings is his insistence that internationalism is an essential feature of Marxism. Marxists, he argues, are fundamentally opposed to nationalism because we do not treat nations as undifferentiated blocs, but divide them into social classes with different interests. Nationalism — loyalty to the nation as the supreme value — is rejected; instead, the international working class and its struggle for socialism are our guiding light. We are internationalists because socialism is a universal aim which answers the basic needs of *all* humanity; we are also internationalists out of necessity, because capitalism has created a unified world economy. It is in the interests of workers in each country to seek as their allies in struggle the workers of other countries. The cosmopolitanism of Marx and Engels is well summed up by the rallying cries of the *Communist Manifesto*: "Workers have no country" and "Workers of the world, unite".

For Löwy, Marx and Engels went further than this in two other important respects: with their proposition that a nation that oppresses another cannot be free; and by saying that the liberation of oppressed nations is a premise for socialist revolution in the oppressor nation itself. They advocated Polish independence from Russia and separation (probably followed by federation) of Ireland from Britain. Löwy refutes the charge that Marx and Engels were Eurocentric, with useful citations of their sympathies with, amongst others, the Chinese against England in the Opium Wars and the Arabs in Algeria against France in 1857.

Löwy wants to criticise Marx and Engels' approach without rejecting Marxism. The tendency within the *Communist Manifesto* to treat capitalism as a homogenising force, in which "the country that is more developed industrially shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future", is rejected for a view of the combined and uneven development of capitalism. Marx himself warned, in 1877, against the danger of transforming his "historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever [its] historic circumstances".

More specifically, Löwy follows earlier Marxists who have criticised Engels' conception of non-historic peoples. Engels wrote that the national movements of the Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Romanians, (as well as Basques, Bretons and Yiddish-speaking Jews in Eastern Europe) had played a reactionary role during the revolution of 1848, allying themselves with the arch-enemies of progress, especially Tsarist Russia. He characterised them as peoples without their own history — peo-

ples who had been unable to establish their own state in the past and would not be able to do so in the future. Engels argued that these peoples as a whole were reactionary, and therefore opposed their demand for national self-determination, predicting they would be assimilated as the French Provencals had been after 1789. Löwy endorses Rosdolsky's verdict that Engels had abandoned class analysis and substituted "an idealistic residue of the idealistic conception of history [i.e., from Hegel] and therefore a foreign body in the theoretical system of Marxism".

I think this conclusion is valid: Marx and Engels are not church fathers incapable of errors conditioned by the times they lived in. The implication of their views in 1848, the division between progressive nations (who have rights) and reactionary nations (who have none), has indeed been a real blight on attempts by socialists to make sense of the national question.

LÖWY, following Marx and Engels, conceives of nations as historical formations linked to the rise of the capitalist mode of production and crystallised in the political superstructure, the national state. Capitalist production and trade needs areas of sufficient size, in which goods and people can move easily and in which there is a common language, common laws and common taxes. This is the economic foundation of national movements.

The development of these insights into a coherent conception of what constitutes a nation, and how to address national divisions from a working class perspective, are the second focus of these articles. Löwy defines nations dialectically, as political entities given not simply by objective criteria such as economy, language and territory, but rather by the subjective element, the consciousness of national identity by a national political movement, by the self-definition of the community itself. It is something that even the much disparaged Engels accepted: writing to Vera Zasulich in 1890 about whether the Ukrainians and Belorussians were separate nationalities, he argued that the people concerned should decide their fate.

But if this explains what nations are and how they formed, how should socialists respond? Nations conquer other nations, plunder the economy, downgrade the language and culture, generally oppress peoples. Löwy locates the socialist answer to the national question in the sphere of democratic rights, and endorses the call, made at the 1896 Congress of the Second International, for the universal right to self-determination of all nations. For Lenin, recognition of the right of nations to self-determination was the basis for free and equal relations between communities and peoples. Such a demand meant that nations oppressed by other nations had the right to self-rule, to political independence — the right to secede and form their own state. Anything less than this right was, for Lenin, effectively support for the privileges and nationalism of the oppressor nation; recognition of this right was a clear commitment to the equality of all nations — and the best means of facilitating the future voluntary union of nations.

Lenin believed this was necessary because of the way national oppression divided the proletariat in empires like Tsarist Russia. As Marx put it,

it was the secret of the impotence of the working class and the secret by which the capitalist class maintained its rule.

However, upholding the right to self-determination did not oblige socialists to advocate separation as the only solution. In the Balkans, for example, the slogan of a Balkan Federal Republic was put forward. To advocate secession required a concrete appraisal of the interests of the working class, and whether independence would not only free the nation from oppression but remove all privileges and inequalities between the nations concerned. In the Saar plebiscite in 1935, socialists could not advocate that these Germans return to a Germany ruled by Hitler, despite their right (and the desire of the majority) to do so. Here, Löwy does valuable work in historical excavation, laying bare some of the features of a genuine Marxist conception on the national question.

Löwy tersely explains what was wrong with some of the contributions to this debate in the Second International. He criticises Rosa Luxemburg and others for reducing the national question to an economic rather than a political question, for seeing only the reactionary aspects of national struggles and for failing to understand that the recognition of national rights was an indispensable condition of solidarity between workers of different nations. Far from distancing themselves from the nationalism of the oppressed, (which Lenin believed could only be effectively fought by recognising the right to secede), these socialists tacitly supported the privileges of the oppressor nation. Bolsheviks like Kievsky (Pyatakoy), who argued that the nature of the epoch (imperialism) meant that national wars could not be progressive, are similarly slated. Stalin (who concurred with Lenin on self-determination), is criticised for the rigidity of his view that "it is only when all of these characteristics [common language, territory, economic life and psychic formation] are present together that we have a nation", and for explicitly refusing to allow the possibility of the unity or association of national groups within a multi-national state. Kautsky too was one-sided because he stressed language as the essence of nations.

Löwy presents a new thesis. He believes that Lenin's approach (the right of nations to self-determination) and the conceptions of Otto Bauer (known as cultural/national autonomy), are "complementary rather than mutually exclusive". In the light of break-up of the USSR and the former Yugoslavia, he asks, "...whether regional autonomy and cultural autonomy (in the framework of multi-national federations based on voluntary membership) are not a more rational and more humane solution. While the democratic right to self-determination is indispensable, how can it be applied to territories where nations are thoroughly intermixed without setting off battles, massacres and ethnic cleansing?"

Löwy re-appraises Bauer, whose *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* (1907) was an attempt by Austrian Marxists to save the multi-national framework of the Austro-Hungarian state by means of reform, offering each nationality cultural-national autonomy. Bauer defined a nation as a set of human beings linked by a common historical destiny or fate, by a common character, unified by a common culture and

as the never-completed product of an unending process. This definition stood out clearly against the ideology of eternal nations and other nationalist myths. Bauer was the first Marxist to criticise Engels' concept of non-historic peoples, arguing that nations like the Czechs having had no independent state in the past did not preclude a state emerging in the future. Bauer went beyond the limitations of those who focussed on language, or those who fetishised territory, as the defining features of nations, allowing for the inclusion of communities which did not fit clearly the abstract, objective definition. The subjective side of national identity was elevated in importance. In this respect, Bauer is worthy of credit.

However, the Achilles' heel of Bauer's position is his definition of nation in terms of common culture, and his proposal for cultural-national autonomy, giving "each national community the chance to organise itself as a legal public corporation, granted a certain degree of cultural, administrative and legal authority". In practice this meant that every person within the multi-national state would register their membership of a national community, entitling each group to its own parliament and ministers, separate schools, to raise taxation, etc. Bauer also supported the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO) dividing into separate parties according to nationality. (In 1918 Bauer abandoned his strategy of cultural-national autonomy, instead putting forward the demand for self-determination.)

Lenin mercilessly criticised Bauer in *Critical Remarks on the National Question* (1913). Making cultural-national autonomy an *alternative* to the right of nations to self-determination was, argued Lenin, to make concessions to nationalism (especially the nationalism of the oppressor nation), because it could not afford the freedom that self-determination implied. He also argued that cultural-national autonomy was institutionalised nationalism. Setting up a carefully balanced system of equal communal privileges within the existing boundaries of multi-national states undermined the struggle to abolish national privileges and transform the state as a whole. Lenin did not fetishise existing borders; Bauer's proposal seemed to fix the existing borders of states, institutionalising divisions between different peoples rather than uniting them on an equal basis.

Lenin also criticised the definition of nations in terms of national culture. He acknowledged that, because every nation contains exploited masses, any national culture would contain elements of a democratic and socialist culture. However, every nation also possesses a dominant bourgeois culture which had to be fought. Cultural-national autonomy tended to reinforce, or at least did not tackle, this dominant national culture, institutionalising divisions and thereby undercutting international culture. Just such a criticism has been made of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland over the past year.

And, Lenin said, if cultural-national autonomy made it easier for bourgeois ideas to dominate, it would strengthen reactionary elements such as clericalism and chauvinism. For example, the proposal for Yiddish-only schools in Russia would, he believed, take control of education out of the hands of the state and leave such schools under rabbi control. (He did not preclude Jewish children learning Yiddish within a unified school system.)

Although Bauer's view seemed to allow socialists to address the oppression of nations which did not fit the objective, textbook definition, in practice it is unhelpful. For black people in the US or South Africa, it downgrades the specific features of their racial discrimination and oppression, which will not be resolved by separation, nor even by community control. Conversely, the white racists who define themselves as a "nation" are really expressing their striving after racial privileges.

Lenin also favoured the unity of workers within one party regardless of nationality — hence the adoption of the spelling of "Russian" in the party name which applied to the whole country, not just those who spoke Russian.

Lenin had a positive alternative which retained the rational elements in Bauer whilst avoiding their pitfalls. However, Lenin's proposal — which really does complement the right of nations to self-determination — is conspicuously missing from Löwy's account, and is the gravest weakness of his analysis. Within the overall framework Lenin repeatedly called "consistent democracy", and on the attitude to minorities within a multi-national state, Lenin's attitude is clear. It is expressed in the Bolshevik resolution on the national question of 1913:

"Insofar as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government which guarantees full equality of all nations and languages, which recognises no compulsory official language, which provides the people with schools where instruction is given in all the native languages, and the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully

"Löwy defines nations dialectically, as political entities given not simply by objective criteria such as economy, language and territory, but rather by the subjective element, by the self-definition of the community itself."

democratic local self-government, with boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up, etc."

Löwy is therefore wrong to suggest that Lenin's policy for minority populations was to present a choice between assimilation and self-determination. Lenin wrote, "Advanced countries — Switzerland, Belgium, Norway and others — provide us with an example of how free nations under a really democratic system live together in peace or separate peacefully from each other" (*The Working Class and the National Question*, May 1913). Norway was an example of how separation might work without strife, after it broke away from Sweden in 1905. Switzerland was a model of resolving the national question where peoples were mixed within a multi-national state which did not deny national differences. The 1848 Swiss constitution's canton system allowed for wide regional and local control. The communes, the basic local units of government, were autonomous in many governmental matters. Lenin was not oblivious to the limits of the Swiss system — for example, women only gained the right to vote in some places during the 1970s — but the model has clear advantages over cultural-national autonomy in uniting different national communities on an equal basis.

What about the practice of the Bolshevik government? Löwy contends that, during the early years after 1917, in relation to Jewish and other national minorities, their policy was close to the cultural-national autonomy of Bauer, for example in developing Yiddish schools, theatres, libraries, etc. I think this is a little disingenuous: the Bol-

sheviks had already carried out a substantial programme of self-determination. Poland, Finland and the Baltic states had separated from Russia, whilst the Ukraine and other minorities enjoyed substantial autonomy. This was a very different kind of state from the decaying Austro-Hungarian empire which Bauer sought to reform, and different too from the "prison-house of nations" that was Tsarist Russia. Yet even for the Jews of Russia, the Bolsheviks still toyed with the possibility of a territorial solution to their oppression. Within this framework, some of the differences between the 1913 policy towards minorities and Bauer's proposal seemed to be narrow — but this is far from a vindication of Bauer's project without the substantial framework of consistent democracy.

Löwy's great omission from this collection is Lenin's framework of consistent democracy, and specifically the Bolshevik attitude towards national minorities, namely, "No privileges for any nation or any one language. Not even the slightest degree of oppression or the slightest injustice in respect of a national minority" (*The Working Class and the National Question*). Therefore I think Löwy is also wrong to argue that Lenin's distinction between oppressor and oppressed nations is the defining concept of his views on the national question. The division of the world into the great imperialist empires on the one hand, and the mass of colonies and semi-colonies on the other, was valid in 1920 — but is not an accurate description of the development of capitalism since then, nor of the mutual relations of interdependence within global capitalism today. Lenin rightly based his position on the reality of national divisions during the period in which he wrote: but the principle of consistent democracy seems to me to be the relevant answer both then and now. Löwy implicitly recognises this when he notes the various cases of rapid transformation of oppressed into oppressor. The relations between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, or Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda are just two of the latest examples. Lenin himself explained in *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1914) that, "We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation."

Löwy points to two contrary temptations which haunt the revolutionary left: firstly, to deny the legitimacy of national movements (he cites the Palestinians and the Catholics of Ulster), condemning them as petty bourgeois and divisive, abstractly proclaiming workers' unity; and, secondly, to espouse uncritically the nationalist ideology of these movements and condemn the dominant nations (Israeli Jews or Northern Irish Protestants) en bloc as reactionary (1998: 44).

However, as I understand it, supporters of the Fourth International (to which Löwy belongs) think the Jews should have national rights after a socialist revolution. This relegating of the question until after the achievement of socialism was dubbed by Marx and Engels national nihilism or indifferentism, and Lenin, in 1916, called it an empty declamation.

If Israeli Jews are a nation, then they should have the right of self-determination now like any other nation (or we are back to Engels' good and bad peoples). The conception of a democratic secular state in Israel-Palestine satisfies the national aspirations of no-one in the region: the Jews already have their own state and want to keep it; the Palestinians want their own state and are denied it. The answer is for the Palestinians to have their own state, alongside the Jews, on the territories where they are (and were before they were driven out) a majority. This is the only programme which addresses the desires of both nations, and which can unite Jewish and Arab workers to fight together for socialism.

The same criticism can be made of those on the

Women, identity and war

The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict, by Cynthia Cockburn, Zed Books, 1998.

CYNTHIA Cockburn's book is a study of three women's projects in areas of national conflict.

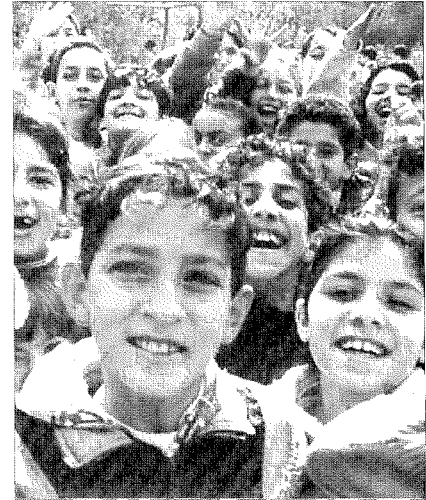
The Women's Support Network represents women's community centres, both Catholic and Protestant, in Belfast. Bat Shalom brings together Jewish and Palestinian Arab women in northern Israel to campaign for peace and the creation of a Palestinian state. The Medica Women's Therapy Centre in Zenica, central Bosnia, is a medical and psycho-social project responding to the needs of women and children traumatised by rape and bereavement during war.

Cockburn spent time at each of these projects, and interviewed over 60 women about their own involvement with the organisations. The result is some fascinating description of the practicalities of life in the places she surveys, which should be of considerable interest to socialists concerned with building working class unity in areas of national conflict. However, Cockburn's political analysis leaves much to be desired.

A striking aspect of the case studies is in their approaches to the national question. The Women's Support Network effectively ignores it, concentrating on bread-and-butter issues of poverty, domestic violence, abortion rights. Bat Shalom, in contrast, has a democratic programme of two states for two peoples, and actively campaigns for the rights of Palestinians in Israel, alongside its more social meetings: a distinctly different perspective. But this theme is not drawn out by Cockburn. Her concern to stress the similarities between the projects in terms of how they deal with women's national identities at a personal level is at the expense of ignoring important differences in their political programmes.

On the question of violence, Cockburn's own position is rather undermined by the women she researches. In the opening section of the book, she sets out her perspective: "A feminist analysis is not a bad place to stand to get a perspective on violence as a continuum — from domestic violence (in and near the home) to military violence (patrolling the external boundaries against enemies) and state violence (politicising against traitors within). It makes women question the pursuit of political movements by violent means."

But the responses to violence of the women she studies are rather more illuminating of reality than Cockburn's. One woman in Northern Ireland defends the paramilitary policing of local communities, because the paramilitaries will deal with domestic violence while the police



ignore it. Some there are explicitly pacifist, while others draw distinctions between civilian and military targets. In fact, the Belfast women are a long way from backing up Cockburn's assertion that women question the pursuit of political movements by violent means.

Cockburn's analysis is perhaps more accurate in the case of the women at the Medica Therapy Centre in Bosnia. Their experience, in many cases personal, of systemised rape during the wars in ex-Yugoslavia gives rise to a very different perspective on violence against women and its relationship to war. Cockburn describes women "worried about what their own menfolk had seen. And what, perhaps, they had done." Yet while the account of the worst atrocities of nationalism in ex-Yugoslavia is the most chilling aspect of *The Space Between Us*, Cockburn's characterisation of the Balkan wars as "masculine" falls into the excesses of radical feminism. Does she imagine that women played no part in "ethnic cleansing", that, faced with the evils of militarism and nationalism, all were sisterly and pure?

While this book is big on interesting description, it is lacking in conclusion. Cockburn makes a reasonable point that the women she has studied have a difficult time of it fighting against the identities which their respective nationalist politicians try to impose on them. But that's it.

While elsewhere in the book Cockburn does address, at least to some extent, the issues raised by class society (for example in stressing the working class nature of the Belfast women's projects), in her discussion of national identity politics the role of class is noticeably absent. So, who creates these identities: Irish, British, Serb, Croat, Israeli, Palestinian? In whose interests do they exist? Not in women's, says Cockburn. Beyond that she has no answers.

Cath Fletcher

left whose pious offer of national rights for the Kosovars after a socialist revolution fails completely to engage with the oppression they suffer right now under Serbian imperialism. Before the current war, socialists might have made propaganda for a Balkan federation as a means of preserving workers' unity, but it would be criminal in the present situation to deny the Kosovars' legitimate right to independence in the face of Serbia's ethnic cleansing. (Löwy, to his credit, does champion Kosovar national rights.) Similarly, only the demand for a federal united Ireland, with guarantees for the Protestants, satisfies the aspirations of the Catholics of the North whilst addressing the potential for oppression of the Protestants if the present relationship of forces was reversed. In each case, the policy of consistent democracy can be applied to the concrete situation and yield a programme to overcome national oppression on the basis of the equality of nations, and thus heal the divisions within the working class.

Writing against Kievsky (Pyatakov) in 1916, Lenin also gave a derisory warning to those who only formulate slogans negatively (e.g., "Troops out" or "NATO out"): "A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not sharpen, but dull, consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting..."

One of the virtues of Löwy's booklet is his apparent separation of the national question from the theories of imperialism and of permanent revolution. However, there is a residue here of his (mistaken) conceptions on these questions, in asides on imperialism, on post-capitalist societies (code for ex-Stalinist states, which Löwy has characterised elsewhere as "deformed workers' states"), and on the erroneous assumption that some movements (e.g., Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Nicaragua) which set out for national independence somehow grew over into triumphant socialist movements (1998: 51). This is nonsense. The purpose of Lenin's policy of consistent democracy was to unite the international working class, to facilitate the fight for socialism. In none of the countries cited did the working class itself fight for its own freedom or rule in its own interests: rather the workers were shackled by the bureaucracies that ruled these countries — ruling classes who were also unable to resolve their own national questions, except by repressing or freezing them.

The final chapters of the collection, in which Löwy addresses some contemporary national issues, are the least satisfactory. On Mexico, Löwy endorses the nationalism and anti-imperialism of Cuauhtémoc Cardenas of the PRD, yet this type of nationalism has been used to befuddle Mexican workers since the revolution of 1910-17. At the same time, he says that the proposals of the Zapatistas and the indigenous communities they represent are for cultural-national autonomy, suggesting there is hope for the future. It is not clear to me that this is exactly what the indigenous communities of Mexico are demanding, nor, given the extent of their diversity, whether policies such as separate schools would actually address the extent of their oppression. Again, the overall Bolshevik policy on national minorities from 1913-14 seems more far-reaching and more adequate. Although he rightly seeks the elements of a new internationalist culture in the actual struggles of today, Löwy's mish-mash of eco-warriors and general social movements only serves to detract from his earlier conception of internationalism built clearly around the international working class.

Most of the left have completely lost their bearings on the national question. Yet, as this discussion makes clear, the contribution of Marxists during this century is still — especially when pruned of the various excrescences and misinterpretations which have blighted the tradition — the basis for a coherent answer.

Paul Hampton

Fight for Rob Dawber's life!

ROB Dawber is 43. He and his partner Lindsay have five children. Last December he was diagnosed as having mesothelioma. This is cancer of the pleura that causes a thickening of the lining of the lungs. It is usually caused by exposure to asbestos. The thickening continues, filling the space into which the lungs expand. It is inoperable and incurable, Rob was told. There was nothing they could do. How long could he expect to live? Prognoses varied from two years to a few months. The average life expectancy after such a diagnosis is a few months to a year. Come back for painkillers when things deteriorate further, they said. That was it. Just go away and die.

Rob refused to do that.

Telling the story he stresses this part of it — that combativity and militancy can make a big difference. Knowing himself to be otherwise fit (never a smoker, for example) he decided not to sit around waiting to die, but to try everything possible.

His union, the RMT, fixed an appointment with a London specialist — and Rob learned of tests the specialist was himself involved in with a drug that had previously been used only on breast cancer. Rob managed to get himself referred from Sheffield to the hospital in London, where he was accepted on to the experimental programme. This involved chemotherapy each week for six weeks and then a CT scan to see what effects the chemicals were having. If there was no change, the experiment would be abandoned.

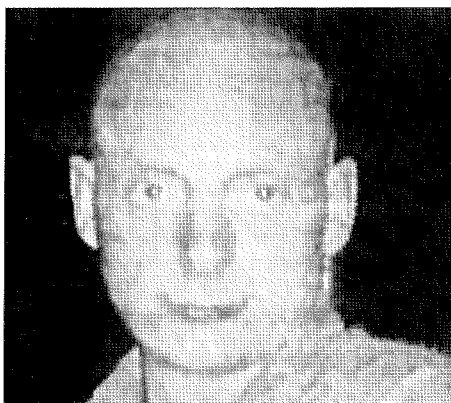
On 13 April 1999 Rob learned that the growths showed "definite regression in all areas". He continues to receive the chemotherapy.

But that, despite the very encouraging results, may not in the end be enough. Only two people in the whole world have survived mesothelioma — both had surgery which in almost all cases has so far proved impossible. One of the survivors was operated on at a clinic in Boston, Massachusetts, where work on mesothelioma is being pioneered. Can they operate on Rob? That, they tell him, will not be known until they "open him up".

They are willing to operate on him on one condition — that he provides \$100,000 (£70,000) upfront. Rob is miles away from such money. His friends in the Sheffield labour movement have set up an emergency fund to raise enough money to pay the £70,000.

Who is Rob Dawber?

Rob has been a socialist for 25 years. For almost all that time, he has been an active



supporter of *Workers' Liberty* and its predecessors. He graduated from Leicester University with a first class degree in mathematics. He could have earned better money than he earned on the railways, at easier and, certainly, safer work. But Rob took his socialism seriously. That meant staying with his class. That meant fighting for socialist politics in the working class and in the trade unions.

Many young people, especially in the '70s, learned that we live in a society built on wage slavery and oppression, in a world where socialism is not only possible but achingly necessary. Not too many of that generation of student socialists are still standing their ground for socialism. They have learned to live with the system. You find some of them pontificating in bourgeois newspapers; you see once-familiar faces on your TV screen. Not a few have found a ready market for the organisational and communication skills they learned in the socialist movement inside well-endowed bureaucratic structures. If £70,000 stood between any of them and their best chance of life, most of them could be sure of raising it. Some of them are "still" socialists, they will tell you. It's just that they have better things to do with their lives than swim against the stream in conditions where there are no guarantees of quick or easy success.

For Rob Dawber, his socialist ideas are a faith to fight for. On the purely personal level, they are a way to find a tolerable place in an often intolerable society. He believed that the only way to act and feel like a decent human being in a money-worshipping, commerce-mad society was to fight against that society and its rulers, to live his life as a pioneering representative of a better, socialist future.

Though the labour movement was a long way from what socialists want it to be, there he found a world in which human solidarity still has meaning. He believed it to be a move-

ment capable of refashioning society around the values of working class and general human solidarity. Having studied the history of the international labour movement in the twentieth century, he knew that this would only happen if socialists first persuaded large numbers of workers to refashion the labour movement itself as an instrument capable of waging class struggle. Immediately that meant working to build an organisation capable of helping the working class do that.

Rob has held various local union offices; he stood unsuccessfully for his union Executive. Forced out of the railways after 18 years, he took up writing. The well-known socialist film-maker Ken Loach is interested in turning a script Rob wrote about railway privatisation into a film.

IF Rob Dawber had been injured in a fight with police during a strike, as he might have been on a number of occasions, during the miners' strike of 1984-5, for example, or if he were facing legal charges as a result of militant labour movement action, it would be easy to pitch an appeal for money to defend him. Instead he faces death as a result of a job injury he did not know about until years later. Just one exposure to asbestos can lead to cancer — 10, 20, 50 years later. Unknown numbers of workers, tens and tens of thousands, are injured as Rob was injured, but don't yet know it. He is suing British Rail for compensation, but he can't wait on that. Every day may count in his fight for survival.

What will you do to help save the life of Rob Dawber? He is poorer than he might be now because he has devoted 25 of his 43 years to the fight for socialism. What *can* you do? Propose that your branch or District Committee makes a donation to the Rob Dawber Fund. This has already happened in a few trade union branches. Make a donation yourself. Ask your socialist friends to help. Don't be shy about approaching drop-outs and platonic socialists for help. Look for ways of raising money — for example by holding a local benefit social.

Rob Dawber's experimental chemotherapy is going well, but it carries no guarantee of ultimate success. Therefore time may be short. The sooner Rob can go to Boston, the better chance he'll have.

Do something!

● Send cheques payable to "The Rob Dawber Mesothelioma Fund" to: Mark Serwotka, 39 Vivian Road, Firth Park, Sheffield, S5 6WJ.

Sean Matgamna