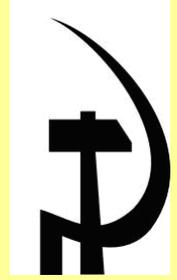


Marxist Revival

A selection of articles from the Marxist Revival website

May 2013



- Why Marxist Revival? p.2
- Why internal democracy is a precondition for building an international organisation p.3
- The politics of globalisation and imperialism today p.7
- Modern imperialist domination and Islamic fundamentalism p.15
- International report adopted by AWL conference, October 2012 p.26
- Iran: Two leadership crises, one revolutionary solution p.27

<http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/>
marxist.revival@gmail.com

Why Marxist Revival?

The big economic crisis of 2008-09 once again exposed the frailty of the ruling class in all countries and the fragile basis of the world capitalist system itself. While the consequences of the crisis continue (even in countries that are technically no longer in recession) the manner in which the bank bailouts and other 'solutions' were carried out created deep dissatisfaction and suspicion among large sections of the masses.

The economic crisis of capitalism and the political problems of the bourgeoisie also highlighted two other crises. First, the traditional mass organisations of the working class - whether the parties that include the words 'socialist', 'labour' or 'democrat' in their names - or trade unions that have represented generation after generation of workers in various industries, have been unable or unwilling to mobilise their ranks even to fight an effective defensive campaign against the bourgeoisie's attacks on workers and their families.

Second, the various organisations claiming to be 'revolutionary', 'Marxist' or 'Trotskyist' have generally been unable to contribute to the resistance of the masses against the attacks. In many cases they have directly acted as a left alibi of the bureaucratic apparatus of the traditional leadership, or as sectarian commentators of the class struggle.

What we have clearly seen is that the massive onslaught by the bourgeois state on everything from child benefit to pensions, on jobs and conditions, and on all aspects of social provisions (free healthcare, housing, education and so on) has – so far - mostly been successful. All the hard-won gains that helped hold together the very fabric of working class communities are under threat.

While both the reformist and the 'revolutionary' leaders have been in the depth of their own crises, the masses have had to fight their own battles: most recently in particular in Europe, in North Africa and in the Middle East – all as an expression of a world revolutionary crisis. With the reformist leaders offering no campaign to fight back, or, worse still, taking part in the

counter reforms, the masses have adopted new methods of by-passing the traditional leaderships and fighting on their own initiative in the streets of cities and towns all over the world. The present crisis of capitalism has sparked the mobilisation of millions all over the world against the austerity measures that are supposed to stabilise the capitalist system.

'The historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat' has still not been solved. Even the best of the leaderships still have work to do on the theoretical, political and organisational level. It is not sufficient to be at the forefront of defensive campaigns or pressure groups. We must prepare ourselves for the rebuilding of a revolutionary international capable of leading the offensive to take power and taking the first steps in replacing the capitalist mode of production.

The attempt to build a Fourth International and the method presented in Trotsky's Transitional Programme can be counted as some of the biggest steps forward for Marxism after the demise of the workers' state in the Soviet Union. But we cannot merely rely on resurrecting them. Just as surely as the struggles of the working class have continued during the past 70-75 years, the long struggle to make new organisational, theoretical and political gains also continues. The revival of an international organisation that is capable of dealing with all the important tasks facing the working class is now the main point on the agenda.

As revolutionary Marxists, in order to make our contribution to the necessary revival of Marxism, we cannot act without an organisational structure and programme that express our previous experiences and direct our new interventions.

We call our very modest structure **Marxist Revival (MR)** and we declare our readiness to collaborate with the genuine forces striving in the same direction as us.

Marxist Revival is formed by comrades who consider themselves revolutionary Marxists and base their activities on the experiences of Bolshevism in the Russian revolution, the first four congresses of the Comintern, the International Left Opposition and the Fourth

International. We struggle for the formation of an international vanguard organisation in order to prepare the world working class for socialist revolution. The MR is not itself an international organisation or even a tendency. The MR is a project for elaborating contributions to a political platform, together with existing organisations and with individuals. In this way we want to contribute, both on a theoretical and practical level, to the building of an international organisation.

Marxist Revival

10 June 2012

Why internal democracy is a precondition for building an international organisation

Maziar Razi

Although in discussions about internal democracy tendency rights are accepted in words by many organisations both from Trotskyist and other backgrounds, in practice, however, they are not implemented. In my opinion this question is not a trivial or secondary issue, but is the precondition for building a healthy organisation both on the national and international level that are preparing for socialist revolutions.

Also, the Marxist concept of “democratic centralism” stems from an objective necessity within the labour movement. Many communist organisations and parties have a totally incorrect and non-Marxist understanding of this concept. This incorrect and non-scientific understanding is not exclusive to Stalinist organisations only, but can also be observed in many Trotskyist organisations.

These organisations and parties have an administrative concept of democratic centralism. In fact, all these organisations have an organisational structure that is a caricature of a revolutionary party. They all appear to have congresses, members of a leadership, elections and (formal) ‘democracy’. The leadership of these organisations appears to be ‘elected’ on the basis of a majority vote and the leaders and the

‘leader’ are elected for the period between one congress and the next. These organisations all have their party organ and the pages of their papers are also adorned with articles by, and pictures of, Marx, Lenin or Trotsky (or other leaders), and organise activities and have their supporters. All these organisations claim to have a so-called ‘democratic’ organisational structure. However, either they do not allow, in practice, internal rights for discussions of different views, or when the first signs of a disagreement with the leaders or the majority of members appear, a wave of accusations, slander and humiliation of opponents begins immediately; and if these psychological pressures are not effective, organisational manoeuvres, exclusion and slander quickly progress towards expulsion and suspension of membership. No doubt, if such organisations were to have a state position, then these differences would surely result in arrests, trials and even the execution of opponents. According to these ‘leaders’, by having a majority of the votes inside an organisation it is enough to nip in the bud the voice of any opposition. In fact, the method these so-called ‘communist’ organisations have for dealing with dissent can be compared with how military regimes in underdeveloped countries treat their opponents.

The common denominator of all these ‘communist’ parties lies in a fundamental issue: namely, the lack of recognition of ‘tendency rights’ for the views of minorities. In fact, this very obvious and simple issue separates all these organisations from a genuine revolutionary Marxist organisation. Not recognising the rights of members who reach different views to those of the leadership or the majority of members, is the basis for distinguishing between a deviant organisation and a revolutionary Marxist organisation. These organisations believe that allowing an internal democratic discussion will undermine the unity of the party and eventually lead to splits and result in a weak party that is not capable of leading a revolution. All these arguments are based on theories and ideas of the defeat of the Russian Revolution (Stalinism), and have no resemblance to the organisational theories of the victory of the Russian Revolution (Leninism).

The reason for recognising a place and rights for different and opposing views within a

revolutionary organisational structure is this: within a revolutionary organisation the members of this organisation, based on their revolutionary practice in different fields of struggle in society, reach different and sometimes conflicting types of consciousness from each other. Accepting a general programme of the party does not mean that all members, at all times, have to have unanimity of ideas and obey their “leaders”. Members can, as a result of their practical struggles, reach a consciousness that is different from some other members of the organisation who are active in other spheres of struggle. Hence members and cadres of a united party, in their daily interventions in between two party congresses, adopt dissimilar and different tactics. Their experiences are relative and even in many cases incomplete. For example, among the worker members of a revolutionary organisation differences may arise on the slogan of ‘independent labour organisations’ or the ‘national question’ and how to intervene among workers to achieve it. Perhaps, on the issue of say independence of labour organisations from political parties, some party members come to the conclusion that perhaps this workers’ independence should also include their own party. Others may conclude that no: it should not include their own communist party! This type of differences of opinion may also be seen in other cases. Obviously one cannot be certain in advance as to which view will reach the desired results and is correct. It is only through practical action and experience that theories are eventually proved right. From a Marxist point of view, theory is only concentrated action (practice).

Obviously, to reach agreement and a common position in order to put these tactics into practice, and to bring together the different opinions and implement them in unity, inside the revolutionary party there must be the conditions that facilitate the possibility of dialogue and the formation of tendencies that disagree with the majority’s view.

It is under these conditions that internal democracy within a revolutionary party becomes vitally important. A party that from its formation does not recognise the right to form tendencies for differing and opposition views, cannot be a

revolutionary Marxist party that is supposed to prepare the workers’ revolution. A party that does not understand that only through the exchange of views among members with different types of consciousness and tactics inside the party can the party programme be refined and effective intervention be organised; without a doubt, will deviate in the whirlwinds of the class struggle and will not play a revolutionary role. The Bolshevik Party was a party with internal democracy. The internal democracy practices within this party prior to the October 1917 revolution, and particularly between 1917 and 1919, can be an example to follow for future revolutionary organisations. Those who deny internal democracy and the formation of tendencies and factions within organisations, are not corresponding themselves with the concept of the Leninist vanguard party.

To explore the real meaning of “Democratic Centralism” we need to discuss this issue further. In a vanguard party, members, who during their activity in the struggle reach different views, present their views at the party congress. However, the problem arises when some members (even one person) have differences with the majority’s or the leadership’s views. In such a situation it is obvious that the revolutionary party must accommodate this minority so that its position can be publicised among all the members through the internal bulletin and planned meetings. This minority must have the right to form a ‘tendency’. A tendency that, with the majority’s agreement and the setting up of internal promotion tools by the leadership, takes form and, in a reasonable and comradely environment, discusses and promotes its views for the next period. This is because a revolutionary party knows full well that any tactic that is presented by some members (even a majority), will not necessarily be the correct view in practice. Only action in the struggle can show which one of the views has been more consistent with reality. For example, if after one year experience shows that the minority view is wrong, it is obvious that this disagreement will be invalidated and the tendency will declare itself disbanded. But if the minority view has been correct and the majority view incorrect, then the minority view that has become familiar to all members will become the majority view. This

way there will be an opportunity for all views to prove themselves.

However, even if in the future the majority's views are shown to be wrong, the minority – while preserving its beliefs and its criticisms of the majority – must put into practice the majority position outside the party for a period (until the next congress). Despite its internal differences, this party must act in unity within society and experience the majority's views in action, until their outcome is proved in practice (whether positive or negative). The next party congress can reach a new assessment and conclusion based on the practice of the previous period.

What happens if the disputes of a minority are not resolved after a period (between two congresses)? At this stage, there can be two causes for this. The first is that these differences still remain at the level of tactical issues and more time is needed to prove these views. In this case the opposition tendency, as in the previous period, remains in the party so that the issues can be reviewed in the next period. But in some cases the differences may go beyond just tactical differences. Deep political divisions can also appear in the party. In capitalist society the dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling elite. There is always the possibility that even members or the leadership of a revolutionary party are influenced by ideas of the class enemy. Therefore some differences can go beyond tactical ones. For example, it is possible that some members reach a decision that the line of the party leadership suffers from class deviations and that it is necessary to have a deeper struggle to obstruct the deviant line. In that case, the party leadership must respect the right of that group of dissidents – according to their judgment – to declare a 'faction'. These members must be allowed to remain inside a revolutionary party and even to participate in the party leadership, according to the number of their supporters. In this way sufficient opportunity will be given to them to publicise their views within the party and at the leadership level. In fact the formation of a 'faction' is a more serious step for combating the deviant line of the majority within a revolutionary party. Forming a 'tendency' is about tactical issues and may be short-lived.

But if after a period the faction reaches the conclusion that the leadership and the majority of the party are about to cross the class line, and that there is no possibility of convincing the majority of members, then, at this stage, it should have the right to form an 'open faction'. In fact, the concept of forming an open faction means that preparations are being made for a split. The open faction can even address the labour movement and make public announcements and let the working class know about the deviation (in its opinion) of the majority. A revolutionary party must also give this minority the organisational opportunity to not only get its views across to all members but to also include them in the official party organ. Obviously, if there is no agreement and the labour movement did not change the positions of the majority, the next step will be a split. But this split can also be reasonable and comradely, without accusations and slander. History will show the correctness or the deviance of the two sides' views in the future. Perhaps when the majority's mistake has been proved in practice the conditions for this minority tendency to re-join the united party will come about. But if they end up clashing, fighting, making accusations and hating each other; these two tendencies, even if they come to have the same views in the future, can never be inside a party together.

Won't all these preconditions, as many so-called Trotskyist claim, weaken the party and its leadership? Aren't these 'liberal' and 'bourgeois democratic' attitudes towards internal democracy? Shouldn't the party be 'iron'-like so that it carries out its decisions in unity? Isn't making a concession to a 'minority' liquidationist? The answer to all these questions is in the negative. Recognition of minority rights not only does not weaken the party but it will lead to strengthening it. Making provisions for setting up a 'tendency', a 'faction' and even an 'open faction' will give the party more credibility and make it stronger in the eyes of the mass of workers. It is enough to just look at the state of the various international organisations and parties to see the severity and depth of their organisational crises – which is largely the result of organisational deviations. In fact, a crisis-ridden situation applies to most parties and organisations at an international level. All the

unwanted splits, which have no objective basis, could have been avoided; provided that the rights of minority views inside the organisation were officially recognised. Obviously the basis for organisational separation and collapse are rooted in the deviant and non-democratic approach of the parties, and not vice versa. If the conditions for expressing opinions had been created, perhaps today not only would there be no splits in these organisations, but they would have attracted many forces.

What these deviant organisations do not understand is this: that splits, suspensions and expulsions must only be the last stage in a long process of discussion and joint activity. Expulsions and splits are justified only when a tendency has crossed the class line and that this has also been shown in the labour movement. In other words, the results of the destructive and counter-revolutionary policies of a current (or trend) must not only be clear and transparent for all members of the party but that they have been clearly expressed in society. In the Bolshevik party such rights, including the right to set up a tendency and a faction, were recognised for members. One of the reasons for the Bolshevik Party being successful in the development of a revolutionary programme that was connected to the labour movement, and therefore gaining credibility among the workers' councils which led to the victory of the first and only socialist revolution in the world, was precisely the respect for internal democracy. Only in 1921, during the Civil War, were factions inside the Bolshevik Party banned. Before that, in many cases party leaders and members publicly expressed their positions and differences with the leadership without being expelled or punished. However, the 'necessity' of limiting internal factions at the time of the Civil War in 1920-1921, became a virtue during the Stalin period and was followed by years of Stalinist repression. During the last years of his life Trotsky made a clear 'self-criticism' about this period. Trotsky wrote: "The prohibition of oppositional parties brought after it the prohibition of factions. The prohibition of factions ended in a prohibition to think otherwise than the infallible leaders. The police-manufactured monolithism of the party resulted in a bureaucratic impunity which has become the

source of all kinds of wantonness and corruption." (The Revolution Betrayed, 1936)

The Trotskyist movement has also learned many lessons from the 1917 October revolution and therefore cannot repeat the same mistakes. Leon Trotsky's assessment of internal party issues, to which he remained loyal until the end of his life, was as follows:

"It is entirely insufficient for our youth to repeat our formulas. They must conquer the revolutionary formulas, assimilate them, work out their own opinions, their own character; they must be capable of fighting for their views with the courage which arises out of the depths of conviction and independence of character. Out of the party with passive obedience, with mechanical levelling by the authorities, with suppression of personality, with servility, with careerism! A Bolshevik is not merely a disciplined person; he is a person who in each case and on each question forges a firm opinion of his own and defends it courageously and independently, not only against his enemies, but inside his own party. Today, perhaps, he will be in the minority in his organization. He will submit, because it is his party. But this does not always signify that he is in the wrong. Perhaps he saw or understood before the others did a new task or the necessity of a turn. He will persistently raise the question a second, a third, a tenth time, if need be. Thereby he will render his party a service, helping it to meet the new task fully armed or to carry out the necessary turn without organic upheavals, without fractional convulsions." (Leon Trotsky, The New Course, 1923)

In order to organise a revolutionary international, the recognition of the democratic rights of tendencies and factions within the party is crucial. Revolutionary Marxists must remain loyal to this method.

21 March 2013

The politics of globalisation and imperialism today

By Colin Foster

From Workers' Liberty 2/2, March 2002

Since the 1990s new patterns have emerged in world capitalism. Their immediate roots go back to the 1970s. In 1973, the major oil-producing states forced a big increase in oil prices. Among the big capitalist powers, the oil price rise hit the US less hard than others. It even made some of the US's own new oilfields profitable. Britain, too, would gain from the oil price rise, when North Sea oil production boomed in the early 1980s. But in essence the increase was one of the signals of the end of the colonial era.

In 1975, Portugal's African colonies - Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau - at last won their independence. Over the previous three decades, the great colonial empires of West European states like Britain, France, and the Netherlands, which long dominated the globe, had bit by bit been liquidated. India, Indochina, Indonesia, Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria had become independent.

In 1973 states like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Venezuela and even Saudi Arabia - some once colonies or semi-colonies, others long very subaltern and pliant partners of the big capitalist states - showed that they had their own capitalist ambitions. They were no longer willing just to serve as platforms for the ambitions of US or British oil companies.

Oil-producing states stashed a lot of their vast new revenues with the international banks, who in turn lent the cash to industrialising ex-colonial states. When the big capitalist economies lurched into slump after 1979-80, trade contracted, interest rates rose, and credit got tighter: those borrower states could no longer pay yesterday's debts from today's profits and new loans. In 1982, Mexico's failure to meet debt repayments signalled the start of a global debt crunch. The capitalists of the less-industrial states had put large slices of the loan money into safe US or European property or bank accounts, and now they co-operated with the banks in making the workers and peasants pay the cost of the crisis,

on a scale which made British Tory austerity look gentle.

The crunch was not just a sudden crisis. The capitalists and governments of the poorer countries did not respond to the debt squeeze by shifting into their old mode of having their own national states as the main financiers for development, as some of them had when they became unable to meet debt payments in the 1930s. They made a new permanent regime out of heavy indebtedness, sharpened austerity and a drive for exports to cover the costs of debt. Their industrial development had reached a level requiring substantial imports - and thus international credit - to continue. Some of the costs of keeping internationally creditworthy were irksome to the ex-colonial wealthy, but most of those costs they could offload onto the workers and peasants - and most of the benefits of the borrowing they could pocket for themselves.

The USA and other big economies recovered after 1983. Though the recovery was sluggish, and interrupted by new crises in 1990-2 and 2001, it provided sufficient markets for the ex-colonial capitalists to pursue their new strategy - at least until they got well locked into it. In the 1980s, the ex-colonial states, in total, started to export more manufactured goods to the US than it imported from there.

As the ex-colonial states sweated to make debt payments, they took on new loans. Their debt burden often increased. In 1999, debt-service took 76% of Argentina's export income, 33% of India's, 30% of Indonesia's, between 22 and 26% for each of Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and South Korea.

Tariffs fell. Under the 'Uruguay round' of trade negotiations, average advanced country tariffs on manufactured imports are to be cut to less than 4%. Tariffs of ex-colonial states are set to fall from 34% (in 1984-7) to 14%. Brazil's weighted mean tariffs have fallen from 32% in 1989 to 13% in 1999; China's, from 33% to 16%; India's, from 50% to 30%; the USA's, from 4% to 3%.

World merchandise exports increased 137% between 1987 and 1997 - much faster than world output - and the merchandise exports of countries classified by the World Bank as 'low and

medium income' almost tripled, increasing by 187%. The ratio of trade (imports plus exports) to output (GDP) doubled for 'low and medium income' countries between 1970 and 1997. It increased from 18% to 40% in low-income countries and from 25% to 50% in medium-income.

Investment in ex-colonial countries by companies which buy or construct facilities there (called foreign direct investment, as distinct from just buying shares or making bank loans) sagged in the 1980s but increased fast in the 1990s.

Local private capitalists also figured more largely, often displacing the ex-colonial states from their previous centrality in capital investment. Even states still run by 'Communist Parties', like Vietnam, Cuba and, most spectacularly, China, sought foreign investment and encouraged private enterprise. Telecoms, other utilities and basic industries were privatised in many countries. The Chilean state started privatising in 1973, and has sold off 95% of its state-owned enterprises. Mexico sold off or shut down 80% of its 1,500 state-owned enterprises between 1982 and the end of 1992, cutting 200,000 jobs in the process. South Korea started a new wave of privatisations in 1987, following previous sell-offs in 1962-66 and the early 1980s. In Pakistan, which started privatising in 1991, 43% of workers in the sold-off enterprises were laid off within the first year after privatisation, and many workers elsewhere have lost jobs, or job security, through privatisation.

In many countries, tariff reductions, a drive to make exports and attract foreign investment, and privatisation were tied together with cuts in whatever minimal welfare provision existed - such as food price subsidies - through 'Structural Adjustment Programs' negotiated with the IMF or the World Bank as the price for further loans. Fifty-five countries borrowed from the IMF under Structural Adjustment Facilities between 1986 and April 1998.

This was 'globalisation'. It has brought an increase in inequality both within and between nations. Millions have been pauperised. Whole populations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have been marginalised and left as 'basket cases' by the onrush of world-market capitalism. Since

1960, the gap between the richest and the poorest fifth of nations has doubled.

Yet the development of an industrial base in the ex-colonial world continues. Power production increased in 'low income' countries 170% between 1960 and 1990, and 189% between 1990 and 1998; in 'middle income' countries, 370% 1960-90, 204% 1990-98. The number of telephone lines, the amount of paved roads, the extent of drinking-water supply and irrigated land, have also increased fairly fast. Between 1990 and 1997, manufacturing production increased 49% in 'low income' countries, 57% in 'middle income' countries (and 15% in 'high income' countries). Countries like Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Mexico and Brazil now export relatively high-tech goods. Even in the poorest ex-colonial countries, there is generally some increase in the preconditions for industrial production, even if that increase is outpaced by a parallel rise in misery and poverty. The proportion of illiterates dropped fairly fast between 1980 and 1995 - from 30.5% to 22.6% - though the world's total illiterate population increased from 877 million to 885 million.

Trade has changed in structure as well as increased. Manufacturing as a percentage of the exports of 'low and middle income' countries increased from 20% in 1960 to over 50% in 1990 and over 60% in 1999. Within the reduced share of world trade due to agriculture, a new pattern has emerged where the South specialises in export of labour-intensive luxury crops and the North (especially the USA) in export of capital-intensive 'low-value' bulk foods.

John Pilger, in his book *Hidden Agendas*, puts a widespread view when he contends that the increase in inequality and poverty, and the increased role of big multinational companies and international banks, make globalisation really a euphemism for US reconquest of the ex-colonial world. But capitalist development can bring huge misery and inequality without having to be compounded with colonialism. And that is what is happening now.

The 'globalist' path has been followed by virtually all governments, not only those pushed into it because their debt burden obliges them to do the bidding of the IMF or the World Bank. Although

no doubt the governments would prefer to be able to choose their own tempo rather than obey the international bankers, the basic strategy suits their class interests. They impose the welfare-cutting, privatising, foreign-investment-seeking plans primarily because they are capitalist governments, not because they lack national independence. They queue up to join the IMF, while in the 19th century the peoples of Africa and Asia often fought hard to avoid 'joining' colonial empires. The IMF today (2001) has 183 members, as against 130 in 1975.

Despite the rapid rise of foreign direct investment in the 1990s, the economies of most ex-colonial countries today are dominated by local capitalists. Those ex-colonial states able to provide infrastructure and educated labour for enterprises competitive in world manufacturing and services - and they include some with vast hinterlands of absolute poverty, like India and Indonesia - are doing so not because their states have been weakened, but because they have been strengthened - because they are now established capitalist states, with local capitalist classes behind them of some substance and bulk, rather than what they often were, proto-capitalist states run by a thin middle class layer anxious to use all the levers of state protectionism to build a base and ward off big outside capital. Globalisation depends on the states of newly-industrialising countries being stronger, not weaker.

'Transnational capital may be more effective than was the old-style military imperialism in penetrating every corner of the world, but it tends to accomplish this through the medium of local capital and national states... it depends on many local jurisdictions - on, say, the Indian or Chinese state - to maintain the conditions of economic stability and labour discipline which are the conditions of profitable investment' (Ellen Wood).

Full-fledged capitalism has spread much more widely than ever before. As the gleaming skyscrapers reach upwards in the cities of the ex-colonial states, the grim shanty towns spread outwards. Hundreds of millions of people suffer hideously - peasants pushed out of subsistence farming by the drive towards higher-priced world-market cash-crops; workers who lose their

jobs in privatisations or debt crises; the urban poor, hit by cuts in food subsidies and increases in public transport fares and utility charges; and whole peoples in those ex-colonial countries still dependent on bulk raw material exports.

The pillage of the workers and peasants of the ex-colonial countries continues, but in a different form - the urbane international banker replacing the colonial soldier and tax collector. The difference of form is not just a 'formality'. Far from it. Today's 'imperialism of free trade' is a domination of rich over poor, and richer nations over poorer nations, achieved primarily, to use a phrase from Marx, by 'the dull compulsion of economic relations... Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally'.

Historians have called British imperialism in the early and middle 19th century, 'the imperialism of free trade'. In South America, for example, Britain did not need to establish its own colonial rule in place of Spain's. The competitive supremacy of its industry gave it economic dominance, and with that political influence. A new, more multi-faceted, more universal, 'imperialism of free trade' is the main form today.

It is not 'purely economic', purely a matter of the anonymous and automatic workings of the market. The capitalist market economy, despite having 'the dull compulsion of economic relations' at the core of its relations of exploitation, requires far more police, military establishment, and machinery of government than pre-feudal or tribute-paying economies. The deliberate, semi-political or political, actions of IMF and World Bank officials, of World Trade Organisation negotiators, of the big business executives who fly around the world requesting and giving bribes, and of the metropolitan administrators of military and economic aid programmes, all count for much.

But the basic mechanism is the pursuit by the big multinationals and banks of a world open to the free flow of their products and their capital, the drive towards such a world by the biggest capitalist states, and the compulsion on the weaker capitalist states either to join in such a world, with all its disadvantages to them, or be excluded, with even greater disadvantages.

Three distinct epochs of modern imperialism can now be distinguished.

* Between the 1870s and the end of the Second World War, 'imperialism' meant a world divided up into rival colonial empires. Each of the big capitalist states ruled over vast millions of less-capitalistically-developed peoples, using their territories as controlled sources of industrial raw materials, captive markets for manufactured exports, and sites where capital could be safely exported (mainly for extractive industries and infrastructure) to win dividends, interest and profits. They used colonial or semi-colonial rule because they could do at manageable cost; in order to give them advantage in rivalry with other big powers; and often because without direct metropolitan power no cooperative local machinery of government could be established strong enough to drive the population into the world-market economy, squeezing out raw materials and pushing in metropolitan exports.

* In the epoch from the Second World War to 1989, the USSR practised an ultra-monopolistic imperialism in its sphere of influence, and the USA deliberately promoted an 'imperialism of free trade' as its main counter.

In its 'backyard', Central America, until the 1960s at least, it maintained a system of semi-colonialism, under which the Marines could be sent in against any large reformist threat to the super-profits of the big American corporations which dominated whole countries based on the export of a few raw materials.

But even in Central America, the pattern began to shift in the 1970s. And elsewhere, steadily but effectively, the USA favoured the break-up of the old colonial empires held by Britain, France and other European powers. It did that because it knew that its capital could dominate on the basis of free trade, and because otherwise the colonial independence movements would be pushed towards seeking alliance with the USSR.

If any country 'went communist' or threatened to do so - Vietnam 1965-75, Cuba in the 1960s, Nicaragua after 1979 - then the USA would certainly not rely on automatic economic mechanisms to stop this. The USA would use

direct, murderous, often huge military force to police the frontiers of its sphere of influence. If US strategists saw a military dictator as offering more stable and compliant local rule than a democratic or reforming alternative - if the dictator would be 'a son-of-a-bitch, but our son-of-a-bitch', in the phrase coined by F D Roosevelt for Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and found so apt that later US leaders repeated it for Somoza in Nicaragua and Batista in Cuba - then the USA would deploy its might to make that dictator a pillar of what it called 'the free world'. That happened much further away than in Central America - in Chile with Pinochet, in Iran with the Shah, in Indonesia with Suharto.

There was still a difference from the old European colonial empires. The USA did not want governor-generals, except to a limited degree in Central America. It did not want trade blocs tying particular poorer countries exclusively to its economy. It could and did tolerate nationalisations and protective tariffs enacted by the ex-colonial governments, so long as they remained broadly within its sphere.

South Korea, for example, was kept within the US sphere of influence at the cost of a large war against Stalinist North Korea (1950-53). It was heavily dependent for its startling industrial growth on its position as a supply base for the US war effort in Vietnam. Yet it had a markedly 'nationalist' industrial policy, largely based on local ownership, and with more Japanese than US capital among the foreign owners of its enterprises. Its position in the US 'imperialism of free trade' was markedly different from its position before World War Two in the Japanese colonial empire.

* Since 1989-91, the USSR has no longer existed as a superpower. The old Stalinist bloc has collapsed. The USA has been able to push for a whole world based on the 'imperialism of free trade'. It can do this in an environment where communication and transport costs have been radically reduced; where manufacturing, especially of a great variety of less bulky goods, spreads wider and wider; and where a greater number of poorer countries have both the state-power and infrastructural preconditions for becoming sites for world-market industry.

A structure is emerging which Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, in their recent influential book, call 'Empire'. Not an empire, not the empire, not the US empire, either, but simply 'empire'. It is not the work of the USA alone, not by any means. Other capitalist powers, big and small, have joined in, because, once the push is underway, joining in gives fewer disadvantages than staying out. International bodies like the WTO, the IMF, the European Union, and even the UN have seen their weight substantially increased, although we are qualitatively distant from a 'world government'. The pressures towards a world of three big trade blocs (Americas, Europe, Japan-centred Asia) have been contained and subordinated to a more general 'globalisation'.

The shift towards an 'imperialism of free trade' has come partly because the great metropolitan capitalist interests can afford it. For example, exclusive control by their 'own' nation-state over sources of raw materials is less important to modern big capitalist concerns - often organised in transnational companies with substantial operations in many countries outside their home country, and with several alternative sources for most raw materials - than to the big capitalist classes of earlier eras.

Historically the central reason, however, was nothing to do with the metropolitan profiteers 'mellowing'. The social and political awakening of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, their transformation from populations with dispersed and illiterate peasant majorities into nations with big cities, substantial working classes, autonomous bourgeois classes and some industry of their own, made the risk and expense of colonial or semi-colonial rule generally far too great for the metropolitan powers.

Ever since the liquidation of the old colonial empires became an unmistakable trend, Marxists have argued about 'the end of imperialism'. However, all the theories of the 'end of imperialism' have been as confusing as their mirror-images, the schools of thought insisting that the differences between the imperialism of today and that of, say, 1916, when Lenin wrote his famous pamphlet entitled *Imperialism*, are only superficial and secondary.

This is best seen by reviewing those various theories.

In his writings around 1916, Lenin argued - against others in the Bolshevik Party, such as Bukharin and Pyatakov, who claimed that the political independence of small nations was an utter impossibility in an imperialist epoch - that imperialism in the sense of the world dominion of finance capital and monopoly capital centred in the most powerful nations could quite possibly continue even with political independence of the ex-colonies. No Marxist, therefore, has ever said straight out that the end of colonial empires is the end of imperialism.

The first version of the 'end-of-imperialism' came from Michael Kidron of the SWP (then IS), though the SWP has since flipped over from his views to something much more like a standardised Stalinised-Leninism. Kidron based himself on the idea, drawn from selected passages of Lenin, that the essence of imperialism was the export of capital.

In some circles, that idea had led to the conclusion that decolonisation would mean metropolitan capitalism choking to death on its uninvestible riches. Kidron used the same assumptions to argue that the post-1950 metropolitan capitalist prosperity meant the end of imperialism. Imperialism had been the 'highest stage but one' of capitalism.

Arms spending was draining away the glut of capital, so the basic economic mechanism of imperialism no longer operated. The demand created by the state through the 'permanent arms economy' filled the 'underconsumptionist gap' supposedly caused by workers not being able to consume enough. Export of capital was no longer needed to provide a 'drain' for excess capital from the advanced countries. The Third World was also less and less important to the advanced capitalist countries as a source of raw materials, because of new technologies, use of substitutes, etc.

In short, imperialist exploitation of the Third World was no longer necessary for the West, and that explained decolonisation. However, Third World countries were left crushed and battered in the world of military competition between

nation-states. 'The societies maimed and shattered by the imperialist explosion of the last century are again being maimed and shattered - by the growing economic isolationism of the west (an imperialist implosion as it were)...'

Kidron's argument fell down on several grounds. Firstly, imperialism is not fundamentally about providing a 'drain' for superfluous capital. Secondly, the 'functionalist' argument that economic activities must happen if they are 'necessary for capitalism', and not happen if they are not 'necessary for capitalism', is false in general. A capitalist world is shaped by capitalists acting on capitalist interests - with deflections and detours imposed by workers pursuing workers' interests - not by some superhuman force called 'the needs of the system'.

Kidron's argument also fell down on straightforward factual grounds. The major trend has been 'globalisation', or at least internationalisation, of capital, rather than 'growing economic isolationism', and capitalist development in the ex-colonial states has not been squeezed into nothingness.

So drastic was the factual falsity of Kidron's argument that another 'end of imperialism' argument soon developed which was its exact contrary. For Kidron, imperialism had ended because of 'not enough' capital in the Third World; for Bill Warren, because of 'too much' capital there.

Warren was a member of the British Communist Party and then of a Stalinist-Kautskyist sect, the British and Irish Communist Organisation. His first article, in 1973, presenting facts on industrial development, was an important blow in forcing Marxists to re-think their 'conventional wisdom' of the time about the supposed impossibility of serious capitalist development in the ex-colonies. But Warren's further theorisations became a simple inversion of the 'orthodoxy' he was arguing against, that of the supposedly inexorable and uniform 'development of underdevelopment'.

Where the 1960s radical orthodoxy said that colonialism hindered the development of the colonies, also that the removal of formal colonial rule had not removed those hindrances. Warren

replied that colonialism helped the development of the colonies - and that the end of colonialism helped even more! Where the radical orthodoxy attacked the social and cultural effects of colonialism and imperialism, Warren responded with a vigorous defence of the historically progressive role of bourgeois culture - yet had little but scorn for a major example of that progressive role, the self-assertion of the ex-colonial peoples through bourgeois national struggles.

Where the radical orthodoxy held that imperialism generates underdevelopment - using 'underdevelopment' as a term to cover both lack of capitalist industry, and unevenness of industrial development, and mass misery within that development. Warren replied that imperialism generates development - meaning growth of capitalism, and increasing evenness of development, and increased social welfare.

Warren came to paint the development of capitalism in the most glowing colours, not only recognising it (as Marxists must) but effectively praising and advocating it. Everything that pointed to capitalist progress in the Third World was played up, the other side of the picture played down. One example: Warren noted briefly that 'Agriculture has failed...' in the ex-colonial countries - but rapidly moved on to speculations about favourable prospects for the future.

If you read closely, Warren offered qualifications and reservations. But the main drift of his argument was that the world is moving towards more even development, with relations of economic domination weakened. In fact capitalist development has become more uneven. The economic domination of big states, international banks, and transnational corporations has sharpened, not weakened.

A third and more recent theory about the 'end of imperialism' is, so to speak, neither 'not enough' capital in the Third World, nor 'too much' there, but rather 'too much' capital nowhere in particular.

This argument acknowledges the continuing or growing power of multinational banks and corporations, indeed highlights it, but argues that they have become increasingly footloose,

increasingly free of ties to particular states, and so the actions of the big capitalist states are increasingly 'uncoupled from' and secondary to the actions of particular capitalist interests. Since (so the argument goes) imperialism means actions by big capitalist states to impose the interests of their 'own' particular capitalists on other states, it is obsolete. So argue such writers as David Becker and his colleagues in their book *Postimperialism*, and David Lockwood in the Australian Marxist journal *Reconstruction*.

In the first place, most imperialist state actions in the heyday of 'high imperialism' were not directly linked with the interests of a particular business, either. In an influential polemic against what he understands as 'Marxist theory of imperialism', D K Fieldhouse writes that the theory 'alleges that partition [of the world] was due to economic necessity. The industrialisation of continental Europe and the revived protectionism of the last quarter of the century made tropical colonies necessary as never before to provide markets for manufactures, fields for the investment of surplus capital, and an assured source of raw materials. Colonies were deliberately acquired to fill those needs.' In fact, 'remarkably few colonies were annexed as the result of a deliberate assessment of their economic potential by an imperial power... In short, the modern empires lacked rationality and purpose: they were the chance products of complex historical circumstances.'

Everything is a 'product of complex historical circumstances'! Kautsky, Luxemburg and Hilferding had demonstrated the roots of colonial conquest in the logic of capitalist exploitation in the colonies, not just in a 'rationality' of metropolitan-capitalist deliberations. And Lenin pointed to politically or ideologically motivated colony-grabbing and 'the conquest of territor[ies], not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary...'

It is true that world capitalism's new 'regime' since the late 1980s has combined great accumulations of highly mobile capital with more-or-less free trade, and that in this regime imperialist interventions, whether by the IMF in Indonesia or Brazil or by the US military in the Gulf, are on the whole more likely to be about securing the general conditions for profit-making

by the big transnational capitalist interests than to resemble the mid-century 'sending in the Marines' by the USA to keep small Central American countries safe for the United Fruit Corporation. But, overall, the 'post-imperialist' writers exaggerate the 'uncoupling'.

And anyway, what conceptual precision is gained by insisting that the Gulf War, or the actions of the IMF, are not imperialist? The argument that 'imperialism' is defined by (some rehash or other of) Lenin's picture of the world in 1916 is no better when used to claim that the world today is not imperialist than when used to insist that, being imperialist, it must correspond to that 'Leninist' picture.

Imperialism has seen many forms, and it is pedantic dogmatism to claim that the modern 'imperialism of free trade', led by the IMF, the World Bank, the big commercial banks, the transnational corporations and the military power of the US and NATO, is not a form of imperialism.

It still destroys and oppresses, and maybe on a larger global scale than its forerunners. It is a system which conveys the choicest fruits of the world's labour to the billionaires in 'highly concentrated command points in the organisation of the world economy... a new type of city... the global city... New York, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo... The more globalised the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, that is, the global cities' (Saskia Sassen). Despite all the relative capitalist advance in the ex-colonial world, and some significant advance in commerce within Latin America, the proportion of 'low and middle income' countries' trade done with the 'high income' countries, rather than with each other, increased between 1987 and 1997. The producers of the ex-colonial world still mostly have to do their haggling in trade with bigger, richer, more powerful concentrations of capital, centred in the rich countries. Yet the difference of form has immense political significance.

In Marxist documents of the era of 'high' imperialism, the era dominated by great rival colonial empires, the term 'imperialism' was often used not to designate the system, but as a

shorthand or pejorative alternative name for 'the colonial or semi-colonial power'. Imperialism designated a person, or at least a definite social grouping, as in 'the plans of imperialism' or 'the aims of imperialism'. And the Marxists could write about battles to 'drive imperialism out' of a country, or to wrest a country from 'the grip of imperialism'. No great confusion resulted. They meant the struggle for national independence.

To continue that usage in today's epoch of the 'imperialism of free trade' is confusing.

Battles to 'regain' or 'increase' national independence are today generally a snare. The ex-colonial states mostly have as much political independence as they can have in a dog-eat-dog capitalist world. No extra measure of 'independence' can undo economic dominance arising from the fact that the international banks have the dollars needed for international trade, and the big transnational corporations the technologies needed for world-competitive production. To 'wrest a country from the grip of the 'imperialism of free trade' is only to wall it off from the world market - the one alternative, in today's world, even worse and more destructive than integrating it into the world market.

Imperialism can be fought only by working-class struggle, which must tackle the local capitalist classes as the most immediate enemy. If those capitalist classes, or factions of them, call on the workers and peasants to rally behind them in the cause of 'anti-imperialism' or 'national independence', generally they are lying, or promoting downright chauvinism.

Time was when 'imperialism' could be used as shorthand for 'the advanced capitalist states', without great confusion. To do that today is essentially to use the word 'imperialist' as a way of branding advanced capitalism as a particularly bad form of capitalism. But the evil in advanced capitalism is capitalism, not advance!

Capitalism develops unevenly on a world scale, and with a tendency for the unevenness to increase and compound itself. Some countries become sites for modern infrastructure, advanced industries and services, major finance capital, the headquarters of multinational companies, and heavy investment, while others

remain with few industries (often primary-product or low-technology), operated by low-wage labour, with low investment and widespread pauperism. Capitalism is in its very essence a system of ruthless competition, where the rich and the strong do down the poor and the weak, and the richer capitalist states, and the banks and multinationals based in them, dominate over poorer countries. This system is as predatory as ever. But it is predatory because of the logic of capital, not because of the special ill-will or arbitrary propensities to tyranny of the US or any other particular government. The states which police it are as vicious as ever. But there is no way to "fight imperialism" of this sort by upholding the weaker predators against the stronger. Against political domination we fight for the right to self-determination of all nations and for consistent democracy. Against the impositions of the IMF on poorer countries, we support the struggles of workers and peasants in those countries. Against the depredations of international capital, we fight for social ownership and for the planned use of the world's resources and technology to get rid of poverty. This fight against imperialism is a part of our fight against capitalism, not something superseding and overriding it. Old-style military-conquest imperialism is practised today most often not by the big powers, whose capitalist classes find the "dull compulsion of economic relations" cheapest and most effective, but by smaller "sub-imperialist" powers who have to resort to such risky methods for lack of economic strength. The term "sub-imperialist" was coined in the 1970s by Ruy Mauro Marini, for Brazil. Brazilian capital has acquired its share of what Saskia Sassen calls "command points" largely by economic-based means. But it is not so easy for smaller states. The last of the European colonial powers to relinquish their empires were the economically weakest, Portugal (in 1975) and Russia (in 1989-91). Today some ex-colonial or ex-semi-colonial countries have some military means to dominate their neighbours, but relatively little economic clout. They use the methods of the old imperialism, "paleo-imperialism", as it might be called - Turkey in Kurdistan and Cyprus, Serbia in Kosova, Iraq in Kurdistan and Kuwait, Indonesia in East Timor, Morocco in the Western Sahara, Libya in Chad, Ethiopia in Eritrea, Argentina in the Falklands... This "paleo-imperialism" is a small-scale parody of the high imperialism of the late 19th century.

It is not anti-imperialist. It is not a progressive alternative to the economic domination of the big powers. It may clash with the modern "imperialism of free trade", and with the USA as the chief policeman of that new order - or cooperate with it as a junior partner. But even when it clashes with the USA, the "paleo-imperialism" does not represent liberation or progress. It does not show a way out of underdevelopment, or towards a fairer and more equal world. Only independent working class struggle can do that. And the working class which can wage that struggle is growing in numbers, and often in organisation, all across the ex-colonial world.

Modern imperialist domination and Islamic fundamentalism

For discussion at the 2008 Congress of the IMT

In June 2007 the two Israeli members of the International Marxist Tendency supported Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip going so far as to call it a "victory against imperialism" and a "liberation" (Yehuda Stern, 19 June 2007).

There then followed a month of discussions between the International Centre and the Israeli comrades on the fundamental errors of this position. Despite this, during the IEC meeting in July, Yossi Schwartz not only defended this line but extended it to include the unconditional military defence of the Iranian regime. He said that in the event of a US attack on Iran the Iranian comrades should "join the Iranian army"!

While the barrage of criticism that was aimed at them made the two Israeli members leave the International, it is, however, important for us to draw lessons from this serious theoretical lapse by them. How can a seemingly 'principled' position lead revolutionary socialists into blindly supporting Islamic fundamentalists? This policy would have had serious consequences had anyone been involved in real activity among the workers in Israel, West Bank or Gaza (although it is doubtful that activists with their feet on the ground would have come up with such a ridiculous position).

While it is recognised that the Israeli members (and many groups) stretched the traditional standard position of revolutionary Marxism on the national and colonial questions beyond breaking point, our view is that even this old tradition has been turned into a formula by many in the 'Trotskyist' and other movements. Although we are dealing with the same mode of production and epoch as that of Lenin and Trotsky, the world long ago entered a period that included important changes in the relationship between the imperialist countries and those they dominate. This theoretical viewpoint therefore needs an overhaul to make it relevant to a changed world.

Furthermore, wherever an alternative and ultimately anti-working class movement has developed we should not merely see its mass base and combativity. We should, first and foremost, acknowledge that it has developed and filled the vacuum of leadership because of the successive betrayals and basic errors of 'communists' and 'socialists'. Our position on these movements should therefore be aimed at broadening, radicalising and ultimately replacing their leadership with Marxists - not admiring them!

We therefore need to reiterate the Bolshevik tradition on this issue and to highlight the principles on which it was based.

The role of Islamic fundamentalism

It may seem curious that although every Marxist in Europe or North America recognises Islam as a thoroughly medieval and reactionary ideology, when faced with the Iranian regime's repeated 'confrontations' with the United States, the Lebanese Hezbollah's military resistance against Israel, or Palestinian Hamas's clashes with the Israeli military, they lose the ability to make a concrete analysis of the situation and the class nature of the forces involved. Or, worse still, they make a fairly good assessment about the reactionaries or religious zealots but use the excuse that "they are oppressed" to justify supporting them!

The role of political Islam in its various fundamentalist and other guises is an important issue that has faced the Trotskyist movement and the left generally for a number of decades. Socialists active in Muslim countries have had to wage a daily struggle against it.

Yet following the backlash against Muslims after 9/11 the left in many countries has capitulated to the leaders of these communities in Europe and elsewhere. The British SWP, for example, has totally prostrated itself in front of the Muslim bigots' prejudices in its 'united front' against imperialism's militarist policies and the attacks on democratic rights. It has further shown how out of touch it is with the best elements of workers and youth by trying to implement this policy in places like Egypt!

It is our duty to explain to workers everywhere that no matter how many out-of-context quotes such people find from the Bolsheviks, there is no theoretical basis for justifying their actions or stance. It is possible to quote the Congress of the Peoples of the East making glowing remarks about "holy war"¹ or Lenin saying positive things about bourgeois nationalism or religion.

But the positions of these 'Trotskyists' have nothing to do with a Marxist analysis of the class nature of Islamic fundamentalism and its role in diverting the revolutionary potential of workers and the exploited and oppressed masses into a dead-end.

We would like to begin with a brief look at the peculiarities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and its 'army' in order to put Schwartz's ridiculous advice to Iranian socialists in its appropriate historical context, to expose it as a clearly class-collaborationist line and then move on to our movement's historical positions.

On joining the 'Iranian Army'

What officially became known as the IRI is a unique regime. The precise form it took was the product of the way that a massive revolutionary

wave of workers and other exploited and oppressed masses was smashed by the Iranian bourgeoisie's counter-revolution. This unique regime also has a unique military structure.

For Marxists it is always important to start with the concrete. The Iranian Army, as such, is said to have around 350,000 personnel, with over 60% made up of conscripts. Yet it is the Pasdaran, the so-called Revolutionary Guards, that maintains internal security and was the main military force during the war against Iraq. The Pasdaran number at least 125,000 (slightly less than the professional core of the army) and was formed following the revolution, because the Shah's army had disintegrated and the Islamists did not fully trust its remnants.

From the beginning the Pasdaran was an ideological force loyal to Khomeini. It was first used to crush the mass movement and then, following Iraq's attack, took part in the war. It has always had a separate command structure, controls the basij (the mobilisation force with close to 400,000 total personnel), controls Iran's strategic missile forces, is in charge of defending the nuclear installations and has extensive economic power through its connections to top politicians who were former members (inc. Ahmadinejad). It is ideological, highly-motivated, well-paid and trained, and keeps an eye on the regular army (which the Islamic regime has overhauled completely over the past 29 years).

The nearest historical equivalent to the Pasdaran was the SS, which was a military organisation under the control of Hitler and the Nazi party. Could any 'Marxist' justify joining the SS when the US or Britain attacked Germany?

The error of the "join the Iranian army" political line has already been proven in practice. After Iraq attacked Iran in September 1980 a number of Iranian groups, particularly the Tudeh and Fedaiin Majority, made it their policy. Since they were already giving the IRI uncritical support, and even collaborating with it, they tried to "join the Iranian army" to do propaganda work at the front. Once there they found out that they had to pray, observe religious duties and so on. Many of their members were shot on the spot when they refused to do these things.

¹ *Manifesto of the Congress to the Peoples of the East in Baku: Congress of the Peoples of the East*, pp 163-173.

It could be argued that their position was actually 'better' than Schwartz's - as at the time US imperialism was clearly backing the Baathist regime and the Iranian regime appeared far more 'revolutionary' and 'anti-imperialist' than today. Of course imperialism's backing for Iraq was not aimed at overthrowing the Iranian regime and the 'revolutionary' and 'anti-imperialist' slogans were just empty rhetoric.

So the call to "join the Iranian army" - over 25 years after witnessing what the regime did to the Stalinists and how it has propped up reaction in the region - shows total ignorance about the nature of this regime and its relationship with US imperialism. Schwartz should know that in a real war the concrete situation of doing anti-war propaganda in the army is nothing like Yevgraf (played by Alec Guinness) joining the Tsar's army in Doctor Zhivago! Although, to be fair, Schwartz never said anything about anti-war or anti-regime propaganda while inside the army!

The 'standard' position

Although it has been bad enough that many people within the 'Trotskyist' movement have taken positions on countries with no knowledge other than what they have read in the bourgeois media in Europe, a bigger mistake has been to take the letter of the Comintern's or Trotsky's position without understanding the reasoning behind it.

If we look at Trotsky's position on the war between Italian imperialism and Ethiopia, we see that the main consideration is that the defeat of the imperialist country will create an international balance of forces more favourable to the proletariat and lead to the underdeveloped country's independence. Trotsky says: "Of course, we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia ..." and correctly adds that "... we want to stress the point that this fight is directed not against *fascism*, but against *imperialism*. When war is involved, for us it is not a question of who is "better," the Negus [Ethiopian emperor] or Mussolini; rather, it is a question of the relationship of classes and the

fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism."²

It is clear that in today's world the "question of the relationship of classes" would not be limited to classes in the imperialist country but would take into account, indeed put equal (or even more) emphasis on, the position of workers in the dominated country. As for "the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism", this is, historically speaking, largely irrelevant.

Trotsky could even maintain such a position regarding Brazil in the late 1930s.

"In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally — in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat."³

Trotsky's position on the war between Fascist Italy and Ethiopia, and the British threats against a semi-Fascist Brazil, are similar to Marx's position, for example, on the Russo-Turkish War in 1878. This is because the conditions had not changed fundamentally between 1878 and 1935 or 1938. The pace of development during those 60 years had not produced a qualitative change in the class structure of these societies.

² Trotsky, *The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict*, in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935-36*, p 41.

³ Trotsky, *Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation*, in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*, pp 31-6.

Trotsky was dealing with pre-capitalist or very weak capitalist countries, with no significant working class movement - when dealing with Brazil he mentions the British proletariat but not the Brazilian one. But could such a position be taken now, if say an imperialist power were to threaten Brazil for some reason? Could Marxists overlook the fact that during the past 70 years Brazilian capitalism has grown by leaps and bounds? That there has been a huge growth in class differentiation and social inequalities among these classes? That the working class has been involved in many struggles and has matured to the level that it has experienced both a reformist labour government and factory councils? That many other sections of society, like black people, have also developed important mass movements?

In today's Brazil the "question of the relationship of classes" will have to focus on the Brazilian working class, particularly elements around the factory councils and the leftwing of the PT. It is therefore important to bear in mind the historical specificity of any analysis, position or principle.

If this position was still valid for many cases in the late 1950 and early 1960, it became obsolete with their independence. By 1979, in Iran, it had become a class-traitor's charter! As Gustav Mahler said: "Tradition is the handing-on of Fire, and not the worship of Ashes."

The roots of our position

The position of the IRSL (Iranian Revolutionary Socialist League) has its origins in our experience during 1978-81 in Iran. We tried to grapple with the phenomenon of the Islamic counter-revolution, which, in order to crush the revolution, took on an 'anti-imperialist' appearance. Through this method it managed to assume the leadership of the revolution and, having done so, it then proceeded to crush a mass movement that had mobilised 10 million people - a quarter of the population.

The main force within this movement was the working class. During a period of a few months the workers' movement had made up for decades of defeats and stagnation during the Shah's dictatorship: a political strike by the oil workers, workers' councils controlling production

and distribution, and so on. All of these were smashed because the Stalinist and Maoist left could not see the wolf in sheep's clothing.

Right from the beginning the Islamists adopted tactics that appeared radical or even leftwing but in fact weakened the workers' movement. In the middle of a movement in which the working class, particularly the oil workers, played a key role the Islamists seized the US embassy and diverted workers and many other activists into gesture politics and shouting slogans outside the embassy. At a time when workers were forming factory councils in many areas, controlling production and even distribution in some cases, certain guerrillaist and Stalinist groups did not understand the importance of workers' control and workers' councils. They did not understand the revolutionary role that independent movements of women and the national minorities could play.

A counter-revolution that took on a 'revolutionary' guise, exploited the religious and cultural traditions of the masses and, of course, received help from imperialism, in dealing the movement a crushing blow that has lasted for decades.

While its Islamic ideology was recognised as thoroughly medieval and reactionary by the left, a large section of it, including the international left, thought that the Khomeini regime was somehow objectively, or empirically, or even unconsciously(!), 'anti-imperialist' and 'revolutionary'. Such wishful thinking proved disastrous for all the Stalinist, Maoist, centrist and other groups. It even caused a split among the Trotskyists - with half of the group supporting Khomeini. Unfortunately instead of shunning the group with the class-collaborating policy the leadership of the USFI ostracised the group that upheld working class independence!

Yet this sorry episode in our history did not end there. Having gone through this as a tragedy the movement has had to face it many more times as a farce. Many groups that had criticised others for their pro-Khomeini stance during the revolution ended up out-doing each other in 'defending' Iran whenever clashes between the Islamic Republic and the US escalated!

Similar positions and slogans have dogged the movement: "We back Libya" (April 1986); "Victory to Iraq" (1991) and "We are all Hezbollah now" (2007), and their variations, some more strident and some toned down, have come from a wide variety of groups claiming to be Trotskyist. These positions are shared by a whole range of organisations: from small, marginal, petty-bourgeois sects to large parties with solid working class roots.

And although the movement has seen more than its fair share of charlatans, rogues and muddle-headed philanthropists, we believe that so long as there is no theoretical block against these positions then these mistakes will be repeated.

Our position was first set out in relation to the Iranian regime and then further developed during the Gulf War (in a pamphlet entitled *The Gulf War and revolutionary socialism*). In 1990-91 we did not side with the Baathist regime against US imperialism. We backed the Iraqi masses against both imperialism and its local stooge. The Kurdish and Shia uprisings against the regime showed that this political line was not in any way utopian. If only the whole of the international left had worked to advance this political line ...

Socialists and the national and colonial questions: a brief history

The positions of most leftwing groups, whether they are some kind of Stalinist or 'Trotskyist', have their roots in the Comintern's way of approaching the "national and colonial questions". Unfortunately, however, they copy these principles in a simplistic and formulaic way.

The Second International had a long tradition of ignoring this issue, or at best, adopting resolutions that were never put into practice. This 'international' disliked any real involvement by socialists in the colonies. It even *excluded* Iranian socialists when voting on a resolution on the first Iranian revolution!

At its Second Congress, the Comintern not only established a fundamentally different policy to the Second International on the national and colonial question, but also formulated it in an entirely different way. The various delegates from the colonial countries - particularly the

Indian M.N. Roy and the Iranian A. Sultanzade - played a very active role in the pre-congress preparations as well as the two sessions and commission dedicated to this issue. Then a few weeks later a special congress, Congress of the Peoples of the East, was convened to forge closer links with anti-colonial movements and to begin building communist organisations in these countries.

The Second Congress of the Comintern

In the *Theses on the national and colonial question* drafted by Lenin, the Comintern described the three principles on which its national and colonial policy was based: "... the Communist Party should not place the main emphasis in the national question on abstract and formal principles, but in the first place on an exact evaluation of the historically given and above all economic milieu. Secondly it should emphasise the explicit separation of the interests of the oppressed classes, of the toilers, of the exploited, from the general concept of the national interest, which means the interests of the ruling class. Thirdly it must emphasise the equally clear division of the oppressed, dependent nations which do not enjoy equal rights from the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations, as a counter to the bourgeois democratic lie which covers over the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's total population, by a tiny minority of the richest and most advanced capitalist countries, that is characteristic of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism."⁴

It is through this method, paraphrased below, that the Comintern reached its positions:

- (i) a concrete analysis of the historical conditions, especially the economic situation;
- (ii) a strict differentiation of the interests of the oppressed and exploited classes from those of the ruling class dressed up as 'the national interest';
- (iii) a clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent nations and the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations.

(i) A concrete analysis

⁴ *Second Congress of the Communist International: Minutes of the proceedings*, Volume 1, p 177.

The Comintern was fully aware of its limitations here but tried its best to base its analysis on precise and concrete information about the situation in these countries. At the time of the Second Congress there were still no CPs in most countries of 'the East' (or even in Europe): in the whole of Asia, Latin America and Africa there were just three CPs. Even these parties had a small base, lacked enough experienced cadres and their scope for activities were limited because of very repressive conditions.

That is why when submitting his draft of the *Theses*, Lenin prefaced it with the following:

"In submitting for discussion by the Second Congress ... the following draft theses on the national and the colonial questions I would request all comrades, especially those who possess concrete information on any of these very complex problems, to let me have their opinions, amendments, addenda and concrete remarks ... particularly on the following points ..."⁵ He then lists 16 issues from around the world, including "... Polish-Jewish and Ukrainian experience; Alsace-Lorraine and Belgium; Ireland; ... Balkan experience; Eastern peoples; The struggle against Pan-Islamism; Relations in the Caucasus; The Bashkir and Tatar Republics; Kirghizia; Turkestan ... Negroes in America; Colonies; China-Korea-Japan."

It is important to note that not only did Lenin think that he lacked sufficient knowledge on the "Eastern peoples", colonies in general, large areas like China-Korea-Japan or the struggle against Pan-Islamism, but even many places that had until recently been part of the Tsarist empire. Having "concrete information" on these "very complex problems" was the key to developing tactics that were relevant to the objective conditions in each country. And this was what Trotsky tried to follow - as far as conditions would allow - after the degeneration of the Comintern and his exile. For example, when asked about Latin America he began by saying: "I am not sufficiently acquainted with the life of the individual Latin American countries to permit

myself a concrete answer on the questions you pose."⁶

This approach meant that by the time of the Fourth Congress CPs had been established in many countries and were active in the workers' and anti-colonial movements there.

The main difference between then and now

We believe that when comparing the general international situation vis-à-vis the national and colonial question during the early twentieth century with today's conditions there is one main difference: the Comintern was dealing with *dependent countries* as opposed to *independent nations*.

This new development, in turn, has had the following consequences: the indigenous bourgeoisie rather than European rulers has come to power; the indigenous bourgeois state apparatus and army uphold the status quo; capitalism had become the dominant mode of production in the former pre-capitalist societies; the growth and economic importance of the working class (rather than peasants); growth in industrial rather than agricultural production; shift to urban rather than rural living; and last, but not least, class struggle - especially of the proletariat - within the ex-colonial nation.

Over the past decades the combined effect of these factors has led to the specific concrete situation in these countries.

Independence

It was foreign domination that had held back the productive forces in these societies.

The *Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, written by M. N. Roy, the Indian delegate at the Second Congress of the Comintern, and adopted by the Congress, clearly point out the source of the problem: "Foreign domination constantly obstructs the free development of social life; therefore the

⁵ Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 31, p 144.

⁶ Trotsky, *Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation*, op. cit., p 34.

revolution's first step must be the removal of this foreign domination."⁷

Political independence that removes the main obstacle to capitalist development - colonial domination - has therefore always been the main political aim of the bourgeoisie of these countries. Once the bourgeoisie was in power, however, its main reason for being against imperialism disappeared (even though in a number of cases this is just formal independence). So while the 'national bourgeoisie' was opposed to the colonial administration it is now no longer fundamentally opposed to the economic domination of the country by imperialism.

This 'national bourgeoisie', which in many aspects is a client of the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries, nevertheless, has its own interests that may come into conflict with the imperialists. But so long as there are super-profits then there is enough for thieves of all sizes.

A very important feature of independence and the ascent of the local bourgeoisie is the development of the nation state. A 'potential nation' during the anti-colonial struggle now becomes a reality. The formation of the nation is also itself the beginning of its stratification into various classes and layers. Soon enough the local classes begin to confront each other head-on (without any confusion or complexity about the true nature of the bourgeoisie which was unclear during colonial rule).

Once the 'national bourgeoisie' comes to power it becomes the ruling class. Whether it came to power through a struggle like in Kenya, or from above through a deal with imperialism like in Iran, it no longer plays any progressive role in society. Any 'anti-imperialist' talk or behaviour is the result of bargaining for more concessions from imperialism, and any resulting clashes or even war, does not change the character of this bourgeoisie in relation to other classes in the country or internationally.

⁷ *Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, in *Second Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit., pp 115-120.

The bourgeois-democratic tasks are implemented in a deformed and unfinished way. This is as much as the bourgeoisie can do without losing control. These do enough to develop the productive forces and capitalist relations of production.

Yet it is important to note that even *before independence* the Comintern was clear about the nature of the "privileged classes in the oppressed countries" and what the reality of independence could be like in many cases. The *Supplementary Theses* mention that: "The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not ... mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies." The Comintern, unlike the 'Trotskyists', did not give the national bourgeoisie any 'knee-jerk' unconditional support.

The *Theses* also explain that where possible the Comintern should "... give direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations ... through the Communist Parties of the countries in question."

It is important to note that: first, the Comintern is setting out its policy on "*revolutionary movements in dependent nations*" (emphasis added) and not *reactionary*, or other, movements let alone bourgeois state (or semi-state) structures in *independent* countries. Second, even when giving "direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations" the Comintern tries to do this "*through the Communist Parties* of the countries in question" (emphasis added). So although there were just three Communist parties in the colonial and semi-colonial world, in Mexico, the Dutch East Indies and Iran, the Comintern had a clear vision of how it wanted to help the revolutionary movements that were fighting against colonial occupation.

The *Theses* also differentiated between different countries and draw attention to a number of important points in "... states that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal or peasant patriarchal character". These were: "a) All Communist Parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form the support

should take must be discussed with the Communist Party of the country in question, should such a party exist. [...]

b) An unconditional struggle must be carried out against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy ...

c) A struggle is necessary against Panislamism, the Panasiatic movement and similar currents ...

d) Support for the peasant movement ... against the landowners and every form and remnant of feudalism is particularly necessary. What must be striven for above all is to give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible ...

e) A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries. The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies only for the purpose of gathering the components of the future proletarian parties – communist in fact and not just in name in all the backward countries and training them to be conscious of their special tasks ... of fighting against the bourgeois-democratic tendencies within their own nation. The Communist International should accompany the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries for part of the way, should even make an alliance with it; it may not, however, fuse with it, but must unconditionally maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, be it only in embryo."

So it is no surprise that, when referring to some of these countries, Lenin said: "You will have to base yourselves on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening ... and which has its historical justification."⁸

The working class

In 1919, in his *Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East*, Lenin said that: "... the majority of the Eastern peoples are ... not workers who have passed through the school of capitalist factories, but typical representatives of

the working and exploited peasant masses who are victims of medieval oppression." He added that "... the bulk of the population are peasants, and ... the task is to wage a struggle against medieval survivals and not against capitalism."⁹

The Second Congress was very clear about the predominance of the peasantry and the absence or recent appearance of the proletariat: "Thanks to the imperialist policies whose efforts are directed towards holding up industrial development in the colonies, the native proletariat has only come into existence fairly recently. The dispersed local cottage industries have given way to the centralised industries of the imperialist countries. As a result the vast majority of the population was forced to engage in agriculture and export raw materials abroad. On the other hand we can observe a rapidly growing concentration of the land in the hands of big landowners, capitalists and the state, which again contributes to the growth of the number of landless peasants." (*Supplementary Theses*)

With the development of the productive forces, however, the proletariat became ever more important in the daily economic and eventually political life of the new nation. At the same time as it was formed the new nation started becoming more and more differentiated. Class stratification progressed from the city to the village and into all major sectors of the economy.

The predominantly agricultural and rural forms of employment were overtaken by industrial and urban forms. Even in the villages, the remaining industries not only adopted more and more of the technologies provided by the factories but a fundamental shift took place when the agricultural production was organised along capitalist lines and was aimed towards supplying the market rather than the subsistence of the producers. Large-scale industry developed and even the smallest family-run workshops were run along capitalist lines. There was even a split in the countryside, with the development of rich property-owning peasants and rural proletarians (and class struggle between them).

This pattern, where there was no ideological hindrance, drew in ever more layers of people

⁸ Lenin, *Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 30, p 161.

⁹ Lenin, *ibid.*

into capitalist production and the labour-power market. Not only were more and more layers from other classes proletarianised but women were drawn into the world of work and social life generally.

The workers became one of two main classes in society - even if they, to begin with, didn't know it themselves. The other main class, the bourgeoisie, was fully aware of its interests and had the full backing of its class allies internationally. However, because of its place within the world capitalist system, the pace of industrialisation in this type of country cannot keep up with the destruction of the old methods or forms of production. Consequently all those who become proletarianised cannot always actually join the ranks of the proletariat and be absorbed into the labour-power market, and many, sometimes millions, end up living on the margins of capitalist society in shanty towns around cities. These lumpen elements can, with the wrong leadership, play a reactionary role against the real proletariat.

Within a few years the workers (and all the exploited and oppressed layers of the country) increasingly see their 'own bourgeoisie' as the **main class enemy** - or as the local 'agent' of imperialists if there is less independence. Proletarian struggles become the most important ones in this type of country. Although at times students, youth, poor peasants, national minorities, women and so on may become the main section of the masses struggling against the 'national' government, it is only when important sections of workers join these struggles that they rock the government and even the structures of the capitalist state.

(ii) No class-collaboration between the oppressed and exploited classes

The Comintern's primary aim here was to set out clearly that the workers of the imperialist or advanced countries had no common 'national interest' with their own bourgeoisie. It was imperative that the newly-formed (or soon to be founded) Communist parties took a clear stance against the bourgeois ideology propagated by their own ruling class and did not side with it in military adventures and annexations abroad -

even when they were dressed up as part of the 'national interest'.

Today, with the bourgeoisie in power in all the colonies of Lenin's time, this resolute stand against class-collaboration has to be extended to not only to India-Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, China, and the central Asian republics, but all of Asia, all of Africa and all of Latin America.¹⁰

In most of these countries there is also a long history of proletarian class struggle, which, in some cases, even stretches back to the time of the anti-colonial struggle. Therefore, when a country is threatened in some way, the international left should not look to defend the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of these countries. The workers and other exploited and oppressed classes in these countries have material interests that are opposed to those of their own bourgeoisie and they therefore have no common 'national interest' with it.

It would be a betrayal of the working class movement in these countries to suddenly expect workers to forget their decades-long traditions and suspend the class struggle simply because the bourgeoisie has over-reached itself vis-à-vis America's designs for the country (or the region). The bourgeoisie of the country may expect such support but the workers must know that the nature of such a disagreement with imperialism is totally reactionary and that if it really leads to war then the best way to fight imperialism is for the exploited and oppressed masses, led by the most advanced layers of the working class, to organise the military resistance to the invaders *and* mobilise to overthrow the regime.

Of the Comintern's three principles this is the one that needs to be modified. The principle against class-collaboration needs to be extended to all countries of the world.

(iii) Distinguishing between the oppressed, dependent nations and the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations

This seems to be the only principle that the vast majority of the 'Trotskyists' have learnt from the

¹⁰ Of course, we do not think that N. Korea or Cuba are capitalist.

Bolsheviks (and Trotsky after the degeneration of the USSR).

Obviously this still holds to a great extent: no one in their right mind could equate Baathist Iraq with US imperialism. The majority of the 'Trotskyists', however, use this as a simple formula: Iraq=oppressed, US=oppressor. Once this categorisation has taken place then there is no need to think or worry about a concrete analysis of class forces on the ground in the oppressed country. This is what leads to positions that not only fail to gain any supporters in the oppressed country (or region) concerned but also create big problems when attempting to recruit workers in the west.

Firstly, if we look at this in a purely short-termist and 'calculating' way then two points should be mentioned:

(a) In countries like Iraq or Iran, if the workers and exploited masses are supporters of the regime then they have already joined the Baath party or Hezbollah-Pasdar-Basij. They have no need to affiliate to a small sect in Europe that defends the regime. For an Iranian being a Hezbollahi is more natural, carries material benefits and privileges and provides security. What does being a Hezbollahi by proxy - through a European sect that previously criticised the regime for its abuses and so on - provide other than draw the suspicions of the secret police?

(b) In the imperialist countries, although the 'Trotskyists' may think that by giving unconditional (or even conditional) support to regimes in Iraq, Libya or Iran they are 'challenging' bourgeois ideology and the pro-war atmosphere in their own country.

What actually happens is that many workers in the west are repelled by what these regimes are doing to their own workers, women, students and so on - and they do not have 'the theory' to excuse these atrocities. They are, of course, under the influence of bourgeois ideology - as they are on other issues. But one of the best ways to begin to break this influence of bourgeois ideology is to show how much workers in the imperialist and advanced countries have in common with their brothers and sisters in the dominated and oppressed countries.

Secondly, even though for over thirty years the sects in Europe and N America have defended and supported various Islamic and Arab nationalist movements or groups. Yet they show no significant long-term gain among workers. Where is the radical and organised anti-militarist movement that was built on this basis? How many thousands of workers have become members of revolutionary Marxist organisations because of their stance vis-à-vis these conflicts?

Thirdly, looking at this historically, they must recognise that the nature of imperialist domination and oppression of today is very different and much more complex than 80-90 years ago. Our 'Trotskyists' cannot use this third principle of the Comintern as a master-key that opens all locks. This principle is not an excuse for class collaboration in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It does not rule out or replace the need for a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Today's 'Anti-imperialism'

Because of its balancing act between the masses and its ties to imperialism on the one hand, and its own national (and regional) interests as a minor bourgeois partner of imperialism on the other, the indigenous bourgeoisie may in certain situations adopt not only 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric, but provoke diplomatic incidents and even start some small scale military action.

Whatever the outward manifestation of these conflicts of interest the indigenous bourgeoisie remains fundamentally regressive and reactionary. There is no progressive content to these disagreements with imperialism. Not only is the bourgeoisie unwilling to engage in a real anti-imperialist struggle - i.e., one that is also anti-capitalist and for socialism - but, as the ruling class, it wants to uphold the status quo.

The interests of the workers in these countries are the same as workers in the imperialist or advanced capitalist countries. They are no less proletarian than their European or N American brothers and sisters. The workers in the dominated countries therefore must maintain an independent political position and organisational structure from their 'own' bourgeoisie, and to do their utmost to use the crisis to overthrow not

only the government but the entire capitalism system.

The third camp

Considering that in all dominated countries the concrete historical conditions and economic situation have changed enormously, that there is a national bourgeoisie that would like to promote a 'national interest', and that imperialist domination has taken a new form, we believe that the Comintern's three principles still apply - but in a modified form.

The main factor for Marxists should be the development of the class struggle, particularly of the proletariat. Over several decades the working class in these countries has time and time again developed massive strikes or even general strikes, tried to set up independent trade unions and organisations, formed workers' councils, controlled production and so on.

Considering the way these countries became independent, i.e., on the territory of a colony that included many diverse nationalities, national oppression by the dominant ethnic (or religious) group, and struggles against the state and central government, have also been in evidence. The 'national interest' of the nation-state is against all the basic rights of the nationalities as well as workers.

That is why, for example, the defeat of the Baathist regime in 1991 was a signal for huge numbers of Kurds and Shias to revolt against it. It is true that the leadership of both of movements was reactionary. And although the masses had great illusions in what US imperialism's promises, they showed that there was great potential for forming a third camp or front if a revolutionary leadership had been present.

In places like Iraq or Iran, therefore, the working class should lead the masses in forming an independent third camp - neither with its 'own' bourgeoisie in defence of a 'national interest', nor with imperialism. This is a united front of the workers and all exploited and oppressed layers in society. It should not only be anti-imperialist but also fight for the overthrow of capitalism through posing transitional demands like workers' control.

It would call on all international leftwing or progressive organisations to lend it support to make this independent and truly revolutionary front a real alternative to the other two camps. Instead of calling for workers to join the army of the reactionary stooge bourgeoisie the Marxists should call on workers who are drafted into the army to shoot their officers, to form soldiers' councils, to arm the masses with heavy weaponry to defend their factories and neighbourhoods, to train the masses in military skills to a high level and to conduct a revolutionary war against imperialism and the local bourgeoisie.

This is the real way to confront and defeat imperialism. It is, of course, a tall order. But preparations for a revolution are not an ordinary event. This is our duty. Whether such a front actually takes shape depends on theoretical and practical preparation before the event and our resolute action in being able to lead the masses towards this goal once a conflict has begun.

The nightmare scenario

The nightmare for Marxists in the semi-colonies and dominated countries would come true when once a conflict starts, not only do the international left not help with the forming of such a front, but openly side with the 'little' bourgeois regime against the 'big bully' of imperialism.

This line, in effect, means that the workers are told to suspend the class struggle until the end of the conflict! In practice this has more in common with the Second International in July-August 1914 than with the Third International in 1919-22.

Those who have taken pro-Khomeini, pro-Gaddafi, pro-Saddam and similar positions have not only betrayed the working class in these countries but have discredited the whole of the left. The job of building truly revolutionary Marxist organisations that are rooted within the working class has become much harder because of these errors.

Morad Shirin and Maziar Razi

Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League
May 2008

International report adopted by AWL conference, October 2012

The creation of an international party of working-class revolution is necessary to the achievement of socialism. The struggle for socialism must be conducted in an organised way on the international level and the working class is in need of organisations and institutions to debate and transmit ideas and programmes internationally, just as it must build up such organisations at the national level.

The AWL does not pretend to be “the revolutionary party” in Britain, but we see ourselves as a component of such a future party, fighting to bring it about through splits and fusions in the movement, and to determine its eventual political complexion. In a similar way we should make steps towards bringing about such a world party.

The AWL has long had links with different groups and individuals around the world, especially our sister group in Australia and – though communication has been patchy – a sympathising group in Poland. The list of international greetings to our conferences gives a better account of our international links.

However, until now we have been unable to create a regular organised framework for those links. We took part in a short-lived effort in 1976-7, which proved to have little substance (the “Necessary International Initiative”). We took part in the TILC network to which we were introduced by our 1981 fusion with the Thornett group, and attempted unsuccessfully to save something from its collapse. We attempted international conferences in 1987 and 2005, but in both cases the other groups taking part were unwilling to go further. In the mid-1990s we took part in preparations for an international conference in Cape Town, which was eventually hijacked by the Italian ex-Morenist group which was its main mover and turned out to be more politically unstable than they’d first appeared. Since 2003 we have put a lot of work into discussion and collaboration with the various Hekmatist groups in Iraq and Iran.

The AWL has recently become involved in discussions with two tendencies: the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists’ Tendency and the Turkish group Marksist Tutum. We have substantial areas of agreement with these organisations on the questions of Stalinism, imperialism, political Islam, working-class orientation and democratic demands.

The IRMT is a continuation of the old Mandelite group in Iran, Socialism and Revolution, with whom we had close links in the 1980s. Tutum is a group which has independently arrived at what might be called a Third Camp analysis of Stalinism. Also, the French tendency L’Étincelle participates in the website and meetings set up under the name “Marxist Revival”.

We have seen plenty of pretentious or bureaucratic-centralist “internationals” on the model of the IMT, the SWP’s IST, or the “League for the Fifth International”. We have no desire to recreate the “toy-town Bolshevism” of these groups. We do not want to create a sectarian, sterile “party” on a world scale any more than we want to on a national scale.

We believe that the attitude to the construction of an international organisation outlined by Marksist Tutum in *The Question of Building the International* is correct:

“It is clear that the world party of the working class cannot be achieved at once. But, on the basis of agreement on fundamental ideological, political and organisational matters, it is possible and necessary to form an international tendency to move towards this goal and march together. Formation of an international revolutionary nucleus should be aimed at to create and organise such a tendency.

“It is no use to dream of finding the twin brother/sister on the international field at the start, which causes loss of time. Life does not flow on the basis of rigid and uniform ideas. Therefore, if there is a ground for unity on fundamental ideological-political and organisational matters, then differences on historical-theoretical matters like for instance the class nature of the USSR should not prevent marching together. But of course discussions and exchange of ideas on these matters must be

continued in order to deepen Marxist understanding.

"Unity must be principled, and at the very beginning a clear attitude must be assumed on differences. Differences should not be concealed. Hastiness and pushing should be avoided."

The AWL National Committee of July 2012 resolved to write a review of the available English documents of the IRMT and Tutum; to improve communications with our Polish comrades; to send a comrade to Poland; to put a resolution on Greece to the IRMT, Tutum, and L'Étincelle for discussion; to set a medium-term goal of organising an international conference in which both 'participating groups' and observers may take part; and to propose that any grouping set up from these discussions should eventually seek observer status with the USFI.

We also decided that as many as possible of the documents involved in the discussion should be translated into Turkish, Farsi and French at least, and other languages as well if possible, so that rank-and-file supporters of these other groups can participate in the dialogue.

In addition to these decisions, we should look to carry on closer dialogue with Greek groups, in particular Kokkino.

We should prioritise developing our links with other participants in Marxist Revival – but not at the expense of neglecting contact and dialogue with other international groups and individuals with whom we have links.

(Slightly edited).

Two leadership crises, one revolutionary solution

The following is the English translation of the editorial of *Militant* No. 58, March 2013.

The newspapers and news bulletins are full of clashes between the Khamenei and Ahmadinejad camps. These two main representatives of the Iranian bourgeoisie's warring factions have even

used their Nowruz [new year] messages to criticise each other. The regime's crisis of leadership has now become deeper and more bitter than ever before – with no sign of a quick resolution.

In his message Khamenei said that the next so-called 'president' of the regime should have all the "[positive] points of today without the existing weaknesses". In turn, Ahmadinejad said that "the Supreme Leader has said that he has just one vote and the nation has the right to elect. Everybody has to respect the right of the nation. The government ... is looking for an election with passion and glory and maximum [participation] and [one that is] ultimately healthy." He went on to say that he will be "extremely sensitive and ... will not tolerate the slightest violation" in the so-called 'election' in June.

So what has made Ahmadinejad sound like a champion of free, fair and clean elections? What makes the man who was fully-backed by Khamenei in 2009 disagree with him so publicly now?

The crisis of bourgeois leadership

The answers to these and similar questions about the in-fighting will escape us if we do not pay particular attention to the origins of this regime. The ruling system in Iran is a unique form of capitalist regime that came about after the bourgeois state was severely damaged – but not completely smashed – during the 1978-79 revolution.

The Shah's monarchist-military regime was replaced by a contradictory formation that had two broad tendencies, each with a distinct approach to economic policy. All along one tendency has been aiming to normalise the capitalist relations of production in Iran and to restore full relations with the imperialist countries. Meanwhile the other tendency has been in favour of import barriers, selective trade, and so on, and has represented the interests of the coalition of bourgeois (and some petty-bourgeois) forces that crushed the 1978-79 mass movement.

Over the years the names of these factions, and their representatives, have changed many times.

For example, Rafsanjani was once a very 'radical' figure, but has for a long time been in favour of privatisation, foreign trade and investment, cutting subsidies and so on. Ahmadinejad has now, in effect, become the representative of the same tendency which dates back to Abulhassan Banisadr, the first so-called 'president' of the Islamic Republic, who was forced out in the clashes with Khomeini's faction in 1981. It is therefore no accident that a number of people have been comparing Ahmadinejad with Banisadr.

The friction between the two factions will continue until there is a modern and centralised capitalist state in Iran that is fully integrated with the world market and the region's geopolitical structure. (Or, quite possibly, the workers could overthrow the bourgeoisie before it is able to resolve this contradiction!)

This position has been the basis of our analysis right from the inception of this regime and we have consistently put these faction fights in this context (most recently in the editorial of *Militant* No. 57).

The growing economic and social crisis

While the regime's media have paid a lot of attention to trivia surrounding the so-called 'election', e.g., how many times Ahmadinejad has said "Long live spring" or just used the word "spring" in his speeches; or, worse still, how much physical contact Ahmadinejad had with Chavez's mother during the funeral in Caracas, or covering up Michelle Obama's arms; millions of workers and their families have been sinking deeper into poverty, hunger and destitution.

The contrast between the regime-connected capitalists who are making huge profits out of the current situation - even from the crippling sanctions! - and those who are going hungry, queuing hours for their basic necessities and having to make very hard choices about what they can afford and what they have to do without, could not be more stark!

On the one hand:

- There are over 200,000 malnourished children under the age of six, a growing numbers of street children and 60% of rapes being committed against children!

- Workers' minimum wage for 1392 [March 2013-March 2014] has been set at 6% below inflation!
- The official inflation rate is 31.5% but anyone who has had to pay 30,000 tomans [\$24.45] for a kilo of meat and other unaffordable prices knows that the true rate is higher.
- 17 million people will need food coupons to feed themselves.
- Shockingly, in this 'Islamic Republic', there are now 3.6 million addicts and 26% of drivers breathalysed in Tehran recently had drunk alcohol!

On the other:

- \$33bn is missing from the Iranian banking system!
- In a country where the currency has lost 55% of value in a year 500 Porsches have been brought into the country without anyone knowing the exchange rate used for importing them!

And how is the regime responding to this situation?

- Boosting the repressive apparatus, including setting up a special women's riot police!
- Islamisation of the universities.
- Suing Hollywood for *Argo* and similar films.

Near industrial collapse

In the meantime certain parts of the economy are collapsing. In particular, industrial production, which, of course, hits the industrial bourgeoisie very hard, is on its knees.

Just in Shahrivar 1391 [August-September 2012] there was a 65% drop in vehicle production in Iran. As a result of the near collapse of production many workers have been laid off. Any industry that needs to import parts, raw materials or machinery has been hit severely.

Even oil production, the main source of foreign revenue, has dropped. The regime's oil revenue fell by 45% and prospects for the new year are no better. In 1392 [March 2013-March 2014] the oil revenue is going to be 40% less than in 1391!

The economic and social situation has now become worse than the 1355-57 [1976-78] crisis that led to the revolution. Objectively Iran is now ripe for revolution.

The crisis of workers' leadership

The Iranian labour movement is at a turning point. On the one hand we have seen that syndicalism has clearly failed. Syndicalism, which can be summed up as the viewpoint that thinks that the trade unions - by themselves - can realise all the aims and tasks of the struggle of the working class, has been active in different industries and various parts of the country for more than a decade. And despite all the self-sacrifice, prison terms and torture that labour activists have suffered, and all kinds of pain and hardship that workers' families have endured; if the correct strategy and tactics are not adopted the workers will not reach a positive outcome (although, of course, they will learn many important lessons for the next stage of the struggle).

We can see the proof of the failure of syndicalism in the latest actions of Mansour Osanloo, the person who for many years was the standard-bearer and the most prominent symbols of the labour movement for the revival of trade unions. He has now left the country and has joined a political movement. Through this he clearly admitted to the failure of the syndicalist viewpoint. However, unfortunately he has crossed to the other side of the barricade and has joined the class enemy of the working class. And this also shows that a section of the bourgeoisie is prepared to put down roots in the working class in an organised way - of course, as long as workers and their leaders do not forget who 'the boss' is.

Now an important question is posed: if unions by themselves cannot achieve this, then what kind of other organisation do the workers also need? The answer that Osanloo has given has set his path. But what must be the answer of workers who do not want to throw away the experience of decades of struggle and all that they have already gained? If we look at history, we see only one type of organisation that can fulfil this role: the vanguard party of the working class. The main role of revolutionary Marxists lies in this that they have to be able to turn a merely historical lesson into a living and active organisation that is set deep in the heart of the working class.

We have seen in history that at time of the First Imperialist World War, the social democratic parties mostly betrayed the working class. And such a split also took place among the syndicalists, so that very few of them upheld their revolutionary standpoint. Many of these revolutionary syndicalists eventually joined the ranks of the Communist International. What separated the revolutionary syndicalists from the reformist (and eventually treacherous) syndicalists was that they understood the need for overthrowing capitalism and smashing the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. If a labour activist believes this, then he or she is faced with only one way to organise this, just one political standpoint: revolutionary Marxism.

We have seen that despite all the economic, social and political problems in society, including the most basic issues such as feeding children(!), the capitalist class shows no interest in solving them. It is only the working class that has the potential to solve these problems. That which can put this potential into action in practice is the creation of the revolutionary vanguard party of the working class. Only such a party can connect the most militant elements of the working class and revolutionary Marxism, to solve the crisis of the leadership of the working class and the crisis of the bewildered and boastful 'left', that is even afraid of admitting its own crisis.

In Iranian society there are two crises of class leadership and only one revolutionary solution.

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24 March 2013

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