Trotskyist INTERNATIONAL

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Bosnia: a peace to end all peace?

PLUS: Ken Loach's Land and Freedom - politics of the POUM
Derrida and the spectre of Marx • Russia in 1905: Lenin vs Trotsky?
The US left and black nationalism • Ernest Mandel • Irish Famine

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Cover: US strike fighter takes off on a mission over Bosnia, September 1995

Trotskyist INTERNATIONAL

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INCORPORATING PERMANENT REVOLUTION

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SREBRENICA'S VICTIMS

A peace to end all peace?

Dave Stockton surveys the Balkan wars at a turning point

The history of the Bosnian crisis is littered with failed imperialist peace plans. Each of them involved a recognition by imperialism of territorial gains made over the slit throats and raped bodies of tens of thousands of civilians. These plans drawn up by retired senior politicians and diplomats—Vance-Owen (Mark I and II), Owen-Stoltenberg, the Contact Group and now Clinton— have all put multi-ethnic Bosnia on the dissecting table.

Each plan has awarded greater and greater gains to the ethnic cleansers. At the same time an unholy alliance of the liberal media and the most hawkish and reactionary imperialist politicians has denounced the UN, the US and the EU for standing back whilst these horrors have gone on unchecked. They have called for a full scale military intervention.

Revolutionaries do not criticise imperialism's failure as a lack of nerve or will. It is the imperialist *system* that has failed Bosnia—as we predicted from the beginning.

We said then, and repeat now, that any imperialist intervention in the region—military, "peacekeeping" and political—could only lead to a reactionary outcome.

Turning points

1995 has seen three major turning points, each a striking confirmation of this judgement:

The fall of Srebrenica and Zepa to Serb militias in eastern Bosnia, the ensuing mass murder of their inhabitants by fascist-led groups, and the abandonment of Gorazde by its UN "defenders".

This laid the ground for a final settlement on the basis of the remaining territorial ambitions of the Bosnian Serbs. A geographically contiguous, ethnically cleansed area which could federate or fuse with Serbia proper was now almost complete.

The US-backed Croatian offensive in Krajina, and the resulting mass exodus of 160,000 Krajina Serbs.

This served two purposes for the imperialists. It resolved all Croatia's grievances except for the occupation of eastern Slavonia. It massively weakened and divided the Bosnian Serb leadership and at the same time strengthened Slobodan Milosevic within the pan-Serb alliance.

The imperialist air offensive against selected Bosnian Serb military targets.

This ended their self-imposed ban on offensive military action. The air strikes had the aim of forcing Pale to the negotiating table, in order to finalise the ethnic division of BiH.

Genocide in Srebrenica and Zepa.

Genocidal attacks on the Bosnian Muslims and the multi-ethnic towns and cities have been repeated in every year since 1991. 1995 has seen no let up in the large scale atrocities too, most notably in the enclaves of Eastern Bosnia. The Bosnian government's offensive in central Bosnia and in Bihac in late 1994 and 1995 led to Ratko Mladic launching a counter-offensive against "soft targets", the so-called UN safe havens of Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde.

It also led to the renewal of the bombardment of Sarajevo and eventually, in combination with the Krajina Serbs, to an attempt to wipe out the Bihac

enclave altogether.

All of these targets were UN designated "safe havens", where the UN had put in small garrisons of lightly armed "peacekeepers".

The Bosnian government (BiH) forces defending these enclaves were pitifully ill-equipped. Some had been actually disarmed by the peacekeepers on Serb insistence.

The "peacekeepers" in fact never struck a single blow in defence of their charges. They hid in their bunkers as the Serbs moved in.

Then after slivovitz and cigarettes with the conquerors—including a videoed friendly drink with Mladic—they boarded their armoured vehicles and drove off into the sunset.

The result was the brutal ethnic cleansing of Srebrenica. 25,000 were bussed to BiH lines with UN complicity whilst 2,500 prisoners of war were reportedly massacred by the Serb militias. Why did ethnic cleansing on such a scale not provoke UN retribution? Because the imperialists were already working on a plan which conceded these "indefensible " areas to the Serbs.

Mladic's tightening stranglehold on Sarajevo however could not be ignored. A Bosnian government offensive to relieve the city failed due to the massive minefields the Serb militias had laid. Without armour, heavy artillery and air cover it proved impossible to break the siege.

However Mladic's seizure of UN military observers as hostages, whilst it provided a temporary spectacle of the imperialists' impotence, merely opened the road to a more decisive US intervention. The British and French were alienated and responded by sending in the Rapid Reaction Force. The imperialist powers were momentarily less divided than at any time since the war began.

The Serbs, they could all agree, had to be taught a lesson:

- for the sake of the New World Order elsewhere
- to make them realise that this latest attempt to consolidate a Greater Serbia was bound to fail, that there was a limit to their expansionism.

In addition the onslaught on Bihac in concert with the Krajina Serbs was the last straw for Tudjman's Croatia. If it had succeeded it would have made the recovery of Krajina difficult if not impossible. Tudjman saw the opportunity afforded by imperialism's' impatience with the Serbs and launched his deadly onslaught in the Krajina.

The Croatian Offensive

Three months after the swift re-occupation of Western Slavonia in May, Tudjman launched Operation Storm, occupying the entire Serb Republic of Krajina (RSK). 160,00 refugees fled to Serb-held northern Bosnia and to Serbia itself.

Tudjman struck at a moment when the RSK was at its most isolated and vulnerable. Its chauvinist leadership engaged in joint actions with the Bosnian Serb Republic and the criminal adventurer Fikret Abdic to wipe out the enclave of Bihac.

Thus the plight of the Serb refugees aroused little international sympathy or protest beyond the habitual backers of Serb expansionism. In the aftermath of the Croat victory, UN and EU observers stood by while the Croat army butchered the remaining elderly Serb inhabitants.

This monstrous act of ethnic cleansing must be condemned and actively opposed by all working class internationalists.

The mass of the population of Krajina have had no say in their leadership's criminal actions, let alone control over them.

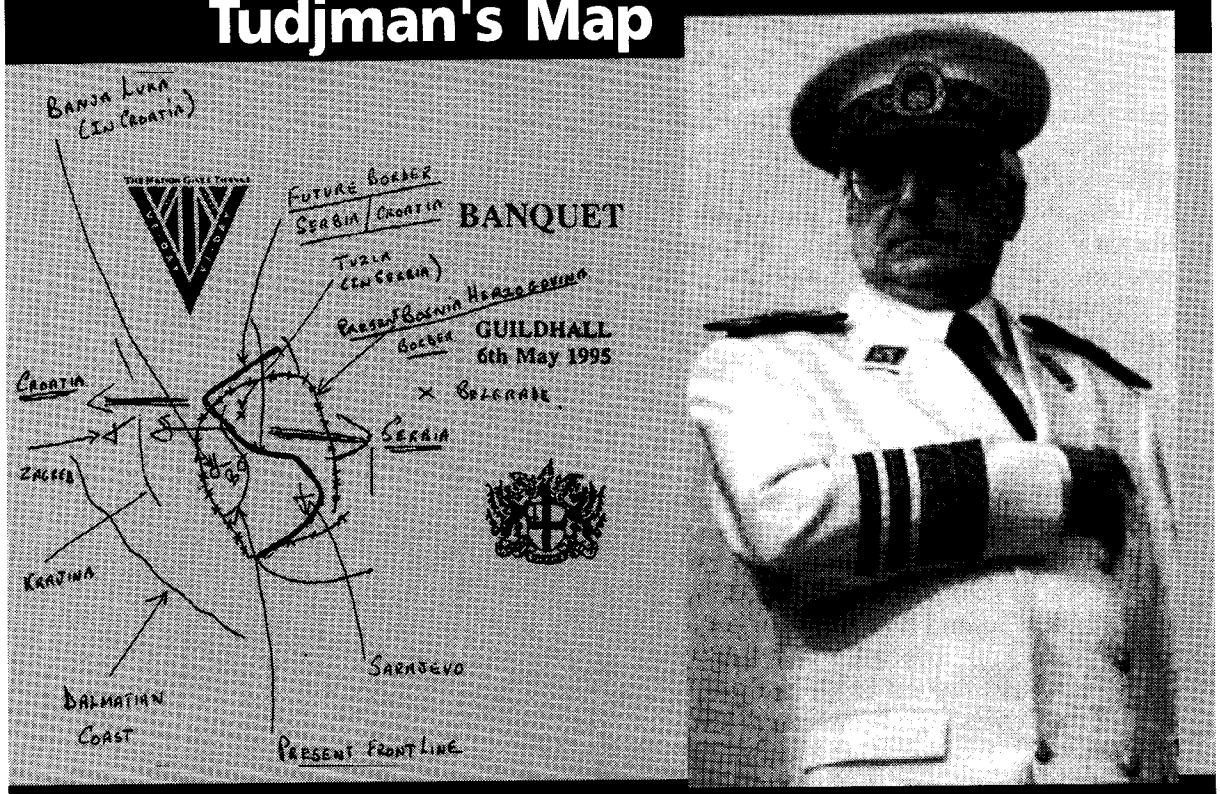
Of course the political leadership of the RSK under Milan Martic, are no innocent victims. In 1990-1, with the aid of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and the Yugoslav National Army, they drove over 400,000 Croats out of the Krajina and Slavonia. By bombarding the coastal roads and ports, and blockading the road and rail system linking Croatia proper to the Dalmatian coastal regions, they brought Croatia to the verge of disintegration as a state.

The air strikes had the aim of forcing Pale to the negotiating table, in order to finalise the ethnic division of BiH.



F/A18 TAKES OFF FROM USS AMERICA

Tudjman's Map



Map drawn by Croatian president Franjo Tudjman on napkin at London VE celebrations, showing plans for Serb-Croat carve up of Bosnia. Four months later military offensives and ethnic cleansing by both sides have gone a long way to making it a reality on the ground.

They pushed forward and occupied territory inhabited by only a minority of Serbs before 1990. They joined in the assault on the hard-pressed Bosnian Muslims. Their leadership's objective was to create a Greater Serbia, no matter what the cost in terms of displacing the Croat and Muslim population. No socialist can support such war aims.

We supported solely and exclusively the self defence of the regions of Krajina that were majority Serb areas before the forced population movements which began in 1990.

We supported the right to self-determination only of these areas, including their right to secede from Croatia. But we never advocated such secession.

The geographical, economic and ethnic composition of both the RSK and Croatia make complete separation a reactionary utopia.

The geographical, economic and ethnic composition of both the RSK and Croatia make complete separation a reactionary utopia. It was the attempt to make this goal a reality which led Martic and co. to involve themselves to the hilt in the Bosnian conflict and the project of a Great Serb state whose territory would stretch from Serbia proper through northern Bosnia to the Krajina.

Only a renewed federal system, based on the freely given consent of the various nationalities and ethnic groups, or on a genuine and full autonomy for all minorities, combined with the restoration of full economic links, can solve this terrible conflict.

Tudjman's aims are equally reactionary. He was determined to clear Krajina of its Serb population, people who have lived there for at least three centuries.

Tudjman wants to create a Greater Croatia by incorporating a substantial part of Bosnia, under the cover of a phoney federation.

Socialists must totally oppose the Croatian occupation of the Serb majority areas of the Krajina. During the war between the RSK forces and the Croat state workers should have refused to take sides, fighting alongside RSK forces only where tactically necessary for the legitimate defence of populations faced with ethnic cleansing.

NATO strikes - to divide Bosnia

In August 1995 the major imperialist powers grouped in NATO began the use of large scale air attacks against the Bosnian Serbs. Despite the scale and duration of their attacks, they do not as yet constitute a fundamental shift of position by the imperialists from overall neutrality to decisively siding with the BiH forces

There has been no all out attack either on the military personnel or the urban population of the Bosnian Serb Republic. Military targets were initially restricted to the radar and surface-to-air missiles of the Bosnian Serb Republic and to the artillery batteries which have wreaked havoc on the multi-ethnic cities and enclaves of the Bosnian Republic. No more than 10% of the latter were knocked out in the first two weeks of action.

The imperialist intervention, using the pretext of yet another horrific Serb mortar attack on the Sarajevo market district, was no act of justified retribution, but a coldly calculated manoeuvre to force both Pale and Sarajevo to accept a new US peace plan.

NATO proclaimed that its objective was not to takes sides in the conflict but only to break the three year long siege of Sarajevo by the Bosnian Serb Army. They promised to eliminate its capacity to bombard Bosnia's towns and cities repeatedly and at will.

To the unwary this might seem a laudable objective after the atrocities in Tuzla and Sarajevo, which has seen 10,000 civilians killed in the siege. Taken on their own these objectives would be progressive ones, just as the BSA's siege of the cities is reactionary.

But they cannot be taken on their own. The progressive or reactionary content of wars, and of even limited military actions, can not be judged by isolated actions alone. They are indeed the "continuation of politics by other (violent) means". The question must be asked: what are the objectives of the combatants?

The political aims of the imperialists, since their intervention in the break up of Yugoslavia, are reactionary. They are to create a stable framework for completing the restoration of capitalism and establishing one or two of the Yugoslav successor states as gendarmes for imperialism in the Balkans. To this aim they have subordinated the national rights of Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Serbs. Their peace plans are reactionary and must be opposed in every one of their manifestations.

No worker, no consistent supporter of multi-ethnic Bosnia, can support the NATO military action. It must be condemned.

Having used the arms embargo for four years to prevent the Bosnians from defending themselves, having kept the population on a drip feed of minimal "humanitarian aid", the air strikes were designed:

- to bring the Serbs to accepting the terms on offer from Holbrooke
- to "prove" to the Bosnians that only imperialism can guarantee their survival in a tiny statelet, and to force them to give up their goal of a multi-ethnic Bosnia.

Both the NATO air strikes and the new peace initiative are a continuation of a policy adopted over a year ago. Faced with a confident Serb nationalism, unwilling to compromise, the USA set about finding an enforcer on the ground. It turned to Tudjman's Croatia.

The USA first of all promoted the formation of a Croat-Muslim federation in Bosnia itself and then brokered a military alliance between Sarajevo and Zagreb. It publicly tolerated and privately encouraged Croat offensives to recover the western Slavonian enclave and then the Krajina.

But they have tried hard to avoid creating a force which could go onto the offensive in Bosnia and recover the ethnically cleansed lands. After the Croats' reactionary ethnic cleansing of Krajina they immediately ordered them to desist from any joint offensive with the BiH army in central Bosnia.

They thus revealed that their true purpose was not justice for the displaced and cruelly oppressed Bosnian people but the stabilisation of the situation via a deal between Zagreb and Belgrade.

In seeking an agreement to withdraw the heavy weapons, and a cease-fire, the imperialists are not seeking to alter the long term military balance between the BiH and the RS. If the balance has now shifted against the Serb forces it is a result of the Croatia army's extension of the Krajina offensive into Western Bosnia.

The reason for the self-imposed limits on the NATO "war" aims has been stressed by the LRCI since the beginning of the conflict. The imperialist powers, despite their differences over tactics, have a common aim: the *containment* of Serbia, not its defeat and subjugation.

US and EU imperialism are seeking to defuse the possibility of a Serb-Croat all out war that could drag the neighbouring states into a real Balkan War, and thus avoid the enormous damage this could wreak on NATO, the EU, and their relations with Yeltsin's Russia.

Three vital concessions have been handed to the warring parties: the Bosnian enclaves surrendered to the Serbs, Krajina "cleansed" by the Croats and the siege of Sarajevo lifted by US bombing. Each has been paid for with the blood of innocent civilians and conscript soldiers.

Now US imperialism has taken the lead in sponsoring a peace deal. Its principal victims will be the multi-ethnic cities and towns of BiH and their working class and student movements.

The ethnic-Muslim population will be pressured into a pseudo-national existence which they never sought, and moreover as an *oppressed* nation. An inevitable future national liberation struggle by the Bosnian Muslims, analogous to that of the Palestinians, is being prepared.

The imperialist peace deal if it goes through will be *a peace to end all peace* in the Balkans in the decades ahead.

The beleaguered population of Sarajevo greeted the NATO bombings by dancing in the street. But these celebrations will soon turn to mass protests and even despair as the plans for partition become clear.

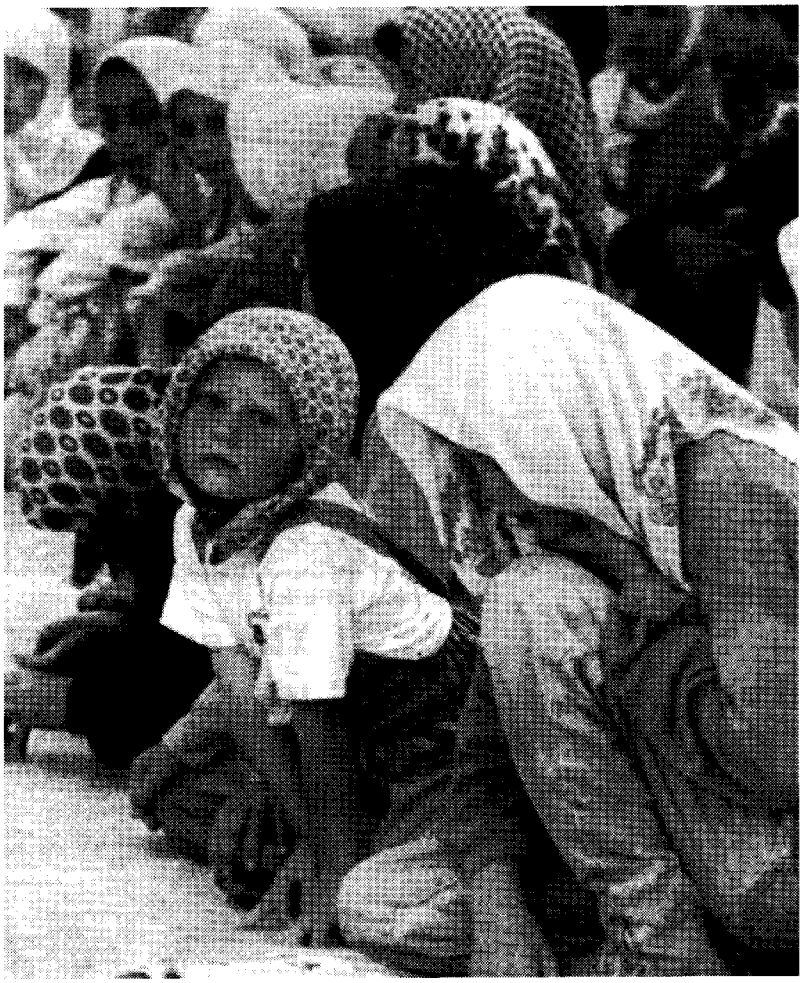
The hopes and illusions in imperialist peace, fostered by Alia Izetbegovic, Haris Siladjic and Mohammed Sacirbey since 1991, are going to be shattered in the cruellest fashion.

Like the Vance-Owen, Owen-Stoltenberg, and Contact Group plans before, the current peace plan, unveiled in Geneva on 8 September 1995, represents a further concession to Milosevic and Tudjman's chauvinism and expansionism. It is a recognition and reward for three years of ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide.

The Geneva Accord is a deceitful basis for the dismemberment of Bosnia into two statelets which will initially be spheres of influence for Milosevic and Tudjman but which will probably rapidly evolve into little more than regions of their republics.

Whilst it solemnly proclaims the

The ethnic-Muslim population will be pressured into a pseudo-national existence which they never sought, moreover as an oppressed nation.




IZETBEGOVIC

continued statehood of BiH "within its present borders with continued international recognition", it immediately outlines its division into two state entities: the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska). Both will have "parallel special relationships" with Croatia and Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro) respectively.

The "right of return" of refugees is being systematically denied in the current peace plan. Tudjman is busily enacting a law to prevent the return of the Krajina Serbs and to confiscate their property.

The Geneva peace plan now includes, on the insistence of the Bosnian Serbs, "compensation" as an alternative to return.

Of course, say the imperialist peace brokers, the refugees of all ethnic groups will still be "free to return" to life under the guns of those who expelled them and killed their relatives.

They know that few will avail themselves of that right.

The plan threatens also to include the division of Sarajevo, by exchanging territory, into compact ethnic zones. The Pale regime's concession of 21% of the territory they presently hold is not so remarkable when the nature of the terrain (sparsely inhabited mountains) is considered.

Professor Koljevic, deputy to Radovan Karadzic, remarked:

"I'm quite sure we can do the swaps—exchanging quantity for quality, especially land in the Brcko corridor." (*Independent on Sunday* 10 September 1995)

Behind closed doors in Paris and Geneva, the USA, its European allies and the major players, Belgrade and Zagreb, have prepared a deal to impose on Pale and Sarajevo.

The coming weeks and months will see all the stops pulled out to overcome the reactionary resistance to this deal from sections of the RSK leadership and the progressive resistance to it from sections of the Bosnian population and armed forces.

Despite the reactionary nationalist leadership of Bosnia-Hercegovina it is necessary for the world working class to support their right to self defence against that genocide.

Should Socialists Take Sides in Bosnia?

Since the Autumn of 1992, when the Bosnians found themselves the target of a genocidal onslaught by both Serb and Croat nationalists, the LRCI has stood for the defence of multi-ethnic Bosnia and urged workers to take sides with the BiH forces.

Despite the reactionary nationalist politics of the leadership of the BiH government, the Bosnians were waging a just war of self-defence against genocide. Despite the NATO air attacks on the Serb forces, this remains the case today.

The Serb and Croat nationalists' project of creating "Greater" states for themselves at the expense of the Bosnians are reactionary through and through.

The very existence of both the Muslim ethnic group and the multi-ethnic cities and towns of Bosnia was an obstacle to that project. Hence the mass ethnic cleansing and expulsions carried out by the Bosnian Serbs and their fascist allies in the Summer and Autumn of 1992 and by the Herzegovina Croats in early 1993. The Bosnian Muslims were faced with genocide.

Despite their reactionary nationalist leadership it was necessary for the world working class to support their right to self defence against that genocide.

Throughout we have warned of the reactionary consequences of the policy of Izetbegovic and co, in particular their slavish reliance on imperialism and their repeated, if largely unsuccessful, efforts to embroil it on their side in war with the Serbs. The LRCI warned repeatedly that if they were successful in achieving this then the Bosnians themselves would soon rue the consequences.

The large scale bombing of Serb targets by imperialist warplanes naturally provokes the question: should socialists take sides with the Bosnian Serbs against imperialism?

Aren't the Serbs objectively anti-imperialist? Is it not the case that imperialism is always "the main enemy" and therefore whoever is fighting it becomes a "lesser evil" and objectively anti-imperialist?

Marxists never take positions in a war on the basis of abstractly counterposed definitions of the combatant states: imperialism, degenerate workers state, semi-colony etc.

Vital as these categories are, they cannot be used to *replace* a concrete analysis of whether the parties in a given war are progressive.

They cannot be used in isolation from the fundamental objectives the warring sides are pursuing. A war to defend a workers' state or a semi-colony against conquest and exploitation by an imperialist state is a progressive war.

A war by a section of the fragmenting chauvinist bureaucracy and nascent bourgeoisie of a moribund workers state, to commit genocide against a section of its population is a reactionary war.

A limited, tactical, military intervention by imperialism against the reactionary side in such a national war does not in and of itself change the character of that war and render the Bosnian Serbs "progressive".

An all out imperialist intervention which subordinated the BiH forces to its reactionary aims would be a different matter (see below).

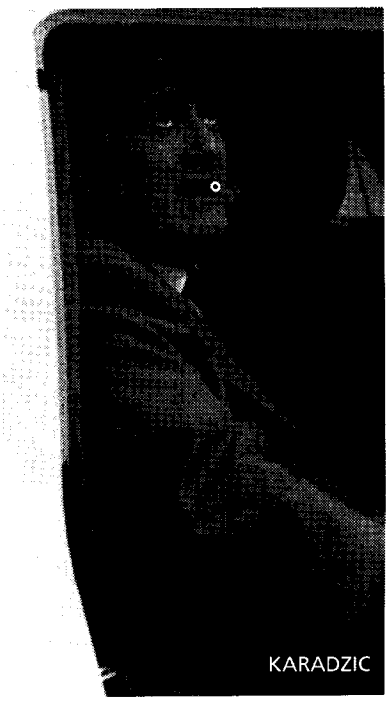
Thus in Bosnia we have to look at the concrete aims of NATO and the Bosnian Serbs in their present limited conflict. We maintain that they are both thoroughly reactionary.

Whoever sides with the Serbs—if they are serious—must wish to see their victory in the given conflict. They must not only desire to see NATO warplanes downed by the Serbs but the continuation of the siege of Sarajevo and Tuzla.

The Serbs are not trying to drive the UN or NATO forces out of Bosnia.

They are continuing their four-year campaign to drive the Bosnians out of Bosnia.

Do the NATO air attacks make this objective any less reactionary? No! What the Bosnian Serbs are actually "fighting imperialism" over is the "right" to continue to besiege and bombard Sarajevo. Thus the limited conflict of the Bosnian Serbs with imperialism


KARADZIC

is not a progressive struggle. It is not in, the Leninist sense of the word, either objectively or subjectively "anti-imperialist" at all.

The imperialist powers have been drawn into this conflict, not in order directly to annex the Balkans to the EU nor immediately to restore capitalism, but to prevent a reactionary nationalist war de-stabilising the World Order.

Above all the imperialist powers sought to prevent multi-ethnic Bosnia from acquiring the means to defend itself (the arms embargo) and indeed liberate the ethnically cleansed majority Bosnian areas.

Without an airforce, without tanks and heavy artillery, all attempts to do that are doomed to failure.

As imperialism revealed its true reactionary role, greater and greater numbers of the BiH working class have come to realise that imperialism can do nothing progressive in the region.

Thus the British "defenders" of Gorazde had to retreat amid the gunfire of the local BiH militia who were justifiably trying to seize their arms and ammunition, the better to prepare the real defence of Gorazde.

The danger today is that the confidence of the Bosnian masses in the warplanes of the USA will be restored, and not directed where it should be: the power of their own militias and the solidarity of the world working class.

If so, that confidence will be dangerously misplaced. In the coming months it will be terribly disabused in the peace

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Danger of escalating war

During the NATO air bombardment of early September 1995 the LRCI summed up its slogans

NATO has chosen a "high risk strategy" to bring about its peace deal, one that could still lead to the embroilment of its air and ground forces in a full scale war with the Bosnian Serbs, thus even drawing in Belgrade's regular forces and leading to a diplomatic face off with Russia.

The Vietnam syndrome means that the US military has to intervene with massive technical and numerical force as to assure minimum allied casualties. This tendency to "overkill" runs the danger of escalating the conflict rather than settling it.

The Vietnam syndrome also demands that operational control is given to the US generals, not the politicians. Thus a "contingency plan" to blitz the economic infrastructure of the RSK has been drawn up as a matter of course and casually made public by the generals—even though it is politically unthinkable to the British and French politicians at present.

The longer NATO's involvement goes on the more it will strengthen the hand of those US politicians who have advocated the all out military alliance with a BiH/Croat federation.

Therefore it is possible, if at the moment not the most likely outcome, that the present actions will escalate into one where imperialism decisively sides with an unleashed Croatian-BiH military alliance and changes its war aims accordingly.

But this would tearing up Clinton's present plan, and a radical break with Belgrade. It would alienate Russia and China, as well as Greece within NATO and the EU.

It would put an end to using the cover of the UN because of the Russian/Chinese vetoes. Similarly, Greece could prevent the use of the EU mandate.

What is more Britain and France would be at best unwilling allies in such a development. They have threatened to withdraw their forces altogether.

Revolutionaries would be obliged to alter their strategy in the event of a decisive imperialist intervention on the side of the BiH forces, such that it subordinates the latter's war aims both to those of their imperialist masters and their reactionary Croatian allies.

It would entirely alter the character of the war.

In such circumstances the defence of Bosnia would become subordinate to the defeat of imperialism.

Despite the horrendous crimes of the Bosnian Serb leadership revolutionaries would have no option but to see their victory over an imperialist occupation force as preferable to the imposition of a new imperialist order by imperialist military force.

But that situation has not yet come about.

The Bosnian Serb Republic is under direct attack by imperialist warplanes, cruise missiles and the British and French ground troops of the Rapid Reaction Force.

Whilst we recognise the right of the Bosnian Serbs to defend their traditional majority areas against attack by these forces, it cannot make us in the present conditions defencist with regard to the Bosnian Serb Republic.

Thus in the present limited military conflict between NATO and the Bosnian Serbs, revolutionaries must take a revolutionary defeatist position on both sides.

We condemn the NATO intervention, demand an end to it. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Bosnia.

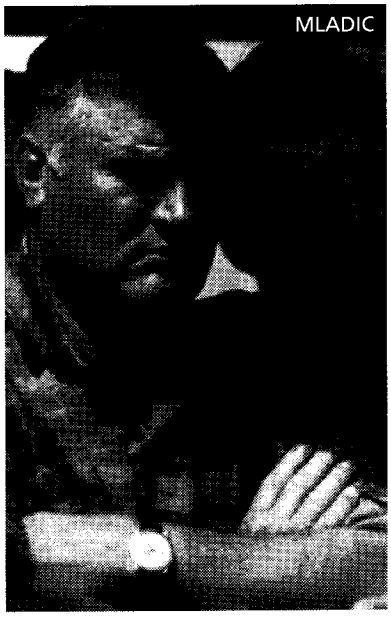
At the same time, we continue to support, critically, the BiH forces in their war of self defence and liberation.

We likewise demand an immediate end to the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo and the surrender of all territory seized as a result of ethnic cleansing since 1991.

Immediately workers throughout the world should demand:

- Stop the air strikes, stop the artillery bombardments, UN/NATO out of the Balkans!
- Down with the reactionary Geneva peace plan! Down with secret Diplomacy!
- Defend multi-ethnic Bosnia. No to imperialist peace plans which carve up Bosnia on ethnic lines
- Once the ethnic cleansers are defeated any settlement must include the right of self determination to all nationalities in Bosnia, including to separation.
- Victory to the forces of BiH in their struggle to regain the lands stolen by the ethnic cleansers! No reliance on imperialism. No holding back on imperialism's instructions!
- For the right of all refugees, all victims of ethnic cleansing, including the Krajina Serbs to return to their homes. For multi-ethnic militias in all intermixed areas to protect all nationalities.
- End the Arms Embargo! Send heavy artillery, tanks and plans to the BiH army with no conditions!
- End the Economic Blockade of Serbia!
- Restore the devastated economies of all the former Yugoslav states with a workers' plan which defends the working class against restored capitalist exploitation!
- For a multi-ethnic Workers state of Bosnia as part of a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!
- Massive working class protest action across the world against the reactionary peace deal, for multi-ethnic Bosnia and for the immediate withdrawal of NATO/UN troops.■

London, 12 September 1995



negotiations that will emerge from the present round of secret diplomacy.

The working class of Bosnia desperately needs to forge its own independent answer to the crisis.

This needs to start with the realisation that NATO, the UN and the European Union are Bosnia's worst enemies. Whatever tactical advantages the air/artillery bombardment presents to the BiH militia on the ground, overall, strategically, it is reactionary, leading to an end to the struggle for liberation.

Indeed the Pentagon has ordered Izetbegovic's troops not to take local advantage of the onslaught, lest this upset the plan to secure a reactionary peace in Paris.

During the Rapid Reaction Force bombardment on 29 August UN sources revealed that the BiH forces "had also opened fire with artillery but stopped when the UN threatened to attack them" (*Independent* 1.9.95).

The mid-September victories of the Croat-BiH forces in north-western Bosnia, whilst they can return thousands of Muslim refugees to their former homes, could simply become part of Tudjman's drive to make his map (page 4) a reality.

The BiH working class and militias should denounce the NATO/UN actions and demand their immediate end.

They should demandthe breaking of the political alliance with Croatia, place strict limits on military collaboration with Croat forces, denounce the Croatian army's ethnic cleansing and strive to prevent its repetition in central Bosnia.

Clearly there are already major divisions amongst the Bosnian multi-ethnic population and these are reflected within its government and its leading force the Party of Democratic Action (SDA).

Izetbegovic is inclined to go furthest towards it. As an ethnic-Muslim nationalist he is most likely to concede to the idea of an ethnic partition with only a facade of multi-ethnic Bosnian unity.

His problem is that many ethnic Muslims, especially the soldiers who make up the 7th Brigade, are composed of survivors of the ethnic cleansing of northern and eastern Bosnia. They are fighting to recover their homes and will not easily accept a partition which assigns these regions wholly and exclusively to their former torturers.

On the other hand the most multi-ethnic populations—in Sarajevo and Tuzla will resist the principle of ethnic partition.

The BiH working class and militias should denounce the NATO/UN actions and demand their immediate end. They should demand a break with the political alliance with Croatia and place strict limits on military collaboration with Croat forces

At the moment they look to premier Siladjic as an opponent of such a partition. But Siladjic is a bourgeois politician unable to give the lead that the Bosnian workers opposed to the US deal need.

It is vital that the working class, especially in Sarajevo and Tuzla, establishes its political class independence, distinguishes itself from all forms of nationalism.

It must denounce the NATO intervention and the US peace plan. It must struggle against the SDA government and as soon as is possible overthrow it both in defence of its own class interests and gains and in the interests of preserving a multi-ethnic Bosnia.

It must address to the war-weary Serb and Croat Bosnians, and indeed to the workers of Serbia and Croatia proper, a call for a mass working class movement to drive from power the opportunists and criminals who have wreaked havoc over the last five years.

A clarion call must be made to the workers of Zagreb and Belgrade for a peace based on strict national equality, the return to their homes of the refugees of every national or ethnic group, of the right to self-determination within the framework of a federation based on the power of the working class of the cities and the working peasants in the countryside.

The working class alone can bring a progressive conclusion —a real peace to this dreadful war. It is the only alternative to either a reactionary peace or a further spiral into barbarism.■



SPANISH STATE

How left is the United Left?

Trotskyist International spoke to members of the Revolutionary Communist Group

The United Left (IU) in Spain has attracted the attention of the far left. In municipal elections this year the IU doubled the number of its councillors. Last year, in the July General Election, they tripled their parliamentary representation.

Disgust and disillusion in the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE), now in office for 13 years, is widespread among workers. Only the recent memory of Francoism has to date prevented the right wing Popular Party (PP) being swept to power as a result of alienation from Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's anti-working class actions.

The IU was formed in 1986 with the Communist Party (PCE) at the heart of its alliance of four parties. Does it offer a left alternative to PSOE and a clear socialist alternative?

We publish here an interview with the **Revolutionary Communist Group** of the Spanish state (GCR), which is a member of the Committee for Orthodox Trotskyism (CITO). This international grouping was formed in July 1994 as a result of expulsions from the International Workers League (LIT). Before the split the GCR were part of the Socialist Workers Party (PST), Spanish section of the LIT.

INTERVIEW

What led to the formation of the United Left (IU) in 1986?
The main force was the PCE (Communist Party of Spain), led by Geraldo Iglesias after the departure of Santiago Carrillo. The PCE was by far the biggest component. The other parties included the Carlist Party a pro-monarchy party, in favour of self-management in the economy. Their main power base was in Navarra, in the north of Spain. The third force was Izquierda Alternativa (Alternative Left) - basically the party that carried the banner of Manuel Azaña, the President of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War. There was also the Partido de Acción Socialista of Pablo Castellana, and leftists who split with the PSOE. Then there were the Humanists and us, the PST.

The PST were in the IU ?
Yes, but we only lasted one meeting. We made three demands that we considered essential for any left platform. If the IU was to be truly representative of the left it should also be open to Herri Batasuna (HB), the nationalist party from Euskadi with close links to ETA, and other nationalist groups. We insisted that the IU had to support the right to self-determination for all oppressed nationalities in the Spanish state (Basques, Galicians, Catalonians). Also, the independence of the Spanish colonies, Ceuta and Melilla, were paramount. The trouble was, the IU was deeply constitutionalist and, as the constitution explicitly denies the right to self-determination up to and including independence, the IU would never agree. On the question of Ceuta and Melilla the PCE position was typical: "not now but maybe in 25 years". So we, the PST, left the IU.

What was the immediate impulse to form the bloc?
The IU arose out of the campaign against NATO leading up to the referendum in 1983. The campaign united all the left around opposition to NATO. The central force in this campaign was the PCE. Although the campaign lost, after Gonzalez urged the people to vote yes, it was clear there was a need for unity. On the far left, the LCR (United Secretariat) and MC (Movimiento Comunista, a Maoist group that emerged from a split from ETA in the 1970s) stayed out of the first discussions. The PST decided to join the discussions. After we left the Humanists were soon thrown out. A further split from the PCE gave rise to the Nueva Izquierda which became part of the IU. They were largely pro-PSOE and were prepared to form coalitions with it. Nicolas Sartorius, Christina Almeida and Antonio Gutierrez were its leaders. Gutierrez is probably the most important as he is one of the leaders of CCOO (Commisiones Obreros), the trade union organisation associated with the PCE.

What is the structure of IU and how is it related to the working class ?
First, the dominant role of the PCE in the IU overshadows all else. Before Franco died Santiago Carrillo dissolved the cellular structure of the PCE. During the 1960s and 1970s the PCE built cells all over the State of Spain; in factories, amongst youth. But Carrillo destroyed this by creating a new structure based on cities, towns and villages. This geographical organisation responded to the electoral ambitions of the PCE as Spain moved towards bourgeois democracy. These "Asambleas del Pueblo" (People's Assemblies) were all rigidly controlled by the centralised bureaucracy. The actual membership of the PCE dropped however. For example, in the Madrid suburb of Paseo Extremadura, out of 150,000 inhabitants the Assembly had more than 250 members; now it has less than 25. The main aim of PCE, in helping give birth to the IU, was to create a bigger electoral machine. Since 1989 they have indeed increased their electoral votes but they have rapidly lost active militants.

Does IU have any influence on particular sectors of workers ?
Most of the workers who support IU are in the metalworkers' unions, graphic arts—which includes journalists—chemical workers, public administration, SEAT (cars) and IVECO, the old state truck company, now privatised. All these unions support IU.

What is the relationship between the IU and CCOO?
Obviously the CCOO is very close to IU but there is a debate in CCOO as to whether the links should be so close. This has a lot to do with the relationship of CCOO with the PCE and the relationship of the PCE with IU. There are some within the PCE who argue that the PCE should be dissolved. Those most opposed to

dissolution are Camacho, the historic leader of CCOO, and Julio Anguita, the leader of the PCE. Gutierrez is in favour of breaking the PCE's influence in CCOO, and is supported by Almeida and Sartorius.

A good example of the conflict within the IU with regard to the trade unions was the General Strike, 27-E, (27 January 1994). The majority position of those attached to the unions was "¡Apoyo a las luchas!" (Support the struggles!). The General Strike was called by the unions, by and large under the pressure of the workers, to respond to the neo-liberal policies of the PSOE government, particularly with respect to pensions and the economy in general. Unemployment was running as high as 20%.

Camacho, Anguita and Antonio Moreno, another CCOO leader, argued for the "Maintenance of the mobilisations!". What they really meant was another one-day strike in 1995. For this they called for the organisation of the "Plataforma por los Derechos Sociales" (Platform for Social Rights). They called for this action mainly under pressure from ex-PCE trade unionists.

The 27-E ended with a demonstation to the Puerta del Sol in Madrid led by the CCOO, followed by the Trotskyist groups. The IU did not even have a banner. Indeed, Gutierrez said IU shouldn't even go. This doesn't mean that Camacho, Anguita and Moreno were more left; all they wanted to do was to allow the workers to let-off steam.

What is the role of the PCE within the IU?

At first, under the leadership of Geraldo Iglesias, a miner and CCOO leader from Asturias, the period was described by him as one of "aguantar el tirón" - this means that after the defeat of the "No" vote in the NATO referendum they had to "dig in".

When the PCE formed the IU it lost many deputies. During the same period there were violent confrontations between the striking dockers in Asturias and the state, in a struggle against closures. The CCOO supported the strike but the PCE did not openly support it. The PCE will not openly support any particular strike. Deputies may make particular declarations in support of workers' claims but not openly support strike action. They are electoralist and want to win more seats in parliament.

When Anguita won the leadership he rebuilt the PCE and IU. In the general election of July 1994 IU won 18 seats in the Congress compared to the 6 they had before. This was the best electoral moment for the left since the 1970s when the PCE had 22 deputies.

What has IU done since 1986 when it was formed ?

What IU doesn't do is support any form of mass mobilisation. Since their formation the IU have hardly supported any marches. About all they do is march on May Day. Their main policy is "rectificación": rectification of the government's policies. They are thoroughly electoralist. Their aim has been mainly to win the middle class vote, the vote that is most disaffected with Felipe. They take the working class vote for granted.They defend the welfare state and argue for "fairer distribution of wealth". This will be done by raising taxes on large companies, increasing the budget for social provision and lowering the defence budget and the salaries of parliamentary representatitves.

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In their last programme there was not one mention of "socialism" although they did mildly criticise the bourgeoisie. However, this didn't stop Anguita meeting with the heads of multinationals, just before the last elections, notably Coca Cola. Presumably, this was to put their minds at rest, just as Lula did in Brazil before last year's Presidential elections. [See *Trotskyist International* 13/14)]

As part of the parliamentary opposition IU voted against the government's bills for labour reform, pension rights and modification of unemployment and social security benefits. With regard to abortion they support "the extension of the right to abortion" but are against free abortion on demand.

Can you tell us some more about Anguita? What politics does he stand for ?

The first thing that must be said is that he is no fool. He knows just when to put on his radical mask and when to take it off to reveal his parliamentary face. Lately, he is always invoking Lenin's name. He claims, for instance, that "soon, communism will be fashionable again" and that, "the working class does not have a party" at the moment. But he always talks about the National Federation of Spain, he never talks about a republic, he never criticises the monarchy.
He always argues for labour reform against the economic adjustment plans. Just recently, he denounced Gonzalez in the parliament for the role of the GAL (state secret service) in the murders of Basque militants. Anguita argued for his resignation and a general election. He should at least have called for mass mobilisations. But in the 1994 "State of the Nation" debate he said that "if there is someone amongst you who will replace Felipe, we'll support you". One of his electoral arguments was that IU would apply the constitution much better than PSOE, specifically on the right to work.

What was the position of the IU during the Gulf War?

IU always had a pacifist position. After the invasion of Kuwait a committee was formed by the PST, PCPE (Popular Communist Party of Spain), AEDENAT (an organisation influenced by MC), CNT, Inusumisos (conscientious objectors to military conscription, largely anarchists) and the LCR. The committee's main demand was against foreign intervention, they wanted to maintain an anti-imperialist stance. IU joined the campaign in August and fought for a pacifist position. When IU and CCOO formed the platform in December their main demands were "No War!" and "Return our soldiers!".

How do you account for IU's success in the recent elections?

Their campaign was disgusting. IU were so opportunist that they were even prepared to make a pact with the right to prevent PSOE getting in. Anguita left the decision on who to make a bloc with to the local IU representatives. This meant that many voters, who did not want the right to get in, wanted to know who the local IU representatives were going to pact with. Of course, many refused to say.

In other areas IU asked the people to abstain, particularly where the working class was strong but worst hit by the policies of PSOE; this effectively meant a pact with the right wing, for example in Asturias. They doubled the number of IU councillors but often at the cost of forming pacts with the right.

What is your group's position with regard to IU ?

Probably a bit sectarian in the past: we don't call for a vote for PSOE or the IU.

Remember, we have just come out of the LIT. The PST always stood independent candidates. For us the most important question is why the working class votes.

In the State of Spain the working class votes for the PP, PSOE or IU. Those who vote for IU usually do so because they aren't as bad as the others. For us IU is a "petty bourgeois popular front". What we mean by this is that it is led mainly by petit bourgeois elements and it is small.■

With Mexico's economy in deep crisis, in September President Ernesto Zedillo invited the EZLN to particiapte in National discussions on political reform. They immediately accepted. This came in the wake of an unofficial referendum in Chiapas which revealed that a majority of the population wanted the Zapatistas to abandon "the armed struggle" and form a political party. Despite the EZLN's statement that they would never give up their weapons, the EZLN is on the brink of entry into 'normal' Mexican bourgeois politics? Keith Harvey looks at the Zapatistas' recent evolution and argues that there has always been a reformist logic behind the revolutionary rhetoric.

ZAPATISTAS



The "first post-modernist guerrilla group"?

On New Year's Day 1994 a new guerrilla group announced its presence to the world by occupying six towns in the Chiapas state of Mexico[1]. Born in the Lacandona rainforest, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) had been gestating for ten years. Evading detection for much of that period, the timing of their military offensive was motivated by the coming into force of the NAFTA agreement between USA, Canada and Mexico.

This agreement, coming on top of a decade of neo-liberal reforms by the Mexican PRI government, promised further impoverishment for tens of thousands of poor and landless peasants. Blocked from advancing their cause through bourgeois democratic means due to PRI intimidation and manipulation of the electoral process, the EZLN shifted their struggle to the military plane.

The local uprising made an immediate impact in Mexico and North America. The long-standing networks of activists that had been drawn together in the fight against NAFTA facilitated the surge of information and solidarity. The swift flood of reporters and human rights groups acted to spread the news and to some extent impeded the retaliatory slaughter by the Mexican Federal Army.

Although the EZLN withdrew in the face of an overwhelming display of force including helicopter gunships, heavy artillery and thousands of troops, the short-lived EZLN operation ignited a wave of strikes and land occupations throughout Chiapas in late January and February.

The PRI controlled 111 of the 112 municipalities in the state. In dozens of these mayors were run out of town, town halls were burned down and offices seized. Roads were systematically blocked. By 26 February, one bourgeois paper, *La Jornada*, reported:

"The spontaneous municipal uprisings, the rebellions of teachers and municipal workers, the blocking of banks (by peasants), the takeovers of land, and the general climate of civil disobedience is making Chiapas ungovernable."[2]

In all this activity it was the land occupations that were the most threatening. In Soconusco 11 *fincas* were taken over; in Chilón 38 properties were seized; 27 ranches were overrun in one valley in Ocosingo. Altogether 100 land seizures were reported and 10,000 cattle were reported "missing". And all this in full knowledge that a 40 year prison sentence was the punishment for illegal occupation of private land.

The PRI government, faced with this challenge, sought to defuse it with an offer of "dialogue".

By mid-February a national dialogue between the EZLN and the federal government was under way. For one year, despite ebbs and flows of popular support inside Mexico for the EZLN, and despite a change of PRI President in the August 1994 elections, no progress was made in five rounds of negotiations.

Then, on 9 February this year, under pressure to restore "investor confidence" after the dramatic collapse of the currency and the onset of recession in January, the Mexican government ordered the Federal Army to tear down

the EZLN blockades, arrest EZLN leaders and occupy the war zone. Some 50,000 troops(nearly a third of the Federal Army) have occupied the area, driving thousands of peasants into the mountains and rainforests.

The EZLN remains armed and undefeated but pressed back into the Lacandona rainforest and their hundreds of villages.[3] The PRI government has chosen to wage a "hearts and minds" campaign in the Chiapas, handing out tonnes of food and medical supplies to undermine support for the EZLN. To date they have refrained from launching an all-out military assault; but neither will they give the peasants land, tractors and other fundamental reforms sought by the Zapatistas.

Roots of Rebellion

The EZLN was quickly dubbed the first "post-modernist guerrilla group" by the *New York Times*: one that owes no loyalty to foreign governments, one that has learned the lessons of the defeats of the Central American guerrilla armies. The leadership of the Zapatistas is praised for its skilful propaganda machine, for using the information superhighway to the full.

Its chief spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, has captured the hearts and minds of western journalists with his articulate, often poetic and richly informed interviews and communiqués to the world.

How new then is the EZLN, what are its roots and linkages? What kind of guerrillaism has it forged? What are its strategic objectives and what kind of alliance among the different social classes of Mexico does it seek to forge to achieve its goals?

The Chiapas region of Mexico is rich in resources but most of its people are impoverished. Since the familiar sight of the guerrillas in ski-masks first hit our screens, the statistics of oppression and poverty have been well rehearsed.

The main resources of the state are oil, coffee and beef cattle. Some 35% of Mexico's coffee is produced in Chiapas and employs over 80,000 people. While the peasant producer gets less than 2,500 pesos per kilo for coffee sold to the middleman, it sells for 8,000 pesos a kilo abroad.

The same rip-off happens in the beef industry. Cattle sold by poor farmers sell for 400 pesos per kilo and are resold by middlemen to agribusinesses for up to 4,000 pesos per kilo.

The EZLN estimated that in the late 1990s 1.2 trillion pesos of resources left the state while only 600 billion in credits and public works came in from Mexico City. Chiapas is the source of 20% of all Mexico's electricity production (including more than half of its hydro-electric power). Yet only one-third of homes in the state have electricity.

Two-thirds of the state's 3.5 million people live and die in rural communities. Half of them do not have drinkable water and two-thirds have no sewage system. 90% are too poor to pay taxes.

Educational achievement is the worst in the country with three-quarters of all children failing to finish first grade. Most drop out because economic hardship demands that they work to help their impoverished families as soon as they are able. Chiapas has the highest mortality rate in Mexico, the worst nutritional diet: the facts and figures of oppression go on and on . . .

Capitalist development has robbed the peasants of their land, deprived them of the fruits of its natural resources, ground the people down and driven them to early graves for centuries. But the trigger for the revolt lies in more recent events:

"There was a standstill until the supreme government had the brilliant idea of reforming Article 27. That was a powerful catalyst in the communities. Those reforms cancelled all legal possibilities of their holding land. That possibility is what kept them functioning as para-military self-defence groups.

Then came the electoral fraud of 1988. The compañeros saw that voting didn't matter either because there was no respect for obvious, basic things. These were the two detonators, but in my view it was the reform of Article 27 that most radicalised the compañeros. That reform closed the door on the indigenous people's strategies for surviving legally and peacefully. That's why they rose up in arms, so that they would be heard."[4]

A new insurgency?

Naturally in the first days and weeks after 1 January 1994, the Mexican government tried to stigmatise the EZLN as foreign: the "green-eyed Marcos" was obviously not Mexican, the weapons came from Nicaragua, the insurgents were Guatemalan or El Salvadorean guerrillas.

All of this rubbish was soon disproved. The EZLN is made up of around two thousand indigenist peasants from Chiapas.[5] There are a handful of *ladinos* (white Mexicans) including Marcos himself. Their AK47s and aged rifles have been accumulated gradually from the black market where drug dealers' weapons captured by the army are recycled; M-16s and R-15s were captured in small operations against the police in the last ten years. The EZLN has neither sought external material support nor lays claim to ideological allegiance with any specific brand of "Marxist-Leninism" or petit-bourgeois nationalism.[6]

The EZLN specifically rejects the *foco* tradition—the idea of a small armed elite separated off from the people it claims to fight for and waging a sporadic hit and run war behind enemy lines. The EZLN has more in common with the "people's war" form of guerrillaism, in that it bases itself on the idea of liberated zones within which the revolutionary army institute land and tax reforms in occupied areas.

Marcos has said that the Zapatistas specifically reject the Maoist conception of this form of guerrillaism:

"We don't think like the Maoists. We don't think that the campesino army from the mountains can fence in the cities."[7]

But the FMLN in El Salvador, likewise, abandoned this simplistic Maoist truism and organised armed popular campaigns simultaneously in the cities. In fact the EZLN in its ten years of preparation seem to have put down far fewer roots in the urban centres than did the FMLN.

During this ten year period the EZLN built up a core active group of around 5,000:

" . . .the compañeros could participate in one of three different ways: as part of the regular combat force that lives in the mountains, as part of the irregular combat force that lives and works in the communities, or as part of a reserve force composed of the elderly and children. These last also receive military training."[8]

The EZLN is at pains to stress its national roots and its conscious emulation of the armies of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, the leaders of the Mexican revolution of 1910-20. More recently, the EZLN claims to be inspired by the example of the guerrilla group in Ocosingo, neutralised by the federal Army in 1974.[9]

The EZLN originated in the 1980s as a series of co-ordinated defence groups, put together by the peasants to resist the "white guards" attached to the cattle ranchers and other big landowners in Chiapas. Gradually, the emerging guerrilla army sunk roots in the communities in the many villages of the region.

The EZLN stresses that over time they adopted the democratic structures and methods of decision-making that existed in the indigenist communities. All decisions on war and politics are taken by the EZLN General Command (CCRI), which is made up of dozens of peasants drawn from the separate communities.

The declaration of war and the revolutionary laws of the EZLN, announced at the start of the campaign, were drawn up and adopted after long discussions in the communities.[10] When the first round of national dialogue with the government began in February 1994, the committee was based on two members elected from each community. This

democratism represents a conscious break with the practice of Stalinist inspired guerrillaism, and is a progressive trend within the Zapatista movement.

Goals

The first programmatic statement of the EZLN was issued in a special issue of their paper (*The Mexican Awakener*) on the day they seized San Cristobal de las Casas. The manifesto appeared in the form of a series of Revolutionary Laws which taken together can be said to amount to a revolutionary democratic programme.

It contains, among other things, a very progressive set of demands in relation to women in the indigenist community. Part of the ten year preparation for the insurrection included a long campaign for women in the communities to be allowed to control their own bodies, to be educated, to take public positions, and to be free of the threat of domestic violence. Evidence suggests that women play a central role within the EZLN command structure.[11]

Other laws include detailed provisions on administration and taxes to be levied in the liberated zones, the administration of justice and provision of social security. But at its heart is the agrarian programme. The EZLN:

"... demands the return of the land to those who work it and, in the tradition of Emiliano Zapata and in opposition to the reforms of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the EZLN again takes up the struggle of rural Mexico for land and freedom."[12]

Good quality land, privately owned, in excess of 100 hectares, will be confiscated and distributed to the landless, organised into co-operatives. Machinery and other capital equipment would be expropriated as well in order to allow the confiscated land to be put to use. Large agricultural business will be expropriated and agricultural produce will be sold at a fair price. None will be allowed to be exported until national demand is satisfied.

This is a classic poor peasant agrarian programme directed against *latifundists*, (large landowners)–in this case the large cattle ranchers who have expropriated, by fraud, theft or brute force, whole areas of land owned or held in common by the peasant communities.

What is striking about the programme is its attitude to other forms of private property. The EZLN espouses a classic petit-bourgeois reverence for small private property and, apart from large agricultural concerns, avoids calling for nationalisation or expropriation of other businesses or finance. In its place it calls for a ceiling to be placed on rents to be paid out to landlords.

In a section on Labor Law (i.e. the working class) it calls for a minimum wage and a Prices and Salaries Commission made up of employers, landowners and workers. It calls for a plan of comprehensive medical care to be paid for by employers and a taxation system which levies a 20% top rate on the profits of the largest capitalist concerns.[13] In short, the EZLN advances a social reform programme for the working class, to be paid for by a relatively modest system of taxation levied against capitalists.

The EZLN has no strategy for the overthrow of the central state. Its strategy for reform of this state depends upon an alliance of class forces which cannot achieve it.

While this revolutionary democratic programme is quite detailed, it also has the character of a maximum programme. Intended as a series of measures to be enforced whenever and wherever the EZLN establishes its control during the revolutionary war, it has never had the chance to be put into effect. In its place, once the cease-fire was established, the minimum programme—of political reforms— became the operative set of demands: for autonomy and a fair electoral system.

The EZLN is proud of repeating that it is not a "left" organisation but an "indigenist" one.

It rightly sees that the Indian ethnic groups have been victims of capitalist development in Mexico. But rather than see their liberation as tied to a fight for working class power, in a society which is mainly proletarian as a result of capitalist development, it seeks to protect itself and in some senses cut itself off from this development.

Thus the demand for autonomy is central to the EZLN programme. In and of itself the demand for autonomy is entirely supportable for the variety of ethnic groups in the Chiapas.

Control over education, local government, certain taxes, the exploitation of natural resources in their area—all these are democratic demands.

In addition, the long tradition of direct and participatory democracy in the communities stands in stark contrast to the 60 odd years of fraud and manipulation under PRI rule at the Federal level. This latter fact is well testified to by the fact that Chiapas returns the highest pro-PRI vote of any state in Mexico while anti-PRI discontent is clearly the highest also!

But the dilemma the EZLN faces is that autonomy from the central state has to be negotiated by the central state: it is, after all, not *independence*.

This central state will not grant such autonomy, precisely because the rich cattle ranchers and large-scale state (and foreign owned) industries, cannot allow the major economic resources to fall under local democratic control.

So, unless the programme of autonomy goes hand in hand with a programme for the overthrow of the central state authority and its replacement with a regime that has no economic interest in continued exploitation of the Chiapas, then autonomy is a utopia.

But the EZLN has no strategy for the overthrow of the central state. Its strategy for reform of this state depends upon an alliance of class forces which cannot achieve it.

Strategy

The EZLN does not aim to seize power to achieve its goals. This is a first in the history of guerrillaism.

This view has been repeated countless times since 1 January 1994 in interviews and communiqués. Yet, according to the declaration of war issued on 31 December 1993, the first order given by the EZLN leadership was, "Advance to the capital of the country, overcoming the Mexican Federal Army ..."[14]

To destroy the second biggest and best equipped army in Latin America and seize the capital of the country may be thought of as taking power, but this ambition was soon dropped once the EZLN's original retreat from San Cristobal de las Casas was effected. In an interview in February last year Marcos admitted:

"We know that we cannot defeat the Federal Army, but we also know that the Federal Army cannot defeat us militarily."[15]

This soberness when it comes to estimating the balance of military forces, is also related to the lack of external support. The EZLN know that to be successful in their aims they must place politics in command of the gun. Thus there is a sense in which Zapatism is a break with previous forms of guerrillaism whose hallmark has been to subordinate politics to the armed struggle.

The EZLN place the perspective the other way around:

"We don't understand armed struggle in the classic sense of the previous guerrillas. That is, we do not see armed struggle as a single path, as one single almighty truth around which everything else spins. . . What's decisive in a war is not the military confrontation, but the politics at play in that confrontation . . . What matters are the politics that move one or the other party. . ."[16]

The EZLN do not seek to put an end to capitalist exploitation in the cities or the towns. On the contrary, their whole political strategy, which is absolutely faithful to guerrillaism, is the "armed popular front". The EZLN appeal to all those capitalists and professionals who are alienated by the PRI system of government.

Naturally, they cannot be appealed to as (the leading) part of a social alliance if you seek to abolish them as an economic class.

In this sense the armed actions of the EZLN were subordinated to the promotion of a broad popular front. They were

intended to galvanise Mexican civil society to forge a grand coalition of all popular classes, including disaffected bourgeois, to get a changed electoral system. In reality, this aspect of the EZLN strategy became transformed into the goal once the cease-fire was announced and the EZLN was pinned back into the Lacandona rainforest.

In that sense the EZLN does not look so different to the M-19 guerrilla movement in Colombia which was formed in the early 1970s when fraud deprived the victorious Presidential candidate from taking office.

The M-19 resorted to armed struggle in order to allow the possibility of free elections in Colombia. They were among the first to disarm as a result of concessions on this front.[17]

Marcos put this proposal in one interview:

"We are proposing a space, an equilibrium between the different political forces, in order that each position has the same opportunity to influence the political direction of this country—not by backroom deals, corruption, or blackmail, but by convincing the majority of the people that their position is best . . we are talking about a democratic space where the political parties, or groups that aren't parties, can air and discuss their social proposals."[18]

The EZLN views the class struggle in an idealised fashion. The form of bourgeois dictatorship and the latitude given the parliamentary regime is not understood as specific historical outcome, determined by the strength of social classes, the weakness or strength of the national bourgeoisie in relation to imperialism and so on.

Since the first occupation of the Chiapas towns, the EZLN has softened its position on the bourgeois opposition to the PRI and increased its dependency upon it.

The EZLN does not see the content of bourgeois political power as being to guard and reproduce their wealth and property.

A greater degree of openness and absence of manipulation could be created in Mexican politics without changing the fundamentals, because the more formal power that was given, the more the openness of debate, then the more sophisticated would become the methods of persuasion and of ideological control. Real power would slide even further towards the executive branches of the state.

In most of the industrial world the possibilities of political debate and discussion exist, but the exploited still give their consent in elections to parties that enforce this exploitation. The EZLN naively believes that a transparent system of bourgeois democracy would allow the manifest injustices that exist to be articulated at a government level and real change be initiated.

This is simply unrealistic and the whole history of capitalism proves it.

If the democracy envisaged is more direct and permanent than bourgeois parliamentarism—permanent assemblies of the masses, immediate accountability, revocability etc.— then this will require *a revolution and an armed insurrection* to smash the Federal Army, which will not allow it. But the EZLN refuses to admit this simple truth.

Negotiations

Since the first occupation of the Chiapas towns, the EZLN has softened its position on the bourgeois opposition to the PRI and increased its dependency upon it.

In the period between the first national dialogue (February 1994) and the Presidential elections (August 1994) the Zapatistas refused to endorse any political party in Mexico.

Taken together with refusal to form a political organisation and stand its own candidates, this position was both self-defeating and yet indicated a petit-bourgeois fear of its own tendency to be drawn into unprincipled political pacts.

As the elections drew near and as the first National Democratic Convention met, the EZLN moved to a position of implicit and indirect support for the PRD and Cárdenas.

Cárdenas was PRI-trained and the PRD was a split from the PRI in 1988 in response to the capture of the PRI by US-trained economic technocrats who were implementing the IMF's neo-liberal policies in Mexico.

In 1988 the PRD stood for some kind of return to state protection; but by 1994 Cárdenas did not pretend to stand by even this.

The EZLN made a fundamental error in tying the prospects for a nation-wide strategy of resistance to the PRD and an electoral process. Incredibly, at this convention in August 1994, all groups were barred by the EZLN if they supported the armed struggle, since they said it was necessary to try and change the system by peaceful methods first. This was the price to be paid for PRD participation.

The elections were a massive blow for this perspective: Cárdenas lost badly. But in January of this year, the EZLN deepened its errors in calling for the creation of a country-wide "National Liberation Movement" to be led by Cárdenas. Indeed, after the elections in August 1994, the EZLN narrowed its immediate programme even further to focus on the recognition of the election of Amado Avendaño as governor of Chiapas, and on troop withdrawals from the state.

Avendaño was the anti-PRI candidate who stood on a PRD ticket and narrowly lost, probably due to fraud.

Negotiations between the EZLN and the government were broken off on 8 October 1994. The government, with a new mandate and with the opposition forces demoralised by the results, were emboldened to harden their stance.

The EZLN announced in return that it was setting up parallel government bodies in the areas that it controlled and closing down all government offices.

The EZLN called for the resignation of the PRI government in January 1994 and its replacement with a transitional government made up "of people of prestige outside the parties, who have the moral authority to lead the country."[19]

While this government was in office there would be a "National Dialogue on Democracy, Freedom and Justice" which would penetrate down into all local communities throughout Mexico to debate the content of a new constitution which would be created by a National Democratic Convention (NDC).

Naturally, the PRI government rejected such an idea out of hand. But an NDC did get formed and met twice during 1994.

Solidarity

In the first weeks and months after the New Year rebellion, the Zapatisatas gained a lot of solidarity, and galvanised popular support inside Mexico itself.

The worst response has been the negligible solidarity from the Latin American social democratic and Stalinist left. This has undoubtedly helped the PRI government to isolate the EZLN and put it on the defensive.

At the 5th Sao Paolo Forum in Montevideo (July 1995), there were an impressive number of organisations present. The organisers refused to invite the EZLN while at the same time they wanted to invite the PRI as an observer!

What could possibly explain this act by the so-called "left"? One need look no further than the presence and influence of the Cuban Communist Party in this Forum, which refuses to support any opposition to the PRI in Mexico.

It has long seen this government as an interlocutor for Cuba with the US in its search for an accommodation and an end to sanctions.

The diplomacy of Stalinist "socialism in one country" is alive and well in Cuba.

It is prepared to see valiant struggles of the oppressed on its doorstep go down to defeat rather than see its rela-

tions with favoured bourgeois regimes come to an end.

Workers and the EZLN

The fact remains that the isolation imposed on the EZLN by the Latin American left will induce it to look even more to its bourgeois allies inside and outside Mexico.

This will be self-defeating. The strategic task confronting all forces wishing to effect lasting nationwide social change in Mexico is to draw in the majority of the Mexican working class to the side of economic and political struggle against the state.[20]

This is far from easy. The PRI controls the trade unions. The bureaucracy of the unions is large, repressive and corrupt; it is an extension of the PRI state apparatus.

The hostility or indifference of petit-bourgeois classes in Mexico towards the working class is therefore natural; workers' organisations can and do act as an ally of the PRI against social justice. But the fact remains that unless this bloc between the working class organisations and the PRI is broken the prospects for strategic change in Mexico is poor.

Mexico is a fundamentally proletarian society and the key sectors of wealth creation and economic power are in the industrial sectors.

The initial mistake made ten years ago by the EZLN was not to adopt a *national* strategy for a worker/poor peasant alliance. The decision to build up support among the Chiapas peasants alone meant that the only force really capable of cracking the federal government resistance to social change in the Chiapas—the working class—had not been prepared.

But what can be achieved has been seen this year in the demonstrations and organisations that have emerged in response to the economic recession and the austerity packages imposed by the government.

For the first time ever, the trade union bureaucracy refused to organise the traditional May Day demonstrations, out of fear they would be aimed against the new packages.

Still, 100,000 marched under new leaderships to protest; many thousands made the conscious link between their demands and the fight of the EZLN for land and democratic rights.

An independent working class movement, allied to the poor peasants, is the only force that can rally the social power to overthrow the state and secure land, workers' democratic rights and a socialist plan of production.

This is the direction the poor peasants and indigenist supporters of the EZLN must take if their initial heroic rebellion is not to be isolated, vilified and sold out at the negotiating table.■

Footnotes

1 Around 1,500 EZLN guerrillas were involved in briefly occupying San Cristobal, Rancho Neuvo, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Oxchuc and Huixtan. Only Ranco Neuvo saw serious fighting to gain the town. The Federal Army immediately mobilised 14,000 troops to take them back. The EZLN retreated in good order from all towns except Ocosingo. There, 2,000 army troops cut of the escape route of 500 EZLN fighters. In three days of fierce fighting up to 200 were killed, a majority of them civilians as well as 40 plus Zapatistas. See *Rebellion from the Roots*, J Ross, Monroe, 1995, Chpt 6 for the best account of the New Year uprising.

2 Quoted in ibid, p211

3 The villages in the rainforest are home for around 400,000 indians.

4 1994 Interview with Marcos, 4-7 February, in, *Zapatistas!*, ed Autonomedia, New York 1994, p151

5 The main Mayan ethnic groups and languages in the Chiapas are Tzotziles (300,000), Tzeltales, Choles (120,000), Zoques (90,000) and Tojolabales (70,000).

6 Marcos had said that the Sandinistas placed too many illusions in elections, the FMLN were wrong to give up their arms.

7 *Zapatistas!*, op cit, p151

8 ibid, interview with Marcos, 11 May 1994, p294

9 By and large however, Mexico has been notable for the lack of guerrilla groups in the post-war period.

10 Speaking of the decision to launch the war Marcos stated: "Then the General Command explained it to the ethnic committees. Those committees to those of the regions and ravines, those ones to the local committees; the pros and cons were argued until it was time to vote. Records were taken to how many said yes, how many no, how many did not know; without distinction of age, men, women and children. Then came the reverse process . . . it ended up that the immense majority were inclined towards it." in ¡Zapatistas! op cit, p249-50

11 Major Anna Maria, for example, led the assault on San Cristobal.

12 Revolutionary Agrarian Law, in *Zapatistas*!, op cit, p55.

13 ibid, pp53-61

14 "Declaration of War", reprinted in *¡Zapatistas!*, ed Autonomedia, New York 1994, p50

15 Interview with Marcos, ibid, p157. On several occasions Marcos insisted that he fully expected a full-scale offensive against the EZLN to follow the New Year rising which would have crushed them but hopefully galvanised a response from "civil society".

16 ibid. p143 and 157

17 Naturally, little has changed for the better in the social and eocnomic conditions of the masses despite the fact that parliamentary democracy has become slightly more inclusive, another lesson the EZLN should have studied.

18 *Zapatistas!*, , op cit, p298

19 *Zapatistas*! op cit, p19

20 The working class in Chiapas is very small. Less than 1% of industry is large or medium. 94% of industrial concerns are micro-business making furniture or food products, employing a handful in each.



THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS

The US left and black liberation

Part 2: From the Comintern to the Socialist Workers Party (USA)

In the last issue **John McKee** described how American communists fought for a radical break with the US labour movement's traditions of racial segregation early this century. In this, the second part of his article, he examines the debates about black self-determination in the Comintern in the 1920s and 30s and their influence on the development of the post-war left's response to black nationalism.

The overwhelming opinion of Communist Party members in the USA in the mid-1920s was expressed in the words of John Pepper, one of the party's leaders:

"There exists a Negro-Zionist movement in America which wishes to go to Africa, but thirteen million Negroes wish to remain in America and demand social equality."

Locked in struggle with the remnants of the declining "back to Africa" movement, (led by Marcus Garvey) and beginning to win some cadres from it, the CPUSA did not believe the slogan of self-determination was appropriate.

But this position did not last long. As early as 1925 a group of black cadres from the American party were invited to meet with Stalin to discuss the "Negro Question", as all anti-racists then called it. Otto Hall, one of these cadres, reported Stalin as saying:

"The whole approach of the American party to the Negro question is wrong. You are a national minority with some of the characteristics of a nation."

Black people in the USA were measured against Stalin's famous check-list definition of a nation (language, territory, economy and culture). The common language was English. A "territory", based in the southern states, was staked out by selecting counties with black majorities or large minorities. The common economic life was represented by the continued existence and predominance of share-cropping in this plantation area. And a common psychological make-up and culture emerged from the history of slavery and oppression.

These arguments were put to a subcommittee on the Negro Question to prepare a resolution for the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928.

Three different positions were argued against the proposed national self-determination line. One saw the Negro Question as, fundamentally, a racial one which had to be solved through the fight for full social and political equality. Another argued this was the case in the north but not in the south. A third ad-

vocated a Negro Soviet Republic. None of the three black delegates to the Congress spoke in favour of the new line. Two of them, James Ford and Otto Hall, spoke against it.

Nevertheless the adopted position declared:

"In those regions of the south in which compact Negro masses are living it is essential to put forward the slogan of the right of self-determination for Negroes."[1]

In a further resolution of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in October 1928 it was argued:

"The various forms of oppression of the Negro masses, who are concentrated mainly in the so-called 'Black Belt', provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes . . . the Communist party must come out as the champion of the right of the Negro race for full emancipation. While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes, which must remain the central slogan of our party for work amongst the masses, the party must come out openly and unreservedly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination in the southern states, where the Negroes form a majority of the population."[2]

By 1930 self-determination had become "the chief slogan" and the Comintern was expecting the "rapid approach" of a crisis in the Black Belt and the development of demands for complete state independence.

The impact on the American Party

The party cadres responsible for the work among black people were not enthusiastic about the new slogan for a number of reasons.

Most importantly the black people they were working with were not raising demands for self-determination, but for social equality, an end to discrimination and for the right to join trade unions. While the slogan was developed primarily for the blacks in the south (the majority) the Communist Party did little work in the south among the rural black population. The major centres of their work were the black proletariat in New York, Chicago and other northern cities.

While a "national revolutionary movement" for a "Black Republic" implied the possibility of seeking alliances with black petit-bourgeois movements and even bourgeois figures, the work of the party was in the opposite direction.

They were in sharp conflict with the Garveyites and had folded the African Black Brotherhood (see TI17), replacing it in 1925 with the launch of the American Negro Labor Congress. This aimed to organise within the black working class and strengthen the party amongst black workers. The Tenants' Leagues they established in Harlem consistently attacked black landlords (who owned a third of Harlem real estate) as well as white ones.

The Comintern's serious attention to the black question did bring results. The black cadres were treated as equals in Moscow and mixed with fellow leading communists from Africa and Asia. The American Party was not free from racism and numerous complaints were brought to Moscow. These were treated seriously and the Comintern demanded they be rooted out of the party.

Because of this the black cadres were often the most enthusiastic supporters of the Comintern, regardless of its political degeneration under the Stalinist leadership. They fervently supported the "Bolshevisation" of the party in 1925, which swept away the language federations formed by immigrant Communist workers and allowed fully integrated work by the party in Harlem for the first time.

After the Sixth Congress, five black members were elected to the Central Committee of the CPUSA, and a Negro Department was set up. The party put considerable resources into this work , with special issues of its press, national organisers and rotas of national and regional speakers for street meeting campaigns in Harlem.

While the party struggled around "multi-racial" class issues, such as organising successful rent strikes and building tenants' leagues, unlike the Socialist Party it also put to the fore specific activities for the fight against racial discrimination. It mobilised days of protests against lynchings, campaigned against discrimination in employment and on work relief schemes.

Above all, it made an enormous breakthrough with its championing of the Scottsboro Boys, who were framed in the south on rape charges and threatened with the death penalty. Using International Labour Defense, and later the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the party established this case as a worldwide *cause celebre* and placed the spotlight on southern racism.



MARCUS GARVEY

The case, initially ignored by the much more influential but moderate National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), established the party amongst a whole layer of the black masses as a champion against racial oppression. By the late twenties, using these methods, the party had recruited hundreds of black people, by the 1930s several thousand.

This work went a long way to enabling the communists to challenge the official racism of the labour movement. The problem was that it coincided with the Comintern's ultra-left "third period".

This meant that in practice the communists set up their own red unions and left the mass of white workers in the AFL unions in the hands of racist reactionary leaders.

Meanwhile, the party's work gave it the cadres that would be capable of rallying the millions of oppressed blacks in the south to a fight against Jim Crow[3]; except that its slogan of national self-determination was not activated in the south.

Last, but not least, the work created the conditions under which a genuine programme for black liberation could have been developed out of the lessons of black struggles in the USA. But the party had become bureaucratised, debate stifled, and the line of "self-determination" had been handed down from on high and could only be changed in that same lofty place.

It was left to the Trotskyists to develop the discussion and elaborate a Marxist position on black liberation in the USA.

The Trotskyists and Self-Determination

The Trotskyist opposition leader James Cannon was present at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and supported its line on self-determination. When the Trotskyists were expelled from the CP in 1928 and set up the Communist League of America (CLA) delegates to the first CLA conference deleted the call for self-determination of Negroes on the basis that it needed further discussion.

Discussions took place in 1933 between Trotsky and Arne Swabeck, the secretary of the CLA, who was opposed to using the slogan. Another participant in the discussion was Albert Weisbord, a member of the Communist League of Struggle and supporter of the slogan. Trotsky came down clearly on the side of the self-determination slogan.

Swabeck argued Negroes had no separate language or special customs or religion and had become fully assimilated and "Americanised":

"It is therefore our opinion that the American negroes are a racial minority whose positions and interests are sub-

related to the class relations of the country and depending upon them."[4]

Trotsky was not convinced. While agreeing that, "the negroes are a race and not a nation", he went on:

"Nations grow out of racial material under definite conditions. The Negroes in Africa are not yet a nation but they are in the process of forming a nation. We do not obligate the negroes to become a nation: whether they are is a question of their consciousness, that is what they desire and what they strive for."[5]

Trotsky was concerned that opposition to self-determination could stem from a fear of offending chauvinist and racist white workers:

"99.9% of the American workers are chauvinists: in relation to the negroes they are hangmen as they are also towards the Chinese etc. It is necessary to make them understand that the American state is not their state and that they do not have to be the guardians of this state. Those American workers who say: 'The Negroes should separate if they so desire, and we will defend them against our American police' - those are revolutionists, I have confidence in them."[6]

But blacks themselves were not raising the demand, argued Swabeck. Trotsky countered:

"If the Negroes do not at present demand self-determination it is of course for the same reason that the white workers do not yet advance the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Negroes have not yet got it into their heads that they dare carve out a piece of the great and mighty states for themselves."[7]

In a later discussion with CLR James in 1939, both James and Trotsky agreed that the real content of the mass movement of Garveyism was a desire for resistance to racism. As James explained, they had:

". . . not the slightest intention of going back to Africa, but were glad to follow a militant leadership."[8]

Trotsky argued that in different circumstances (a Japanese invasion or the triumph of fascism) this desire could quickly turn into a real mass movement for self-determination.

Trotsky clearly believed that the whole question of self-determination for black people in the USA had great revolutionary potential. It might start as a movement for democratic demands and for equal rights, and might initially be led by the petit bourgeoisie. But it had the potential to move in the direction of permanent revolution, with the black masses becoming the most advanced section of all the oppressed and exploited in the USA in the struggle for revolution. This was why it was crucial to carry on a ceaseless struggle amongst white workers in support of such demands.

In the 1939 discussion with James, Trotsky made clear that he disagreed with the way the Communist Party positively advocated a separate state:

"I do not propose for the party to advocate . . . but only to proclaim our obligation to support the struggle for self-determination if the negroes themselves want it."[9]

In retrospect, the slogans adopted in the 1930s by Trotsky and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP-US, a successor to the CLA) were correct. Because of the situation of blacks in the south - economic enslavement combined with a denial of democratic rights and a campaign of racist terror - a mass movement for self-determination was a real possibility. Such a battle against racism and Jim Crow could have had a powerful revolutionary dynamic.

History would, in a sense, decide whether the slogan of self-determination would have to be *advocated* by revolutionaries and not just defended as a right. The question for revolutionary Marxists after the Second World War was whether this perspective retained its validity.

It is fitting that the major Trotskyist debates on the relationship between the struggle for black liberation and the struggle for socialism should have taken place in the United States—a land founded on genocide of the native Americans, slavery and Jim Crow apartheid.

It is unfortunate, however, that many of these debates occurred during the degeneration of Trotskyism after 1951. For what they bequeath us is a series of incomplete positions, developed by the post-war leaders of the SWP into an abandonment of Marxism on the black question.

According to a resolution to the second conference of the SWP in 1939, the struggle itself would decide whether:

". . . the Negroes in America are a national minority to which the slogan of self-determination applies . . . The raising or support of the slogan by the masses of Negroes will be the best and only proof required."[10]

If the slogan was embraced by the black masses the SWP would support it, but until then it would seek other ways of developing the black struggle and linking it to the general class struggle for socialism.

In particular, the party agreed to champion the building of an independent black movement. A second resolution, "The SWP and Negro Work", argued:

"The SWP proposes that its Negro members, aided and supported by the party, take the initiative and collaborate with other militant Negroes in the formation of a negro mass organisation devoted to the struggle for Negro rights. This organisation will NOT be either openly or secretly a periphery organisation of the Fourth International. It will be an organisation in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working class programme corresponding to the day-to-day struggles of the masses of Negro workers and farmers."

These basic positions, written by C.L.R. James, were a compromise with Trotsky's more positive attitude to self-determination but an affirmation of Trotsky's argument for a working class black organisation.

Fighting racism in World War Two

The adoption of these resolutions marked a positive turn in the work of the SWP. The party intervened vigorously in the March on Washington movement led by A. Philip Randolph, the black leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

During the war the SWP militants carried on this work fighting racism inside the army. When the government moved to suppress the SWP's paper and imprison its leaders, one observer noted that it was not just because of its anti-war line:

"The government's efforts to suppress the *Militant* during the war were frankly motivated, in part, by the SWP's irreconcilable struggle against all forms of white supremacy."[11]

This work did not result in the birth of a mass black movement, as James and Trotsky had hoped, but it did result in the transformation of the SWP from a predominantly white organisation into one in which almost 50% of the membership was black. This was a tremendous achievement.

But it meant that the cautious and incomplete analysis of the black question in the USA, and a decision on whether or not it could be viewed and treated as a national question, was not really built upon.

Agnosticism on this question seemed to have borne fruit. So, in the 1948 resolution - also drafted by James - agnosticism remained the guiding principle. The resolution, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the US", analysed the position of blacks within US society and explained the dynamics of their struggle for equality:

"The Negro people in all aspects of their social and cultural life are a part of the American people. At the same time it must be recognised that the Negro struggle is not identical with the proletarian movement towards socialism. It exists as a distinct movement of

an oppressed minority within the country, possessing its own historical origins, special characteristics, forms of development and methods of action."[12]

James went on to deride those who feared the development of a black movement, lest it upset the routinist assumptions of the labour movement, and argued:

"We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own;"[13]

The Stalinists, by contrast, feared any independent movements as a threat to their ability to bureaucratically manipulate struggles.[14] The white liberals saw the independent black struggle as a threat to themselves and likely to undermine their efforts at reforms enacted from above within capitalism.

The Trotskyists, however, recognised the explosive potential of the struggle for black equality, even if led by people other than themselves. They had no reason to fear any movement that developed in opposition to the ruling class and its racist system. The 1948 position maintained the revolutionary orientation.

Like its 1939 predecessor, however, the position dodged the important question - were black people in the USA a nation?

By 1948 this might well have seemed less important. The process of migration that occurred before World War Two was speeded up. The concentration of black people in the rural south - the so called "black belt" where 75% of the black population of the USA lived prior to 1940 - was being undermined by the process of migration that commenced during and after the war.

The roots of oppression

By 1964 the proportion of blacks in the south was down to 54% of the black population of the US.[15] The great ghettos of the cities in the north and west were creating a diversified black population, increasingly urban and proletarian.

Despite white racism in the cities, contact between black and white workers was growing. To some extent this excuses the agnosticism of the 1948 resolution. But only to some extent. For the ideas in that resolution of an independent black struggle, unified despite the increasing diversity of the black communities, based on the existence of the black population as a distinct oppressed minority, begged the question - nationally oppressed or racially oppressed?

The question is not academic. If the oppression of black people in the USA had reached the level of national oppression, if a black national consciousness had been created out of the misery of slavery, segregation and urban poverty, then a revolutionary national struggle had the power to explode the USA - geographically as well as socially.

By 1964 the proportion of blacks in the south was down to 54% of the black population of the USA. The great ghettos of the cities in the north and west were creating a diversified black population, increasingly urban and proletarian.

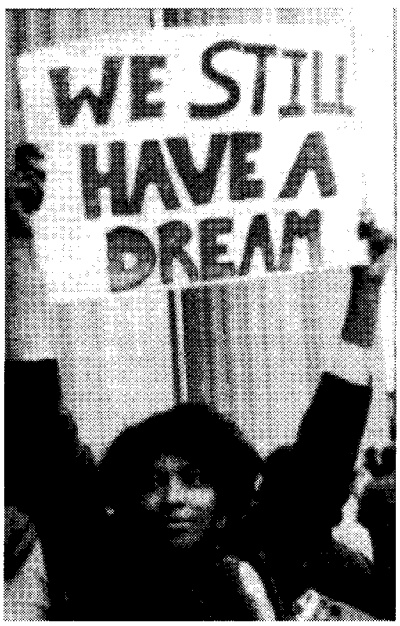
While fighting for working class independence, leadership and methods of struggle as the only way of ensuring a progressive victory in the national struggle, revolutionaries would be obliged to make tactical alliances with those who called for a separate black state, including bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaders.

Despite the best efforts of revolutionary socialists, such a movement might not have assumed the form, originally envisaged by Trotsky, of a workers' and poor farmers' movement, but rather, of a cross-class movement - all classes in the black community striving for national liberation. Even a movement for a bourgeois democratic goal would deserve the support of revolutionary socialists against attempts by a white racist state to deny it.

To assert, however, that the black question was fundamentally about **racial** oppression, and that racial oppression can only be eliminated with the destruction of its material base, imperialist capitalism, poses a different set of tasks for Marxists.

The fight for an integrated anti-racist working class movement becomes crucial, as only a workers' revolution can rid society of racial oppression. If the dynamic is primarily racial, if black nationalists represent not a developing national consciousness but an illusory utopia, then the whole relationship between revolutionaries and the demands and struggles of black nationalist organisations has to change.

This was a gaping hole in the 1948 resolution. At the time it did not cause any ill effects. But by 1954 the birth of a mass civil rights movement among black people meant the issue had to be resolved.



Civil Rights

Led by the reformist NAACP the movement commenced a struggle against segregation in education, winning a Supreme Court ruling against such segregation in four states and in Washington DC. White reaction to the ruling, led by the Ku Klux Klan, prompted vigorous black struggle.

Under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. the black population of Montgomery, Alabama, launched a 381 day boycott of transport in protest at segregation.

In the sixteen years that followed the black movement went through several transformations. It fragmented into numerous movements. And its leaders ranged from the reformist King, through the revolutionary nationalist Malcolm X, to the Maoist influenced Black Panthers.

Was the black struggle a national one or an anti-racist one? On the answer to this question hinged important tactics that Trotskyists should take, not just to the black struggles that were occurring, but to the various leaderships that were competing to direct those struggles.

Fraser vs Breitman

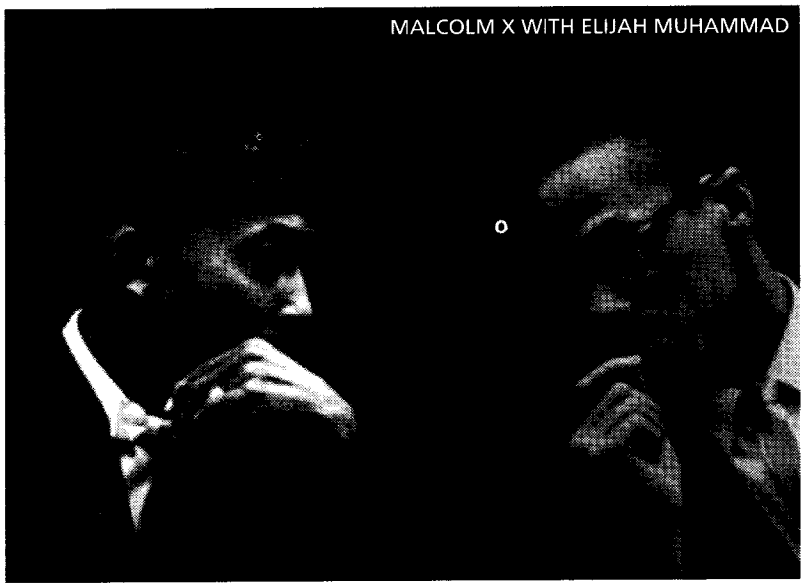
In a 1955 internal bulletin of the SWP Richard Fraser wrote a document entitled, "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Struggle". This document challenged the SWP's traditional agnosticism on whether or not the black population were a national minority, and argued against the traditional SWP acceptance that, if the black masses demanded it, then the SWP would support the slogan for self-determination. He wrote:

"The Negro question is not a national question because it lacks the fundamental groundwork for the development of nationalism; an independent system of commodity exchange, or to be more precise, a mode of life which would make possible the emergence of such a system . . . The Negro question is a racial question: a matter of discrimination because of skin colour, and that's all."[16]

For Fraser, this meant that self-determination was never an issue for black people in the USA and never should be allowed to become one. Nationalism pandered to white prejudice since it tended to confirm the argument - albeit in a positive way - in favour of segregation. He argued that class was the fundamental driving force of the black question, because of its origins in slavery.

Fraser insisted this was far more important in determining the character of black oppression in the USA than the national origins of black people in Africa:

"The goals which history has dic-


MALCOLM X WITH ELIJAH MUHAMMAD

tated to them are to achieve complete equality through the elimination of racial segregation, discrimination, and prejudice. That is, the overthrow of the race system. It is from these historically conditioned conclusions that the Negro struggle, whatever its forms, has taken the path of the struggle for direct assimilation. All that we can add to this is that these goals cannot be accomplished except through the socialist revolution."[17]

The weakness of Fraser's position lay in his elimination of consciousness as a factor in the national struggle. He excluded, in principle, the possibility of racism in the US forging a national consciousness that could give birth to a national movement. Fraser was on firm ground when it came to contemporary trends. His mistake was to read back into the whole of black history this position.

To have excluded from the outset the possible development of a national consciousness as one line of development reveals a mechanical, undialectical and, potentially, sectarian attitude to the national question. It eliminates the subjective factor from the national question. Yet it was precisely the subjective factor that Trotsky regarded as the one thing that could lend the black question a national character in the US.

Despite this weakness Fraser was right to insist that it was time for the SWP to come clean. Had the struggle decided the fate of the black question, as the 1939 resolution suggested? And if so, what had it decided?

Trotsky's prognosis about the possible development of the US black population towards nationhood had been disproved by events. US capitalism had not only integrated black people into the workforce, and dispersed them across the nation in so doing, it had imparted into their consciousness the goals of equality.

Every significant black struggle was a fight for equality, a fight against discrimination, a fight against their status as second class citizens of the USA. Trotsky's prognosis about the national question in the 1930s no longer applied in the 1950s. Struggle, and objective developments in US capitalism, had decided the fate of the black question, and Fraser was right - it was a question of racial oppression, not national oppression.

In contrast to this analysis, faced with the growth of the civil rights movement, and its later nationalist offshoots, the SWP decided that the struggle had *created* a black nation - or more precisely that it had created black nationalism - and that was just fine.

Centrism tailing nationalism

For by this time the SWP had ceased to be any sort of revolutionary party. Along with the rest of the Fourth International[18] it had undergone a profound degeneration.

In place of the revolutionary party as the leadership of the class struggle, it hunted the colonial and semi-colonial world for "unconscious Trotskyists", like Castro in Cuba and Ben Bella in Algeria. An assortment of revolutionary nationalists and left Stalinists became the objects of worship. The reflection of this on US soil was the black movement.

When militant nationalists like Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers arrived on the scene, the SWP discovered its very own versions of unconscious Trotskyism. Its theoretical gap was plugged with grotesque opportunism towards any and every black leader.

In 1963 the SWP updated its position with a new resolution on the black question, "Freedom Now". The vestiges of the 1939 and 1948 resolutions that had championed revolutionary integrationism were expunged. Integrationism and separatism were given equal billing:

"Negro nationalism is progressive because it contributes to the creation of such an independent Negro movement. It will remain progressive so long as it fulfils that function, whether the struggle be fought along integrationist or separatist lines."[19]

The black nationalism of Elijah Muhammad did not have so much as a whiff of socialism about it, notwithstanding Malcolm X's origins in this movement. Breitman also fails to differentiate between types of black nationalism - that of the Muslims and that of the later Malcolm X.

In part, the SWP's espousal of nationalism and separatism flowed from their correct understanding that part of the impulse towards separatism represented a rejection of white US values.

But this was only part of the impulse, a part that would have to be sensitively and patiently dealt with by a revolutionary party fighting for a class perspective. Another part of the impulse, in fact a very big part of it, was the leadership of the black movement.

A section of that leadership was the intensely separatist, and in many respects reactionary, Black Muslim movement of Elijah Muhammad. Their separatism had little to do with the desires of the black masses and everything to do with their utopian project of creating a separate black Muslim state.

Overlooking the reactionary aspects of such a theocratic project, the SWP defended this brand of separatism, only to tail obediently behind Malcolm X's more sophisticated (and revolutionary nationalist inspired) separatism when he split from the Muslims.

The same pattern of tailing any radical black movement saw the SWP becoming cheer leaders for the Panthers, the Black Power movement and just about anybody else they could find.

Underlying this abject capitulation to separatism lay the party's interpretation of its own historic position on nationalism. When the black struggle elevated nationalist leaders to the fore the SWP concluded that the struggle was a national struggle after all. Therefore - according to the SWP's "development" of Trotsky's views on national struggles - the question of independent working class leadership could be held in abeyance unless and until the national struggle had run its course.

Even if the struggle were a national struggle the SWP's position on the nationalist leaders would have been wrong. Trotskyists seek concretely to connect any struggle for self-determination with working class overthrow of capitalism. Support for self-determination and, when necessary, advocacy of independence, allows socialists maximum leverage to split workers from their bourgeois leaders.

But Trotskyists seek to bring the working class to the head of any national struggle so that it can be connected and carry over into the fight to overthrow capitalism. If the independence struggle were to fall short of this then it would be the black working class who would remain exploited and op-

pressed as a class and national freedom will not deliver the social gains they expected at the outset.

The SWP abandoned this approach but also had to avoid embracing Stalinism with its entire logic of completely subordinating the class struggle to the national one. Hence, their centrist alternative, which was to confuse the national and socialist aspects of the struggle of black Americans.

George Breitman was called upon to theorise this:

"Those black nationalists who slight the socialist element inherent in their movement commit an error comparable to those who today slight black nationalism. Here the colonial revolution they feel kinship with has something to teach them. Cuba and Algeria have recently shown how a nationalist, democratic, revolutionary mass movement can, through conclusions derived from direct experience in struggle with imperialism and its agents, grow over into a consciously socialist movement, party and government. We believe that this dynamic of permanent revolution will be operative in the evolution of American black nationalism too."[20]

Black nationalism is inherently socialist, according to Breitman. This could not be further from the truth.

The black nationalism of Elijah Muhammad did not have so much as a whiff of socialism about it, notwithstanding Malcolm X's origins in this movement. Breitman also fails to differentiate between types of black nationalism - that of the Muslims and that of the later Malcolm X.

For him the nationalism of an oppressed people is, in and of itself, progressive. According to Breitman, Cuba and Algeria were proof positive that national and democratic struggles automatically lead to socialist movements and regimes arising.

In fact, as is doubly clear from the vantage point of the 1990s, Cuba demonstrated only the ability of Stalinism to create a bureaucratic workers' state without any independent political rule or control by the mass of the working class.

And the history of Algerian capitalism since independence proves not the spontaneously "socialist" character of national movements in oppressed nations, but nothing more than the ability of such movements and regimes temporarily to put on a left face.

Neither proved that socialism could triumph without a revolutionary party. Indeed, the subsequent development of both countries proves the exact opposite.

The dynamic of permanent revolution requires a party and programme if it is to lead to a socialist resolution of the crisis.

It is not automatic. If it was there would be no need for a revolutionary party to fight for it against bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists who direct the struggle away from socialist goals.

By the end of the 1960s the SWP, having embraced separatism as well as black nationalism as inherently socialist, believed that a separate black party was both necessary and desirable.

A black revolutionary party?

In 1967 the SWP adopted a new resolution calling for an independent black political party. What should be the class basis of this party?

This was answered not in the unambiguous form of a working class programme, but in what Breitman termed the "proletarian-socialist in tendency" character of black nationalism[21]. This was how the SWP put it:

"Similarly the Socialist Workers Party favours the formation of an independent party uniting Afro-Americans in political struggle for their just rights and freedom.

It believes that black people have the democratic right to decide their own destiny and that, without such a political instrument, they cannot effectively advance their immediate well being or attain their ultimate goals."[22]

This is an admission that the supposed revolutionary party of the US working class, the SWP, could not offer revolutionary leadership to the black masses under any circumstances.

It is to concede that a non-class based party (or more accurately a party led by representatives of the bourgeoisie and staffed by the petit bourgeoisie - there can never be non-class based parties) is the only way that black people can secure their liberation in the USA.

It is to accept the nationalists' contention that a socialist revolution, led by an integrated revolutionary party and carried out by an integrated working class, cannot eradicate racism and black oppression. And it is totally wrong on all counts.

Conclusion

For revolutionaries in the USA today learning the lessons from both the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers' Party's experiences in fighting racism and developing a revolutionary answer to racial oppression is vital.

For by avoiding the mistakes they fell into, and by assimilating and developing the best contributions both parties made in their revolutionary periods, a fighting programme for black liberation can be developed anew.

And that is an urgent task for revolutionaries in the USA, where the fight for black liberation remains of strategic importance to the struggle for socialism.■

Footnotes

1 The same commission developed the slogan for "an independent native South African Republic" which was opposed by the leader of the South African Communist Party, Bunting.

2 *The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents* Vol II Jane Degras London 1971

3 A nickname for US state laws passed following the defeat of the "reconstruction" after the Civil War. These laws introduced segegration and severely restricted civil rights for black people.

4 *On Black Nationalism and Self Determination*, p 22, Leon Trotsky, New York, 1978

5 ibid p 24

6 ibid p29

7 ibid p29

8 Trotsky, op. cit. p40

9 ibid p46

10 "The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America", in*The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party*, p355, New York, 1982

11 ibid p 359 - emphasis and capitals in original

12 *Negroes on the March*, Daniel Guerin, London 1956, p131

13 Published in *Fourth International*, New York, May-June 1950

14 ibid

15 In the mid 1930s the ultraleftism of the "third period" gave way to the Stalinist "popular front" strategy, which meant alliances with "progressive" capitalists. Thus they tied themselves to white liberal and moderate black oppositions to racism.

16 T Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism*, London, 1969, p144. By 1980 this proportion was down to 33%.

17 Reprinted in, *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism versus Black Nationalism*, Spartacist League, New York, 1978

18 ibid p3

19 ibid p7

20 The SWP was in the International Committee in the 1950s, but then fused with the International Secretariat in 1963 to become part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International - USFI.

21 *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, vol 24, no 30, July 1963

22 Reprinted in *Marxism and The Negro Struggle*, New York, 1965, p 42

23 *Fifty Years of World Revolution*, New York 1971, p208

24 *The Case for an Independent Black Party*, New York, 1968, p23

From Trotskyism to centrism

Ernest Mandel (1923-1995)

by Mathieu Roux

Ernest Mandel, leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), and one of the key figures of post-war Trotskyism, died on 20 July 1995 at the age of 72.

The lengthy obituaries that appeared in several major European newspapers such as *Le Monde* (France), *Le Soir* (Belgium), *The Guardian* (Britain), and the fact that his death was reported by the French Communist Party daily, *l'Humanité*, all indicate that Mandel had a far greater influence and was more widely known than any of the other post-war leaders of the Fourth International.

For many USFI members, Mandel represented the voice of orthodoxy, a living continuity with another, more radical period in the life of the International, a brilliant and solid base for the organisation's leadership. He was, after all, the architect and principal founder of the USFI.

But although he was far more prolific than any of his contemporaries, and despite his contributions in the field of Marxist political economy which largely account for this relative fame, Mandel's life work was marked by the same inability to grapple with the real problems of revolutionary Marxism that hampered the leaders of post-war centrist Trotskyism.



The revolutionary fight against Nazism

Mandel was raised in a left socialist household. His father had been a friend of the Polish revolutionary, Karl Radek, and bound volumes of Kautsky's theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit* were to be found in the family library.

The young Ernest Mandel joined the small Belgian section of the Fourth International in 1939 and became a close friend of the talented young Marxist, Abram Leon. At the age of 19 he became a Central Committee member of the underground Belgian section and three years later he participated in the 1944 clandestine European conference of the Fourth International. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested for the third time and spent the rest of the war in a Nazi labour camp.

After the end of the war, Mandel became a key element in the new International leadership that was being reconstructed by Michel Pablo and others. Mandel quickly showed himself to be a prolific writer, a tireless organiser and an able theoretician. In 1946, at the age of only 23, he was appointed to the International Secretariat. During this period he made significant contributions to two major questions that confronted the young International leadership: the Israel-Arab war in Palestine and the class nature of the post-war Eastern European states.

Basing himself on the work of Leon—who had been killed in Auschwitz—and on the original anti-imperialist positions of the Communist International, Mandel helped give the International a revolutionary response to the events in the Middle East in the years 1947-49. Writing under the pseudonym of "Walter" he insisted both on the need to defend the Palestinians' right to self-determination while refusing any concessions to anti-semitism disguised as the ideology of national liberation.

The debate on post-war eastern Europe

His contribution to the debate on the nature of Stalinist-occupied Eastern Europe was equally important, but less successful.

The problem facing the International in 1948 was novel and far-reaching. What was the class nature of the buffer states? If they were capitalist states, how could revolutionaries explain the nature of the economies that were becoming increasingly identical to that of the USSR? If they were some form of workers' state, how could that have happened without any kind of workers' revolution, and what were the implications for an understanding of Stalinism?

Mandel's starting-point was, understandably, to look for parallels in previous events. He found one in the shape of Trotsky's analysis of potential devel-

opments following the Soviet invasion and occupation of Poland and Finland in 1939. According to Mandel the overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe would only be possible if these countries were to be "structurally assimilated", that is if they were to become geographically and economically integrated into the Soviet Union.

Despite the occupation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Armed Forces, structural assimilation had not occurred, therefore these were not workers' states. The International adopted his analysis at the Second Congress in 1948.

Not only was this "orthodoxy" severely limited by its formal logic, it was also totally inadequate when faced with the realities of eastern Europe.

Here the Stalinists had indeed overthrown capitalism but in a counter-revolutionary fashion—having at the same time ensured the demobilisation, indeed crushing, of any independent working class organisation—and without carrying out any real form of "structural assimilation". Mandel, and the FI, were left high and dry. As long as they clung to this analysis they ignored the economic reality of the destruction of capitalism due to the false analytical starting point.

The problems with Mandel's position on Stalinism went even further. Following Mandel's lead, the FI argued that Stalinist organisations were those that followed Moscow's orders. Thus, any organisation that broke with the Kremlin had, of necessity, broken with Stalinism. This apparently "orthodox" idea, which completely ignored Trotsky's prediction that Stalinism would break up along national lines, contained within it dangerous opportunist kernel that was to be revealed only a few months after the Second Congress, when the International was faced with the Tito-Stalin split.

Mandel was one of the last members of the international leadership to accept that capitalism had been overthrown in Yugoslavia, long after the more theoretically flexible and erratic Pablo. As late as April 1949—two years after the application of the first Five Year Plan by Tito—Mandel argued at the FI's International Executive Committee that Yugoslavia was still capitalist because structural assimilation into the USSR had not taken place.

A few months later, however, Mandel accepted that his theory of structural assimilation did not fit the facts. But one wrong analysis was quickly substituted by another. For Mandel, Tito had broken with Stalinism and this regime, unlike the USSR, did not require a political revolution to bring the workers to power.

This moment was decisive for both Mandel and the whole of the International. Having espoused ultra-radical perspectives during the immediate post-war period, in which the rapid rise of the FI seemed assured, Mandel in particular, and the International generally, began to look for other social forces to play the role of the locomotive of the revolution. The man who had done so much to reconstruct the International during and after the war now made an important contribution to its political collapse.

Revolution as an objective process

Mandel's method from 1949 onwards was characterised by a form of political "processism". In both his theory and his practice, Mandel—and the International he led—repeatedly suggested that the "world revolution" would surge forward, as a sort of unconscious process.

The role of revolutionaries, according to this point of view, was to identify the political forces that expressed this process, adapt to them. and wait for them to do its work.

Tito was merely to be the first such expression of the "world revolution". In the following years and decades it became embodied in various forces: from Mao's "cultural revolution" through to Castroism; from the post-1968 student vanguard through to leftist military movements like the MFA in the Portuguese revolution; from the Islamic movement in Iran's revolution to the Nicaraguan FSLN. And each time Mandel played his role in putting a "Trotskyist" gloss on the latest opportunist turn.

This objectivist method infected Mandel's analysis of the Soviet Union. For example, throughout the 1950s, he considered that the development of the productive forces inside the USSR, linked with the "de-Stalinisation" process after 1953, would lead to far-reaching reforms of the bureaucracy.

In 1959 he described the USSR as "a society in transition between capitalism and socialism, but which is beginning to approach its goal as the growth of the productive forces, increasing living standards and cultural levels and the industrialisation of the countryside enable the resolution of the main contradictions of the current phase. It is unnecessary to add that the overthrow of the bureaucracy (albeit slightly liberalised) and the re-establishment of full and total soviet democracy are the condition sine qua non for the completion of the construction of a socialist society" (*Quatrième Internationale*, May 1959, p19)

This position sums up Mandel's specific centrism. The orthodox Marxist flourish at the end, however "unnecessary" it might seem, is in fact gutted of its revolutionary content. Mandel was convinced that since the bureaucracy originated in conditions of material scarcity and economic backwardness, it would be undermined by further economic success. The political revolution would be no more than a puff of wind that would topple a redundant structure.

Of course, reality turned out somewhat differently. Rather than economic success undermining the ruling caste, this parasitic leadership undermined the foundations of planned economy. Of course, once again, in the 1970s and 1980s Mandel was clever enough to adjust his position to keep up with the evident stagnation in the USSR. But as he had done with Tito in Yugoslavia and Gomulka in Poland in an earlier period, Mandel looked to a "reform" wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy, under pressure from below, to enact crucial measures that would open the way for political revolution.

In the ten years since Gorbachev's nomination in 1985, Mandel consistently failed to understand what was at stake in the collapse of Stalinism, or to advance a programme that would enable the workers to seize the enormous revolutionary opportunities that were thrown up.

In his writings, and in particular in his extremely weak book on Gorbachev, Mandel revealed the extent to which his orthodoxy had been rotted away by over 40 years of opportunism. Instead of a revolutionary programme for workers' power, he put forward a series of reforms that he called on a "left" wing of the bureaucracy to carry out.

The revolutionary crisis in East Germany revealed all the more clearly the processist method with which Mandel had functioned for over four decades. In 1989, refusing to raise any other slogans than those of bourgeois democracy, Mandel insisted that there was no restorationist threat:

"The European bourgeoisie does not look favourably on this destabilisation. It has no hope of recovering Eastern Europe for capitalism . . . The main question in the political struggles underway is not the restoration of capitalism."

In other words, restoration simply could not take place; the "superior" economic form of the degenerate workers' state could not collapse under the weight of the capitalist challenge. The masses' drive for political democracy would inevitably lead to a radicalisation.

Structural reforms

During the long economic boom in Europe the International had undertaken a strategic entrist orientation towards the mass reformist parties of the Second International as well as the Sta-

linist parties. In his native Belgium, from 1954 to 1963 Mandel was an advisor to the FGTB trade union, working closely with the left reformist André Renard. At the same time, his group carried out entry work in the Belgian Socialist Party.

These material pressures pushed Mandel and his co-thinkers into "developing" Marxism in such a way that softened the edges between it and reformism. A good example of this is Mandel's theory of "neo-capitalism". First elaborated in 1964, Mandel was to say in 1968 that neo-capitalism was a "third stage of development of capitalism", "as different from monopoly capitalism or imperialism described by Lenin, Hilferding and others as monopoly capitalism was different from classical 19th century laissez-faire capitalism." (*International Socialist Review* Nov/Dec 1968 p2).

This new stage of capitalism was immune to a 1929-33 type slump or economic catastrophe, according to Mandel, due to the ability of governments to intervene to regulate the business cycle after the second world war. Crisis would occur in the form of "short-term fluctuations". This type of capitalism, being a new stage, would naturally require a modified programme. Effectively surrendering to those, like the Cliffites, who argued that the Transitional Programme was only of any use in revolutionary crises, Mandel elaborated a programme of "structural reforms". The worst example of this was his pamphlet, *A Socialist Strategy for Western Europe*, published in the early 1970s by the Institute for Workers' Control.

Much of his economic work was an ambitious attempt to synthesise the classical work of Marx with a host of contemporary post-war economic trends

This programme included various isolated transitional demands. But these were gutted of theri revolutionary content. hey were not to be imposed from below by new organisations of struggle, nor did they culminate in the goal of overthrowing the capitalist state.

The end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s forced Mandel into another U-turn. "Short-term fluctuations" gave way to a period of generalised recessions. Mandel soon buried his theory of neo-capitalism and by 1972 had arrived at a theory of "late capitalism".

In a complete turnaround Mandel argued that "The era of late capitalism is not a new epoch of capitalist development. It is merely a further development of the imperialist, monopoly-capitalist epoch" (Late Capitalism, p9). Whereas four years earlier, neo-capitalism was completely different to Lenin's imperialist stage, now "the characteristics of the imperialist epoch enumerated by Lenin . . . remain fully valid for late capitalism."

Typically, Mandel never accounted for the change but it did allow for a more leftist presentation of the transitional programme in the more radical climate of the 1970s in western Europe.

Marxist economic theory

It was as a "Marxist economist" that Mandel was able to break out of the ghetto of Trotskyist politics and establish a global reputation within the academic world and amongst social science publishing houses. *Marxist Economic Theory* (1962) broke the monopoly that Stalinists had on Marxist critiques of capitalism in the post-war period.

His *Introduction to Marxist Economics* (1963) sold hundreds of thousands of copies in over a dozen languages. *Late Capitalism* (1975) and *The Second Slump* (1978) were considered major contributions to the study of the course of capitalism after the end of the long boom.

Much of this work was an ambitious attempt to synthesise the classical work of Marx with a host of contemporary post-war economic trends: the third technological revolution; permanent inflation and credit expansion; the end of empire. Mandel was concerned to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Marx's critique of capitalism as an economic system that is ephemeral, crisis wracked and doomed. This was its progressive, anti-reformist and anti-Stalinist thrust. Unlike some "Trotskyists" he did not write as though little of substance had changed in the course of post-war capitalist developments.

But Mandel's intellectual appetite for reconciling reform with revolution in politics means that his economic work can justifiably be accused of eclecticism.

On the one hand, he went to great lengths to refute alien theories of capitalist development and crisis—Keynesianism, permanent arms economy, unequal exchange between imperialism and the third world, for example.

On the other, he loaded his work with "insights" drawn from other theoretical traditions on the left and in academic life.

This is nowhere clearer than in his theory of capitalist crisis itself, where he rejects "monocausal" theories of crisis (i.e. the over-accumulation of capital) and opts for an explanation based on underconsumption, over-accumulation and disproportionality—acting as a series of relatively "independent variables".

What results is an unstructured hierarchy of questionable analytical rigour and dubious predictive power: who can forget Mandel's strident prediction of immediate economic slump in the wake of the October 1987 stock market crash? Nevertheless, Mandel's rivals in this sphere have scarcely a better record and indeed to an important extent the elaboration of a scientific Marxist theory of capitalist development (and hence at the same time of crisis) remains to be done and will be achieved in part through a critique of Mandel's work.

The USFI, Castro and beyond

Abstract re-statements of Marxist basics, coupled with opportunist adaptations was the hallmark of the USFI and of Mandel's leadership. This was particularly clear in the enthusiastic treatment given to Castro and the Cuban CP who were treated to the same kind of favours as those reserved for Tito in the period 1948-1951.

In the founding document of the USFI (1963), Mandel wrote: "The victory in Cuba marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the world revolution; for, aside from the Soviet Union, this is the first workers' state established outside the bounds of the Stalinist apparatus."

Ignoring both the decisive lack of real workers' democracy and the Stalinist nature of Castro's rule, Mandel gave a succinct description of his view of the role of the Fourth International:

"The appearance of more workers' states through further development of the colonial revolution, particularly in countries like Algeria, would help strengthen and enrich the international current of Castroism, give it longer range perspectives and help bring it closer to understanding the necessity for a new revolutionary Marxist international of mass parties.

Fulfilment of this historic possibility depends in part on the role which the Fourth International plays in the colonial revolution and the capacity of sections of the Fourth International to help win fresh victories."

Following the method established with Tito in 1948, the newly re-unified "world party of socialist revolution" was a cheerleader for petit-bourgeois revolutions, be they Stalinist or nationalist in inspiration. Thus to the end of his life, Mandel opposed calls for political revolution in Vietnam and Cuba, and, for much of the time, in China as well.

Still using his mistaken method of the 1940s, Mandel argued that because these parties had carried out revolutions against the will of the Kremlin, they were not Stalinist. Permanent revolution, argued Mandel, was still on the agenda. However, it would not be the working class led by revolutionaries who would consciously put this into practice, but rather a "blunted instru-

ment" which would express the "dynamic of the world revolution". Once again, orthodoxy was put at the service of opportunism.

The "new vanguard"

The events of May 1968 in France, the student revolt and general strike, were to push the USFI rapidly to the left as they chased the "new vanguard".

The students appeared far to the left of the stuffy reformist bureaucrats and Stalinist fellow-travellers Mandel and his co-thinkers had been orienting to. "Structural anti-capitalist reforms" were thrown out of the window in favour of an ultra-left denial of the hold of reformism on the working class, and calls for guerrilla struggle.

Mandel broke from his strategic entrist orientation and called for the creation of new revolutionary parties in the imperialist heartlands, arguing that the "centre of the world revolution" had shifted back to Europe and the USA.

This "new leftism" made little difference to Mandel and the USFI's opportunist politics. They repeatedly abandoned programmatic positions in order to link up with "new" political forces. Most notable of these was the PRT(C), political wing of the Argentine ERP urban guerrillas, which was welcomed into the international despite being pro-Maoist, pro-Korean and distinctly anti-Trotskyist.

The defeat of the Portuguese revolution in the mid-70s and the wane of the post-68 revolutionary wave found Mandel justifying the new turn of the USFI, back towards the forces of the anti-imperialist revolution—the FSLN in Nicaragua and even the Khomeini movement in Iran.

Mandel vs Barnes on "permanent revolution"

When the US section of the USFI, under Jack Barnes, drew the logical conclusions of Mandel's politics and openly attacked Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, once again Mandel defended "orthodoxy".

A special issue of *International Viewpoint* "In Defence of Permanent Revolution" carried Mandel's reply. It is extremely revealing of the nature and the limits of Mandel's talents. His abstract description of the nature of permanent revolution is correct and in many respects a repetition of Trotsky's position.

However the Trotsky Mandel really defended was not the revolutionary Trotsky of 1917, but the centrist Trotsky before he joined the Bolsheviks, the brilliant theoretician who mistook potential for process, who opposed Lenin's fight for a revolutionary programme and party, arguing that objective tendencies would accomplish the tasks of the revolution.

When as a result the masses deserted the FSLN, resulting in its ignominious electoral defeat, neither Mandel nor his organisation attempted to draw a balance sheet of the FSLN's practice, or of their own political adaptations to it.

This processism, which Trotsky only finally broke with in 1917, was the essence of Mandel's objectivist centrism. Again it was a defence of Trotskyism which gutted the theory of its revolutionary content. In practice Mandel was at one with Barnes in having no use for such a perspective in actual revolutionary situations.

The Nicaraguan Sandinistas were hailed as having created a healthy workers' state, despite the complete lack of workers' democracy, the continuing existence of capitalism and the anti-working class attacks that were increasingly carried out by the FSLN leadership after 1985.

When as a result the masses deserted the FSLN, resulting in its ignominious electoral defeat, neither Mandel nor his organisation attempted to draw a balance sheet of the FSLN's practice, or of their own political adaptations to it.

"Socialist democracy"

The 1970s also saw the growing fragmentation of Stalinism with strong social democratic trends increasingly dominating the Italian and Spanish CPs Once again Mandel was to the fore courting the Eurocommunists, defending the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" as only he knew how, by painting it in social democratic colours as a multi-party democracy for all parties whether they were pro-capitalist or not.

During the Polish revolutionary events of 1980-81, Mandel developed this USFI view on "socialist democracy", arguing not for soviet democracy, rule by workers councils, but for the "combining" of workers' and bourgeois democracy through the election of a second, workers council chamber of the Polish parliament!

By adapting to left-reformist currents in Solidarnosc and covering up their criticism of the restorationist Walesa leadership, the USFI failed in the first of what was to be a decade of stern tests with regard to Stalinism.

Having been proved decisively wrong by the restoration of capitalism in East Germany in 1990, Mandel, with the USFI following his lead, went into a tail-spin of demoralisation in the 1990s. He became profoundly pessimistic for the future of his International and his brand of politics, despite the enormous opportunities for revolutionaries that exist following the collapse of Stalinism.

Whilst recognising in 1992 that "what is at stake today is dramatic: it is literally a question of the physical survival of humanity", Mandel argued that his International no longer had the "pretension" of being the World Party of Socialist Revolution, but was instead merely a tributary of the "world revolutionary movement" in which the decisive differences between reformism and revolution were no longer applicable.

Strategic demoralisation

This analysis—Mandel's analysis—was that which triumphed at the recent 14th Congress of the USFI, held shortly before his death, and at which he made the opening declaration. The demoralised opportunist had decisively replaced the orthodox Marxist.

The reason for this demoralisation is not hard to find: it lay in the collapse of Stalinism and in the failure of his strategic prognoses on the development of the political revolution to be realised.

Stalinist economic development did not lead towards socialism. No left wing was thrown up by the bureaucracy. Capitalism is being restored in the former Warsaw Pact countries.

Mandel's failed illusions in Stalinism undermined what remained of his revolutionary orthodoxy.

In his obituary of Kautsky, Trotsky argued that the pre-1914 "pope of Marxism" was "a propagandist and populariser of Marxism (who) saw his principal theoretical mission as the reconciling of reform and revolution".

Formed in a different epoch, nevertheless the same can be said of Mandel, with whom the parallels with Kautsky are striking.

Talented intellectuals, both men made valuable contributions to defending elements of the Marxism they inherited.

But they both failed ultimately to develop that theory, to be able to apply it in a living, revolutionary fashion when faced with decisive developments in the class struggle. Instead they offered revolutionary workers a centrist parody of Marxism.

Mandel's legacy

What will remain of Mandel's legacy in ten years time? Certainly his economic writings will continue to be read and no doubt stimulate others to produce a genuine Marxist understanding of capitalism today. But Mandel's legacy has to be judged by what he undoubtedly regarded as his life's work: being the principal leader and theoretician of the post-war Fourth International and its principal successor, the USFI.

In virtually every respect, Mandel's life paralleled that of his organisation. For over half a century he fought to maintain the unity of the International, whatever the political cost. As he wrote in 1953 in a letter to US Trotskyist George Breitman, shortly after the SWP-led International Committee split from the International:

"It is well known that a common programme has never prevented a periodic appearance of tactical differences and will never do so. Therefore, there is only one basic loyalty possible to keep

our movement together: the loyalty to the International! One has to penetrate oneself in one's most intimate consciousness with the conviction that the International, not only as a program or a body of ideas but as an organisation with a given structure, represents all hopes of mankind in our epoch . . . To split the International before it has demonstrated its inadequacy in events of colossal historical scope is a real crime against the labour movement."

Mandel hated splits. He was prepared to tolerate the grossest opportunism inside the USFI, on condition that it could be dressed up or defended in the name of Trotskyism.

It pained him when sections or factions pursued the logic of the USFIs opportunist politics and broke with Trotskyism's basic building blocs.

Mandel found himself in this predicament on more than one occasion. A whole period of opportunism, sanctioned by the leadership of the International, often led to unintended, if entirely predictable results: one section or faction would throw the whole Trotskyist baggage overboard in pursuit of some centrist goal.

The LSSP in Sri Lanka ended up entering a bourgeois government. The SWP (US) broke with the International and Trotskyism to draw closer to Castro. Basque supporters of the USFI disappeared into ETA.

Each time Mandel, with heavy heart, would disassociate the USFI from the results of its earlier phase of leadership, even at the same time doubting whether an open split was in reality justified.

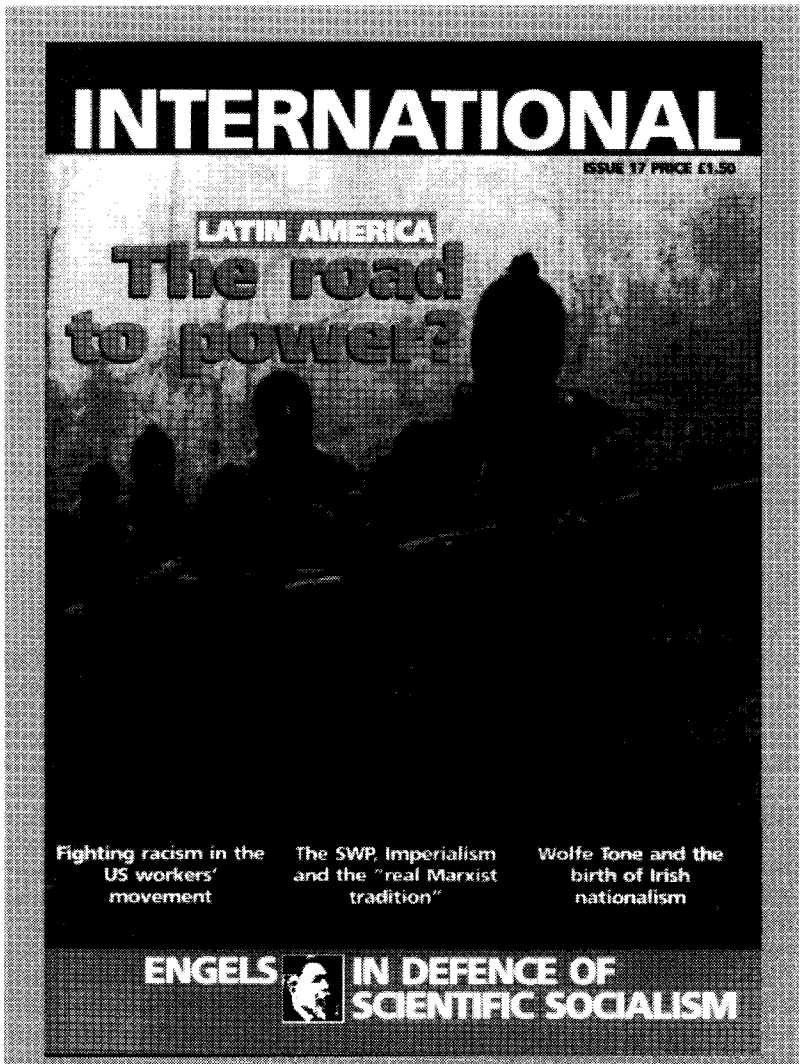
That sums the man up. He argued consistently that because the USFI had not led the masses to defeat and betrayal like the Second or Third International all revolutionaries should be in its ranks.

This argument gave his organisation a blank cheque to carry out any number of opportunist twists and turns, none of which would appear to matter as long as the International remained essentially impotent.

The question of programme was thus secondary, way behind loyalty to "an organisation with a given structure"—in other words, the USFI.

Today the USFI is weaker that at any time since the 1960s and, under Mandel's guidance, signed a collective suicide note at its last Congress (see *Workers Power* 192). Will the final act of self-destruction follow?

It would be a brave observer who would predict that the USFI will still exist as an organisation a decade after the death of its founder. In an important sense to write the obituary of Ernest Mandel is to write the obituary of the USFI as a living centrist organisation .■



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Russia 1905

Lenin, Trotsky and the permanent revolution

On the 90th anniversary of the St Petersburg General Strike **Paul Morris** explains the debates about party, programme and revolutionary strategy that helped shape the Russian Revolution of 1905

Ninety years ago this autumn, the first Russian revolution reached its climax. On 13 October a Soviet of workers' deputies met for the first time; a mass strike wave was underway and a general strike in preparation. Armed insurrection, barricades and repression followed swiftly in November and December.

The massacre of unarmed protesters in St Petersburg on 9 January 1905 had inaugurated a year of revolution which was to see the Russian workers make their first bid for power, a dress rehearsal for 1917.

It was the moment all Russian revolutionaries had been waiting for. The revolution was to put the competing programmes, strategies and political methods within Russian Marxism to the test , in particular those of Lenin and Trotsky.

Two years before, at the Third Congress of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1903, the Russian revolutionaries had split into two rival organisations, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

Although ostensibly a split over organisational forms, with Lenin's Bolsheviks favouring a more tightly organised and disciplined "vanguard" party to that proposed by Menshevik leaders such as Iulius Martov, events soon revealed that the initial dispute had masked radically different attitudes to the class struggle.

Those who like revolutionary history to be an uncomplicated story of heroes and traitors should steer well clear of 1905. The record of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in that revolutionary year combines major advances with serious mistakes. By learning from those mistakes, in the long aftermath of the revolution, Lenin was able to arm the Bolsheviks for the successful struggle of 1917, just as Trotsky was to complete his evolution from a left-wing form of Menshevism to Bolshevism.

It was only after these elements had been combined and fused in the crucible of war and revolution that they were codified in the programme and practice of the Communist International in its revolutionary years (1919-1923).

Today revolutionaries can also learn a lot from this experience. Lenin and Trotsky's struggles in 1905 were more than just disagreements over tactics: they were about programme, perspectives and the relationship between the party and the class—precisely the issues which confuse and disorientate much of the left today.

Tony Cliff, and other leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, make great play of the argument that Lenin and the Bolsheviks led the 1917 revolution with "exactly the same programme as the Mensheviks . . . the one written in 1903". They aim by this to excuse their own opportunist refusal to elaborate a programme for the working class movement. This article shows how, on the contrary, before the ink dried on the 1903 programme, reality pitched both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks into a living struggle to concretise and improve their political programmes.

This made the difference between victory and defeat, between 1905 and 1917, and in the process changed the Marxist conception of the revolutionary programme.

The main events of 1905 tell a story of a weak and backward Tsarist aristocracy, unable to govern and unwilling to reform; a rising bourgeoisie with few domestic social roots, heavily dependent on Tsarism and terrified of the growing working class; a massive peasantry determined to free itself from landlordism; and a small but highly concentrated and militant working class which was to go from police-run trade unions to workers' councils in the space of nine months, and launch a determined bid for power.

In short the Russian revolution was a bourgeois revolution, in a backward country, in which the working class

would have to play a decisive role.

The immediate tasks of the revolution would be *bourgeois* in that they would have to clear the road for further capitalist development. This was a truth which all strands of Russian Marxism agreed with. They had spelled it out in the debates of the late 19th century against the utopian socialists and Populists who thought that on the basis of peasant communes and the near absence of modern industry, Russia could leap directly from feudalism to socialism, bypassing the entire historical epoch of capitalism.

Another fundamental belief, on which all wings of the RSDLP agreed, was Plekhanov's famous statement that, "the Russian revolution will triumph as a workers' revolution, or not at all".

But it was over the concrete relationship between working class struggle and the bourgeois revolution that major differences emerged, amplifying the organisational split of 1903 into a concrete programmatic difference.



LENIN WITH MARTOV 1897

Before 9 January

The latter half of 1904, following Tsarism's military disasters in the war with Japan, was characterised by vacillation in the ranks both of the Tsarist autocracy and the liberal bourgeoisie.

On 12 August 1904 the Tsar announced an "Era of Trust", appointed Prince Mirsky to replace the hardline prime minister Plehve (who had just been assassinated) and allowed the bourgeoisie to convene a private and unofficial conference of the Zemstvos.

These were powerless, regional consultative bodies, and their November 1904 conference passed a suitably timid request for liberal reforms, which made no mention of the key questions of a Constitution and an elected Constituent Assembly to draw it up. Alongside the Zemstvo Congress, the liberal bourgeoisie organised a series of banquets, where they made radical speeches but wavered in their commitment to fight for any concrete changes.

The Tsar then decided the question for them, by ending the "Era of Trust" and threatening repression against anyone who entertained "useless dreams of a Constitution". It was not to be the banqueting campaign of the rich bosses, but the mass strikes of the working class which first gave serious impetus to the fight for a Constituent Assembly.

The Mensheviks

During the period of the Zemstvo campaign we see a marked divergence between the politics of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

Bolshevik means "the majority", and Menshevik "the minority". In time honoured fashion the Menshevik minority of the RSDLP had seized control of the party newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark). In response Lenin founded *Vpered* (Forward) in Geneva, late in 1904.

The Menshevik leaders believed that if the revolution was to be "bourgeois" then the bourgeoisie must lead it. This thought guided their actions throughout this period. In a "Letter to the Party Organisations" in 1904 the Menshevik *Iskra* advised:

"Within the limits of fighting absolutism especially in the present phase our attitude to the liberal bourgeoisie is defined by the task of infusing it with a bit more courage and encouraging it to join in the demands that the proletariat, led by the Social democracy, will put forward. But we should be making a fatal mistake if we set ourselves the goal of forcing the Zemstvos or other organs of the bourgeois opposition, through energetic measures of intimidation and under the influence of panic, to give us now a formal promise to present our demands to the government."

The Menshevik leaders such as Martov deduced from the bourgeois nature of the revolution that the bourgeoisie had a reserved place in the future revolutionary government By contrast the working class should not participate in that government.

Hadn't the left wing of Social Democracy consistently refused to serve in bourgeois coalitions? Had not they attacked the French right-wing socialist Millerand for joining a capitalist coalition? And hadn't Marx himself advised the Communists, at the height of the German bourgeois revolution, to become the "party of extreme opposition" to the coming revolutionary bourgeois government?

The problem was that these arguments reflected a mindset learned by the leaders of Social democracy in the last two decades of the 19th century, when the workers' parties were only *preparing* for power. The fundamental error of Menshevism in 1905 was that it clung to the slogans of a previous period, indeed a previous epoch, in the development of capitalism, whereas events were now placing an actual revolution on the agenda.

The Bolsheviks

From its inception, in contrast, the Bolshevik paper *Vpered* stressed that a new, revolutionary period had begun which required Marxists to undertake new tasks. These were to build a strong, disciplined party of revolutionaries amongst the workers, to help them draw revolutionary conclusions from their experiences and at the decisive moment to give leadership to the spontaneous revolutionary wave; in short to lead the working class to power.

Lenin criticised Martov and his cothinkers as follows. The bourgeoisie in Russia was incapable of carrying through a democratic revolution to the finish because that revolution was both political and social. The bourgeoisie would dearly love to avail itself of the political aspects: press freedom, elections and a Constitution. But the destruction of Tsarism meant also the break-up of the landed estates and the introduction of capitalist relations into agriculture.

Even though these archaic relations of production in the countryside were the biggest obstacle to the development of capitalism in the towns, Lenin saw that the organic connection between the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy would stop the bourgeoisie carrying the struggle against the landowners to a

decisive conclusion.

At best a Russian revolution led by the liberals would lead to a compromise with Tsarism, transforming the estates of the nobility into British or German-style capitalist land holdings. Lenin called this "Junker capitalism", after the German aristocrats who had become capitalist landowners. He described such an outcome as a "revolution of the 1848 type"—i.e. a failed bourgeois revolution.

In order to carry out a "revolution of the 1798 type" (i.e. a plebeian, progressive overthrow of Tsarism), the workers would have to play the same role as the radical bourgeois Jacobins in the French revolution. In alliance with the peasantry they would have to introduce what he called "American-style" relations into agriculture, sweeping away the landowners and their archaic system.

In this Lenin was saying nothing more or less than Plekhanov (who was by now a Menshevik) had said in the 1880s. But to concretise it in the 1900s Lenin had to depart from the truisms of the previous period, developing a concrete *programme of action* alongside the RSDLP's 1903 programme.

Lenin's struggle in 1905 refutes the notion that Lenin simply let the old programme gather dust while the revolution raged.

His outlook was summed up in the pamphlet *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.*

The work begins from a recognition of the new, revolutionary character of the period.

It recognises that the most urgent political task of the revolution was the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. Whereas the liberals wanted this to be granted from on high, by persuading the Tsar, the Bolsheviks realised that only an armed insurrection would achieve it, passing necessarily through the prior phase of a "provisional revolutionary government".

Lenin insisted that since it was only the workers and peasants who could carry out the revolution in full, the Marxists should fight for the implementation of the full "minimum programme" by the provisional government.

The RSDLP's minimum programme consisted of demands for:

- a democratic republic
- abolition of the standing army; the arming of the people
- nationalisation of all land
- the 8 hour day.

It was in the struggle for these goals that Lenin wanted to unite the workers and the peasants.

Since the provisional revolutionary government would be the instrument for creating the Constituent Assembly, the RSDLP should participate in that government; not in order to become the hostage of the bourgeoisie but in order to ensure the fullest and most progressive solution of the democratic tasks.

Thus, in Lenin's practical work at this time, many of the key tactics of modern revolutionary socialism were formulated: the general strike, the fight for workers' militias and the armed insurrection.

Lenin described such a such a government as the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry".

What did the Bolsheviks mean by this ungainly formula?

It would be a dictatorship, acting like the Jacobins of 1798-92, ruthlessly suppressing reaction from within and outside Russia. It would be "democratic" in the sense that its immediate tasks would be limited to the realisation of the bourgeois democratic minimum programme. This was conditioned by the backward productive forces and the social weight of the peasantry, Lenin argued.

Lenin insisted it was not a question of socialist revolution. The Marxists had fought consistently against the petit-bourgeois radicals of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs) who wanted to leap straight from feudal agriculture to rural communes via their plans for the so-called "black repartition" of land.

For Lenin, recognition of the immediate limitations of the revolution was a strength not a weakness. As he wrote in *Vpered* in January 1905:

"One of the most widespread and persistent illusions with us in Russia is the notion that our liberal movement is not a bourgeois movement and that the impending revolution in Russia will not be a bourgeois revolution. The Russian intellectual, from the most moderate Osvobozhdenye liberal to the most extreme Socialist Revolutionary always thinks that one makes our revolution colourless, that one degrades and vulgarises it by admitting it to be a bourgeois revolution."

But, unlike the Mensheviks, Lenin did not advocate soft pedalling on the liberal bourgeoisie. Neither did he want to keep entirely separate the two stages of bourgeois and socialist tasks. His clearest exposition of the relationship of the one to the other in this period reads:

"Marxism teaches the proletariat not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to be indifferent to it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie, but on the contrary to take a most energetic part in it, to fight most resolutely for consistent proletarian democracy, for carrying the revolution to a conclusion.

We cannot jump out of the bourgeois democratic boundaries of the Russian Revolution, but we can and must fight for the interests of the proletariat, for its immediate needs (the minimum programme) and for the conditions that will make it possible to prepare its forces for complete future victory."

Alongside spelling out a revolutionary strategy, Lenin set about the task of preparing the Bolsheviks to intervene in the practical struggle. In spelling out the concrete tasks Lenin was developing, alongside the old RSDLP "minimum programme", a new programme different both in form and content: an action programme, designed to take the working class from its existing struggles through to the seizure of power.

The revolutionary storm breaks

Both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were ill prepared for and isolated from the revolutionary wave when it broke. Nevertheless the RSDLP marched with Father Gapon's peaceful protest—in a separate contingent, 18 strong (!) with its own banner. They organised street meetings where they argued for the minimum programme, and were shouted down by the crowd for their pains.

But that very day, as 200,000 workers marched into a Tsarist killing field, the seeds were being sown for both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks to gain mass influence.

Lenin worked to organise a Third Congress of the RSDLP. At it he argued that, as opposed to the Mensheviks who had resolved to "prepare" the workers for an insurrection, the Bolsheviks had to organise one.

The Congress passed three major resolutions. The first sanctioned participation in a provisional revolutionary government. The second demanded that such a government ratify all peasant land seizures and the formation of peasant committees. The third aimed to organise the working class for insurrection.

For this purpose the Bolsheviks would agitate for a mass political strike and "to take energetic steps towards arming the proletariat as well as drawing up a plan of the armed uprising and direct leadership thereof, for which purpose special groups of party workers should be formed as and when necessary."

Thus, in Lenin's practical work at this time many of the key tactics of modern revolutionary socialism were formulated: the general strike, the fight for workers' militias and the armed insurrection.

In 1905 these concepts were nowhere to be found in the programme of the Marxist movement. The "minimum programme" generally included reforms—democratic and economic—achievable within capitalism. The "maximum programme" generally concerned the policy of a workers' government in power. The programme as a systematic plan to mobilise the masses for the achievement of power was something quite new.

Despite the political achievements of Bolshevism, however, there remained a flaw in Lenin's politics. It was embodied in the slogan for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". It is best examined from the standpoint of the third strand within the RSDLP, the left-Menshevism of Trotsky and Parvus.

Trotsky, Parvus and Permanent Revolution

In late 1904 Trotsky and Alexander Helphand (Parvus) led a left wing current away from mainstream Menshevism. Their prognosis, which Trotsky eventually developed into the "Theory of Permanent Revolution", was ultimately more clear sighted than Lenin's.

Trotsky and Parvus' initial differences with the new Menshevik *Iskra* arose over the Zemstvo campaign and over RSDLP participation in the provisional revolutionary government.

Against the Menshevik leaders, Trotsky wrote a pamphlet calling for a mass strike to bring about the Constituent Assembly. Parvus' preface to this pamphlet enunciated the fundamental premise of the theory of permanent revolution: the "law of uneven and combined development".

Against the utopian Populists, Lenin had proved the existence of modern capitalist industry in Russia. But in concentrating on what was *normal* in Russia's capitalist development, Lenin had under-emphasised what was *peculiar* to it. Parvus outlined the combined nature of Russian capitalism:

"in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist technique and structure are integrated into the social relations of feudalism and barbarism, transforming them, dominating them and giving rise to a unique relationship of classes."

Focusing on the class structure of Russia, Parvus and Trotsky evolved a more dialectical analysis of the laws and driving forces of the Russian revolution.

The strength of Tsarism and weakness of the bourgeoisie meant that the bourgeois democratic revolution could only be carried out by the proletariat and peasantry, Trotsky argued. This certainly took him closer to Lenin than the Menshevik leaders.

But Lenin's slogan left two class questions "algebraic"—that is, as unknown quantities:

- **Which class** would dominate the provisional government—proletariat or peasantry?
- **How quickly** could the proletariat pass from purely democratic tasks to specifically socialist measures?

Trotsky predicted the answer. The peasantry was not capable in itself of projecting its revolutionary interests independently of the proletariat. Thus in the revolutionary alliance to bring down Tsarism, the working class would have to lead and dominate.



TROTSKY IN EXILE BEFORE 1905

Because it would lead the government, the class character of that government could not be called a "democratic dictatorship". It would be in effect a *workers' government supported by the peasantry*. Thus according to Trotsky, whether the RSDLP liked it or not, a workers' government could not be neutral in the face of strikes for better wages, against sackings, or for workers control. The workers would demand socialist answers from their government immediately. If it refused to provide them, it would be compromised from the very beginning.

That government would have to carry out the "permanent revolution" in two senses. It could not limit itself to the democratic tasks. And since it could not dream of completing the socialist revolution in backward Russia, it would have to go on a revolutionary offensive throughout Europe.

Despite their differences over slogans, however, at this stage Trotsky agreed with Lenin that the provisional government could implement nothing more than the minimum programme until a socialist revolution swept Europe. It was the experience of the Soviets and the mass strikes of the second half of 1905—with their complex interplay of political struggles and spontaneous economic demands—which deepened Trotsky's differences with Lenin and compelled him to further reformulate the theory of Permanent Revolution.

Revolution and Counter-revolution

Throughout 1905 the revolution simmered on the land and in the factories. In October it boiled over. The new element of the revolution that now appeared was the Soviet—the council of workers' deputies. One delegate was elected for every 500 workers from all the factories; they were recallable and accountable. This purely class-based organisation of struggle forced all factions of the RSDLP to assess where and how it fitted into the revolutionary process.

Trotsky called the soviet, "the axis of all events, every thread ran towards it, every call to action emanated from it." Trotsky described its nature in a way that revealed his love of the sponataneous:

"The Soviet came into being as a response to an objective need—a need born of the course of events. It was an organisation that was authoritative and yet had no tradition; which could immediately involve a scattered mass of hundreds of thousands of people while

having virtually no organisational machinery; which united the revolutionary currents within the proletariat; which was capable of initiative and spontaneous self-control . . ."

In contrast to Trotsky, the emergence of the Soviet highlighted the woodenness of much of the Bolshevik organisation on the ground. They were suspicious of Menshevik attempts to create a loose, broad form of party in place of a vanguard combat organisation. But they drew dangerously sectarian conclusions from this about the character of the Soviets.

The leading Bolshevik Lunacharsky called the Soviet a "Menshevik Zubatov provocation"—i.e. something akin to a police-run union! Later the Bolsheviks presented the Soviet with an ultimatum: adopt the RSDLP programme or we will walk out. In the event the Soviet did not adopt the programme and passed swiftly on to next business. Dumbfounded the Bolshevik delegates stayed put.

Lenin severely criticised these tactics and argued that the Soviet, far from being an obstacle to the party or a Menshevik compromise was the embryo of a new kind of workers' government.

The Soviet grew in authority, but what attitude would it take to political developments? The Tsar's attempt to appease the bourgeoisie—the promise of a "consultative Duma" to be convened in January 1906—did little to appease the workers. The Soviet promised a general strike when the so-called Bulygin Duma met.

Meanwhile, a printers' pay strike drew solidarity action from rail workers, announced as a "trial run" for the planned general strike against the Duma. By 12 October three quarters of a million workers were on strike. Although initially economic, the strike movement quickly became an unfocused political general strike: *against* the Duma, but *for* what?

On 17 October the Tsar published a concessionary Constitutional Manifesto, which finally bought off a section of the bourgeoisie and turned them against the workers. An attempt to turn the strike movement to economic goals—the implementation of the 8 hour day from below—was met with lock outs.

The new period of open work allowed both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks to produce legal mass papers. Lenin's *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life) replaced *Vpered* as the first legal Bolshevik paper. And when the Mensheviks began producing *Nachalo* (The Beginning) in November 1905 it was Trotsky and Parvus who were calling the shots, with the old Menshevik leaders very much trailing behind.

The Tsar's ability to separate the liberals from the mass strike wave, and the resulting lock outs, convinced Trotsky of the impossibility of maintaining a rigid separation between the maximum and minimum programmes. He wrote in *Nachalo*:

"The complete victory of the revolution means the victory of the proletariat. this in turn means further, continuous revolution. The proletariat carries out the basic tasks of democracy—and at a certain point the logic of its direct struggle to consolidate its political supremacy confronts it with purely socialist problems. A revolutionary continuity is established between the minimal and maximal programmes."

"No matter under what political flag the proletariat has come to power it is obliged to take the path of socialist policy."
Trotsky

Whereas Lenin argued that the democratic phase of the revolution could only be transcended after its achievement, Trotsky saw that democratic conquests themselves would ultimately only be guaranteed under a workers' government:

"Immediately however, that power is transferred into the hands of a revolutionary government with a socialist majority, the division of our programme into a maximum and minimum loses all significance, both in principle and in practice—A proletarian government can in no circumstances confine itself to such limits."

Against Lenin, who insisted that the need for a strong alliance with the peasantry confined the revolution to the fullest implementation of the democratic and agrarian revolution, Trotsky argued:

"No matter under what political flag the proletariat has come to power it is obliged to take the path of socialist policy."

Trotsky never argued that Russia alone could achieve socialism, without a revolution in the West. But he had concluded from the experience of October 1905 that the whole logic of the workers' position in the revolution would require their government to *begin* the struggle for the transition to socialism.

The strength of Trotsky's position was that it exposed the contradictions of the "democratic dictatorship" formula.

Trotsky's weakness was that he formulated Permanent Revolution not as programme and tactics at this stage but as an *objective law*, rooted in Russia's social development. In common with mainstream Menshevism, Trotsky at this stage underplayed the role of the organised revolutionary vanguard in bringing about victory.

For this reason Trotsky's better grasp of the class dynamics of the revolution provided a poorer guide to action than Lenin's flawed theory.

When the working class was on the offensive, Trotsky and Parvus reunited with mainstream Menshevism, which was now swept along on the revolutionary wave.

Of course, for most of the Menshevik leaders this proved only to be a temporary vacillation to the left, whereas Trotsky eventually sided with Lenin in 1917. Yet during the ebb-tide of the revolution, Trotsky had no organisation capable of standing against the prevailing mood of the workers and guiding them onto the counter-attack. And this proved crucial to the downfall of the revolution in St Petersburg itself.

In November 1905, after successfully splitting the liberal bourgeoisie from the workers' movement, and after the defeat of the 8-hour day struggle, the Tsar felt confident enough to impose martial law in Poland—at that time part of the Russian Empire. At the same time he began the court martial of rebellious sailors.

In response, the St Petersburg Soviet, of which Trotsky was effectively the leader, called a general strike which managed to get the Tsar to back down on both threats. But the Soviet was not yet ready or able to organise the armed insurrection, nor had it done much to win over the peasant-based army to the side of the workers' movement. By 12 November, faced with lockouts and demoralisation, the Soviet was obliged once again to try to conduct an orderly retreat, and called off the General Strike.

This time Tsarism moved decisively onto the offensive. On 28 November Khrustalev, the Chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet, was arrested. On 2 December eight liberal and RSDLP papers were closed down by the army. When the Soviet met the following day, its call for an immediate general strike went largely unanswered. That afternoon the Soviet itself was surrounded by the army and arrested *en masse*.

The last days of the Soviet highlighted the weakness of the Mensheviks, including lefts like Trotsky and Parvus.

The absence of a disciplined party, working within the Soviet but sometimes necessarily campaigning against the views of the majority of its delegates, proved crucial in the failure of the revolution in St Petersburg. There was no fighting organisation built, and there was little response to the call for a General Strike. The Tsar's armies waded into the workers' districts with a vengeance.

The real value of Lenin's programmatic rearmament of the Bolsheviks was shown in Moscow. There the Bolsheviks played a leading role in the working class. Their mistrust of non-party, spontaneous mass organisations delayed the formation of a Soviet until 22 November. But the strength of the party and its preparatory work allowed

the Bolsheviks to launch an effective General Strike in Moscow in response to the suppression of the St Petersburg Soviet. In the midst of the General Strike, with time running out, the Bolsheviks issued the call for armed insurrection.

On 10 December barricades went up all over the working class areas of Moscow.

Alongside the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks organised a militia of about 1000 armed men, which now fought a heroic street battle with the Moscow garrison. But from 16 December the strike on the railways began to crumble, allowing the Tsar to send the Guards from St Petersburg into Moscow. The Bolshevik stronghold of Presnya held out for two more days, but on 18 December the 1905 revolution met its bloody end.

In December and January 1,000 people were killed in Moscow; across Russia 14,000 were killed and 70,000 forcibly exiled.

Balance sheet of Russian Marxism in 1905

What, then, do we defend—and what do we reject—in the competing conceptions of Lenin and Trotsky in 1905?

In Menshevism as a whole we can recognise the phenomenon later to be described as *centrism*: opportunist vacillation in response to every spontaneous movement of the masses—tailing them in defeat as well as victory. Where the Menshevik mainstream dipped into the programmatic legacy of Marx and Engels in 1848 and 1871 they concluded that the working class should stand aside from the power struggle until its bourgeois stage was completed.

Bolshevism retained the traditional division of programme into Minimum and Maximum, a division of the programme which corresponded to a whole period of preparation for revolutionary struggle in the absence of sharp revolutionary crises and struggles.

But when those struggles broke out, whilst the Mensheviks retained the dead husk of the old programme, Lenin took over its living kernel. He believed that only a revolutionary struggle could achieve the Minimum programme. But alongside that programme Lenin had to elaborate a new tactical method, a plan of action which was to provide the model of future revolutionary action programmes in 1917 and subsequently for the Comintern.

The rigid conceptual division between socialist and democratic tasks never blinded Lenin to the complexities of reality:

"Of course in actual historical circumstances the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future: the two paths cross. Wage-labour with its struggle against private property exists under the aristocracy as well" he wrote.

But a revolutionary plan of action must have a precise and immediate content: Lenin waged a ceaseless battle against the confused slogans of the Mensheviks. It was his conception of the immediate tasks, as opposed to the possible combination of future tasks, which led Lenin to coin the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship".

What prevented Lenin from seeing the contradictions within the democratic dictatorship slogan was that they were never realised and therefore never exploded in practice. It was not until 1917 when Lenin's slogan had been given the concrete form of dual power between the "democratic" provisional government and the soviet *dictatorship* that Lenin abandoned the formula, which he argued should be relegated to the "museum of pre-revolutionary 'Bolshevik' antiquities".

In 1905 however Lenin did develop elements of the revolutionary action programme: the mass strike, the armed insurrection, the united front tactic with non-party workers in the Soviets and in the Moscow insurrection.

Trotsky's weakness as compared to Lenin was on the crucial questions of party, programme and tactics.

Trotsky lauded the Soviet not least because as a *non-party* organisation it transcended the "internal friction between two equally powerful factions of the social democrats . . ."

Trotsky's spontaneism, his disregard for "previously prepared conspiratorial organisations", manifested itself in three aspects of his activity in 1905.

First, Trotsky was a spontaneist with regard to the revolution itself. The very "laws of revolution" would lead the proletariat once in power to take measures against the capitalists, not just Tsarism. Thus, for all the superiority of Trotsky's perspectives in 1905 his immediate demands went no further than those of the Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself quoted the Bolshevik paper *Novaya Zhizn* to the effect that in action its programme was the same as the left Menshevik *Nachalo's.*

The logical slogan arising from Trotsky's perspective—"All power to the Soviets"—was not spelled out in 1905. It was only in 1917 that Trotsky became convinced that the provisional revolutionary government would take the form of Soviet government, not a bourgeois democratic-style Constituent Assembly. Trotsky's understanding of the class struggle as an objective process, which Lenin labelled "tactics as process", absolved him of the need to draw out precise programmatic conclusions from the theory of Permanent Revolution.

Trotsky's revolutionary activity in 1905, though spectacular, was conducted in the manner of a revolutionary tribune of the 19th century: a Lassalle, a Varlin, a Jaures. Trotsky carried out this task in what Marx once termed "roman costume"—that is with methods and conceptions appropriate to an earlier epoch.

In the event the St Petersburg Soviet did not "conduct the most determined class policy in the spirit of revolutionary socialism" as Trotsky's theory predicted that it spontaneously should.

Ironically it met the same fate as the Paris Commune—which had revolutionary tribunes, a militia and a workers' government, but no consistent organised revolutionary vanguard.

The third manifestation of Trotsky's spontaneism occurred in his own attitude to the mainstream Mensheviks. Not only had Trotsky made an incomplete methodological break with Menshevism; basing his activities on the possibility of the revolution spontaneously re-uniting the two wings of the RSDLP he spent the years from 1905 to 1917 as a "Menshevik conciliator", attempting to unite all factions of the party against Lenin and the Bolsheviks, without reaching common agreement on principles.

It is true that in 1906 Lenin was again prepared to accept unity with the Mensheviks, because he thought the pressure of the revolutionary masses would keep them on the path which Trotsky had won them to during the revolution. But unlike Trotsky, Lenin entertained no illusions in a spontaneous reconciliation. Trotsky's illusions in the reformability of Menshevism, as he himself later admitted, disfigured much of his political activity between the two revolutions.

So ironically Trotsky's more correct theory, disfigured by his Menshevik-spontaneist outlook, did not prove a better guide to action than Lenin's flawed theory. In addition, it has to be said that none of the three groups within Russian Marxism yet understood the epochal nature of the changes which they were confronted with.

They saw the outbreak of the 1905 revolution as a change of period, from prolonged class peace to world instability.

But it was only the later theoretical insight that the 20th century had opened up a new epoch of capitalism—the imperialist epoch of decline, war and revolution—that allowed the programmatic lessons learned in 1905 to be fused into a new revolutionary politics.

When it was finally codifed in the 1930s in the *Transitional Programme,* it was Trotsky and the Fourth International that had absorbed the best lessons of Lenin's and Trotsky's combined work in the revolution of 1905.■



Ken Loach's latest film Land and Freedom, goes on general release in Britain in October. Focusing on Stalinism's betrayal of the Spanish Civil War it was first shown in Spain in April, where it caused a heated public debate. Here, **Stuart Craig** reviews the film. **Keith Harvey** explains the politics of the POUM. Their opposition to Stalinism, which figures prominently in the film, made them the first victims as Stalinism beheaded the Spanish revolution. Finally we reprint a leaflet issued by the official Trotskyist group in Barcelona shortly after the May 1937 uprising. ★

Land and Freedom!

by Stuart Craig

Unusual things happened in Spain during April 1995. In the midst of the crisis over secret service killings of Basque militants, the FILESA corruption scandal and acrimonious debates over the flagging economy, the Spanish Civil War suddenly hit the news again.

The main pro-government paper in Spain, *El Pais*, waxed lyrical about Leon Trotsky's warnings about Francoism. They applauded him and "his disciples" for their "intellectual energy and suicidal morality" in the struggle against Stalinism. On orders from Moscow the Spanish CP acted as judge and executioner of left-wing socialists in the republican camp and thereby contributed to the victory of Franco. *El Pais* even recognised the Trotskyists as the only "genuine . . . revolutionary Bolsheviks".

Santiago Carrillo, ex-leader of the Spanish CP, crawled out of the gutter to appear on TV and radio to defend his role. He explained in *El Pais* that " when the 1937 uprising in Barcelona took place, led by the POUM and a sector of the CNT, the impression that many had at first was that the it was led by the Francoites. In the middle of war, an uprising against the government of the Republic, like it or not . . . went in

some way to help those we were facing, opening a second front against the Republic."

Carrillo denied that he had ever referred to Trotskyists as fascists. Did he defy the Moscow line, after 1936? No, of course he didn't. But in April 1995 he felt *obliged* to deny it.

And the reason for the public debate and the defensiveness of Carrillo about his past was a mere film.

But what a film!

Ken Loach has given us *Land and Freedom*, a film he has long had the ambition to make, and for an equally long time has struggled to find the finance to make it.

It has taken an English director, a socialist, to re-open the wounds that many thought had healed. In fact, no one in Spain could have made such a film. Since the end of Francoism twenty years ago, the establishment has sought to create a climate of artificial reconciliation, in fact drawing a veil over this "painful" part of Spain's modern history. Loach has ripped the veil aside.

The film lays bare the dynamics of the Civil War by concentrating on a decisive phase during 1937 in the struggle of the workers and peasants against fascism and the bourgeois wing of the republican camp. As a consequence of this defeat thousands of Socialists, Anarchists and Trotskyists were murdered by the Stalinist and other Popular Front forces.

The revolution in Spain started before the Civil War. In July 1936, General Franco launched a military coup from the Canary Islands. Nationalist troops invaded the mainland to topple the Popular Front government of Largo Caballero that had been elected in January and had immediately sparked a revolutionary situation.

Workers in the industrial cities such as Barcelona took control of factories. In the countryside impoverished peasants seized the land and formed collectives. Many services were nationalised. In Barcelona waiters and prostitutes formed unions and went on strike. To defend themselves from the fascists the workers and peasants organisations formed militias. They were often poorly armed with guns seized from army barracks.



LARGO CABALLERO

David, the central character of the film, arrives in Catalonia in the autumn of 1936, in the midst of the war. He is a young, unemployed working class Liverpudlian. As a card-carrying member of the British Communist Party he goes to Spain to fight fascism in the International Brigades. He ends up on the Aragon front assigned to a POUM militia.

In the struggle against the fascists the members of the militia develop close relationships. The international brigades exemplified the notion of international solidarity in the struggle against fascism.

The protagonists of the militia in the film include two revolutionary women comrades of the POUM, a member of the IRA, French, Scottish and Spanish socialists plus German and Italian refugees from fascism. In the militia women play an equal role to men. They fight and participate equally in all political discussion.

As the struggle deepens, rival viewpoints emerge. This is brought out most intensely in a discussion the peasants of a recently liberated village and the militia have about the collectivisation of

Trotskyists

Andrés Nin, the leader of the POUM until his murder at the hands of Stalinist agents in Spain, was expelled from the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) in 1927. He formed a Spanish section of the International Left Opposition, led by Leon Trotsky.

Between 1930 and February 1933 Trotsky and Nin corresponded about the tasks of the Spanish revolution, which had opened with the fall of King Alphonso and the declaration of the Second Republic in 1930. Over the next eight years the revolution went through many ebbs and flows until the final victory of the counter-revolution at the hands of Franco in March 1939.

Centrist

Nin and the POUM were to play an increasingly important role in Catalonia and Aragon, but not as Trotskyists.

Trotsky considered Nin a centrist; someone who veered between reform and revolution. Trotsky's first disagreement with Nin was his unprincipled orientation towards Joaquim Maurin's party in Catalonia—the Catalan Federation.

This was an essentially right-wing split from the PCE, sharply critical of the ultra-left excesses of Stalinism in the late 1920s and early 1930s but largely silent about the rightist policies of the mid-1920s. Despite holding a quite different appreciation of Stalinism than Maurin, Nin refused to build an opposition to him, helped write their documents and edit its paper.

All this at a time—1934/35—when the rank and file of the Socialist Party was undergoing massive left-wing radicalisation, something Nin barely related to. Nin and Maurin eventually fused in 1935 to form the POUM. This was the occasion for Nin's public break with Trotskyism, although Trotsky had publicly broken with Nin two years earlier.

Nevertheless, Trotsky was the first to recognise that the POUM, small as it was, organised some of the best working class fighters in Catalonia.

The POUM was a lone voice in Spain throughout 1935 in unmasking the crimes of the Stalinists in the USSR during the Moscow Trials. The POUM's paper—*La Batalla*—carried the harshest and most accurate criticisms of the policies of the Popular Front and the Second Republic. The leftism of the POUM earned it the hostility of both the anarchist and socialist leaders who tried to exclude Poumists from their trade unions.

The POUM was small. Before the civil war estimates of its size vary from 3,000 to 8,000. Like most of the left-wing groups, it grew during the early phase of the civil war and by September 1936 it was about 30,000 strong with 10,000 organised in its own militia.

Fatal

The fatal flaw in the political make-up of Nin and the POUM's leaders was that they refused to criticise the errors of the anarcho-syndicalist (CNT) and Socialist leaders and thereby failed to educate the working class vanguard in the need to break with their leaders and build a revolutionary party. Worse, while Nin was critical of many of the measures proposed in the name of the Popular Front by the PCE, he made the POUM act as a "loyal opposition" inside the Popular Front, agreeing to abide by policies that were fatal for the prospects of a successful revolution.

The best example of the POUM's centrism was to be found in its attitude to the Popular Front itself. Before the

the land. The question of permanent revolution is clearly raised, often with poetic simplicity by the peasants. Other, richer, peasants and some members of the militia argue for postponing the revolution until after the war against fascism is won.

The debate, which included many actual villagers as well as actors, was filmed unscripted as with much of Loach's work. Their arguments are their own. Loach only primed them with the issues. He let the cameras roll while they argued the issues out for real. Later, he admitted his greatest fear was that the vote for collectivisation would be lost!

Unbridgeable differences only emerge when the Popular Front government moves to disarm the POUM and the anarchists. David, who is wounded and staying in Barcelona joins the regular army and becomes involved in a Stalinist-led assault on the anarchist held telephone exchange.

His turmoil and inner conflict are a microcosm of the civil war itself.

Land and Freedom does not possess the same breadth of vision of Bertolucci's *1900* when it comes to showing us the soil out of which fascism and anti-fascism grew in inter-war southern Europe. Nor is it a film with the raw, didactic energy such as Einstein's *Battleship Potemkin* or *October*. But in this moving and most intimate film Loach has achieved, with the dedication of the actors and crew, a fitting commemoration to those in Spain who fought and died in the struggle against the counter-revolution within the revolution.★

and the POUM

February 1936 elections POUM campaigned against any coalition with the republican bourgeoisie. Then, on the very eve of the elections, they actually entered the Popular Front only to renounce it again when the elections were over.

However, Nin's criticism of the Popular Front after February 1936 was not that it tied the workers' organisations to the programme of the bourgeoisie but that it was not genuinely a Popular Front. *La Batalla* of 17 July, on the eve of the Civil War, called for:

"an authentic government of the Popular Front, with the direct participation of the Socialist and Communist parties."

Yet, when the Civil War erupted and the initiative was with the masses, the POUM shifted direction sharply and gave voice to the demands of the socialist revolution. In those early weeks the POUM led the Lerida revolutionary committee. It was the only committee in Catalonia to refuse to have a representative of the republican bourgeoisie on the committee.

Challenge

But even here the POUM stopped halfway. It could and should have used its revolutionary influence in towns like Lerida and Gerona to agitate for the formation of district and provincial soviet-type bodies which would have developed into a decisive challenge to the political authority of the Generalidad (the republican bourgeois government in Catalonia).

Not only did they not take this road but Nin went out of his way to explain at great length that Soviet-type bodies were unnecessary and "alien" to Spain. This unforgivable rationalisation for the prejudices and libertarian localism of the anarcho-syndicalist masses was typical of the POUM.

Instead of "saying what is", the POUM tried at every turn to minimise principled differences that divided it from other workers' parties and above all to conciliate with the leaders of the CNT. For one whole year, for example, *La Batalla* refused to criticise the CNT leadership.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE



BELCHITE 1937

Nin was to get his wish for a "genuine" Popular Front government in September 1936. Up until 7 September *La Batalla* denounced "bourgeois ministers", unlike the PCE who heaped praise upon them. But once the cabinet was formed in Madrid under Cabellero, the PSOE leader and the leftist face of the bourgeoisie, and the offer was made to the POUM of a seat in the provisional government in Catalonia, all this ceased.

Control

In its place Nin assured the readers of *La Batalla* that a revolutionary orientation was "assured" whenever there was a majority of "socialists" in the government. Nin went so far as to define the dictatorship of the proletariat as a united front of workers' parties and trade union leaders who assume governmental power! Nin "forgot" the small matter of the democratic control and accountability by the mass of workers and poor peasants!

Once the POUM took its seat in the Catalan government it also took responsibility for the measures of the government. Of course, the POUM proposed radical measures to its Stalinist and bourgeois allies: an industrial and credit bank; no compensation to factory owners.

But these were rejected and the POUM remained respectfully silent. Worse, when the government proposed that there should be a government agent in each factory, or that there should be no further elections of Factory Councils for two years, the POUM agreed.

Stronghold

But quite criminal was Nin's readiness to join President Companys on a tour of Lerida— a stronghold of the POUM— to convince workers that the powers of the revolutionary committees should be dissolved. Nin argued:

"These revolutionary committees, whether Popular Executive Committees, or Committees of Public Safety, represent only part of the workers' organisations, or else, represent them in incorrect proportions... Obviously, the suppression of their revolutionary initiative is to be regretted, but one must recognise the need to codify . . . the various municipal organisations, as much with the aim of replacing them uniformly as of setting them under the authority of the new General Council."

After having performed these valuable services for the bourgeoisie, on 16 December 1936, Nin was kicked out of the government. The POUM's usefulness was at an end. As Trotsky commented:

"In the heat of the revolutionary war between classes Nin entered a bourgeois government whose goal it was to destroy the workers' committees, the foundation of proletarian government. When this goal was reached, Nin was driven out of the bourgeois government."

Obstacle

It was for this reason that Trotsky called the POUM "the chief obstacle on the road to the creation of a revolutionary party". This harsh judgement was absolutely correct.

Of course, the thousands of workers in the POUM were not reactionary; on the contrary, they were subjectively very revolutionary. But Nin's actions stopped them from taking the final step towards a consistently revolutionary programme.

Stalinism refused to adapt to the revolutionary impulse of the masses after the civil war erupted in July 1936, and instead derailed and destroyed all radical initiatives that brought workers into conflict with the republican bourgeoisie.

In contrast, the POUM wanted revolution, proclaimed its necessity and even on occasion proposed correct tactics. However, it did this alongside covering-up the weaknesses and betrayals of the anarchist, socialist and even Stalinist leaders.

That is why centrism never did and never will lead a successful proletarian revolution.★

Glossary

POUM - Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (centrist party formed by fusion of former Trotskyists led by Nin and right-wing Catalan split from the PCE led by Maurin).
PCE - Communist Party of Spain (the Stalinist party in Spain, affiliated to the Communist International).
PSUC - United Socialist Party of Catalonia (Stalinist party in Catalonia).
CNT - National Conferderation of Labour: the anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation.
FAI - Iberian Anarchist Federation.
PSOE- Spanish Socialist Workers Party (Social democratic organisation headed by Largo Caballero)

ARCHIVE

Barcelona 19 July 1937 Leaflet issued by the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain (4th International)

1. To defeat Fascism with the only effective weapon, the weapon of the proletarian revolution, to destroy Fascism and its roots, which flourish only in the rotten soil of capitalist demoocracy, by the expropriation of the exploiters and by the total destruction of the old state apparatus.

During a transition period we wish to set up the dictatorship of the proletariat, directed solely against the remains of the bourgeoisie, who, with the aid of foreign capitalisms, will try to re-establish private property and the bourgeois regime. The best example of attempts like this are the dishonest manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie at the present time, and above all of the PSUC. The dictatorship of the proletariat will be genuine working class democracy because the privileges of money will have disappeared and the workers, freed from capitalist exploitation, will decide their fate for themselves.

2. So long as the proletariat is not in a position to take power, we shall defend the democratic rights of the workers within the framework of the capitalist or transitory regime. That is why we have publicly, and without any sort of manoeuvre, demanded the United Front of Struggle—CNT-POUM-FAI; we shall never allow the class enemy to destroy workers' organisations, even when it is a question of our political adversaries. Yesterday, we demanded the protection of the POUM; today, we protest against those who want to exclude the FAI from the popular tribunals; and tomorrow, with arms in hand, we shall defend the CNT. We have been and we remain partisans of proletarian democracy.

3. We stand for the formation of revolutionary councils of workers, peasants and soldiers. These councils should be democratically elected in each factory, village and company. It must be possible to recall the delegates at any moment if the majority so decide. Councils of this sort were formed during the July days. The true wish of the masses is allowed the freest possible play in them.

These councils will have for their task the defence of the conquests of the revolution, the maintenance of public order, the control of economy and distribution. Each party will propose its solutions: the masses will decide.

4. We are against the so-called

What do the Trotskyists want?

Popular Front Government which is in reality a government in which the vast majority of the people is not represented. We are against class collaboration because it is a trap for the representatives of the working class. Compromises in such a government lead inevitably to treason . . . The only solution is to set up everywhere Revolutionary Councils, to convoke a Congress of all the delegates of the Councils and to elect a Central Committee from the delegates of the workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils, which will take in hand the management of the country. In such a Revolutionary Council there will be no treachery and it will thus be able to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.

5. Our aim is the complete expropriation of the capitalists. So far the banks have not been touched and the means of exchange are under the control of the bourgeois government. We categorically reject the "municipalisation" feverishly demanded by the PSUC, which means, in reality, taking away the enterprises from the Syndicates and putting them under the control of the reactionary government. Our slogan is complete socialisation and the establishment of a monopoly of foreign trade under the direction of an economic committee of the Revolutionary Council.

6. We demand the nationalisation of the land, that is to say, abolition of private landlordism. The userers shall no longer be able to take the land from the peasants. We stand for the collectivisation of agricultural enterprises only where the peasants consent to it without compulsion. Distribution of the land must be made by the peasants' Councils according to the principle . . . "The land for those who work it".

7. We are of the opinion that only a centralised army under a united command can ensure military victory. But it must be a revolutionary army in which each soldier enjoys political rights, in which the officers are elected and can be recalled by assemblies of soldiers. The same salary for everyone. The united command should be under control of a Council of War of the Revolutionary Council. In such an army the enthusiasm of the soldiers and their revolutionary vigilance will counterbalance the lack of material and technique. It will be a victorious army.

The only solution is to set up everywhere Revolutionary Councils. In such a Revolutionary Council there will be no treachery and it will thus be able to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.

8. We stand for the right of national minorities to dispose of themselves and for the absolute freedom of the people of Morocco, including the right of separation.

Morocco for the Moroccans: the moment that this slogan is publicly proclaimed it will foment insurrection among the oppressed masses of Morocco and cause disintegration in the mercenary fascist army.

We stand for a Federation of Socialist Republics because this corresponds best to the interests of the working class. It must be constituted without compulsion by the free and fraternal unification of all the workers.

9. We fight the Stalinist bureaucracy which pretends to construct "socialism" in Russia while sabotaging the socialist revolution in Spain and throughout the entire world.

Our final aim is the world revolution and the establishment of Socialism over the whole world, which is the only guarantee against the usurpation of the proletarian conquests by a bureaucratic layer like that of the Soviet Union.

We are against Non-Intervention as practiced by the Peoples' Commissars of the 3rd International and by the bourgeois ministers of the 2nd International. We demand the revolutionary intervention of the proletariat and transformation of the Spanish revolution into European revolution.

10. The old organisations have led us into an impasse. Deeply convinced that victory against the Fascist barbarians and the whole capitalist class depends entirely upon capable leadership we shall concentrate our efforts on the creation during the struggle of a new revolutionary party, to be equal to that task. Its granite base will be the programme of scientific socialism, laid down by Marx and Engels, and continued by Lenin and Trotsky.

After the disgraceful treason of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals we shall bring together again all consistent revolutionaries in the new, the 4th International, which will be the world party of social revolution. Beneath its unsullied banner socialism will triumph!

COMRADES! We know that our first task is to put Franco's bands to rout. But you, like us, know that military victory is inseparable from the social revolution. Openly and without manoeuvres, we fight against a policy which seems to us disastrous. The deepening of the social revolution, far from weakening the united front in the trenches, will strengthen the fighting spirit of our militias. We wish to revive the spirit of July 1936.

With the enthusiasm of those days and the arms and experience of today, we shall celebrate July 1936 in a Socialist Spain free from the capitalist yoke.

To all revolutionaries who feel that they are approaching us, we appeal: come and join our ranks!

In friendly discussion we shall clear up points of disagreement and, united in struggle, we shall put to rout our common enemy!

★ DOWN WITH FASCISM AND CAPITALISM!
★ LONG LIVE THE SPANISH PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION!
★ LONG LIVE THE WORLD REVOLUTION!

Marxism and capitalist restoration

A reply to the LTT

by Richard Brenner

The greatest theoretical challenge facing revolutionary Marxists today is to understand the collapse of Stalinism.

Almost alone on the international left, the LRCI has sought to examine and explain each stage of the process of the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former USSR.

Now the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), a small international organisation founded in 1991, has published "The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism" (*In Defence of Marxism* 3 June 1995). They devote a significant proportion of their pamphlet to a critique of the methodology and conclusions of the LRCI's analysis.

The LTT's British Section, the Workers International League, recently published an article by Brian Green, a former Workers Power member, on the role of money in the capitalist restoration process. It too implicitly attacks our understanding of the economic processes at work.

We welcome this opportunity for debate, which can help clarify both the immediate issue of the restoration process and general methodological issues.

Capitalism restored?

The LTT believe that capitalist states have been restored in the CIS and Eastern Europe. They are highly critical of the rest of the left who they divide into two currents:

- those who think, despite the emergence of bourgeois governments committed to capitalist restoration, that capitalism has not yet been restored;
- those who saw capitalist restoration as synonymous with the political overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracies in 1989.

The former group, including the LRCI, are labelled "economists", on the grounds that, for them, the economic character of the state in question is decisive.

The LTT, meanwhile defines the workers' state as follows:

"At root, a workers state is one in which the bourgeoisie is politically suppressed, leading to its economic expropriation as a class. This is what apparently such disparate events as the October Revolution of 1917 and the bureaucratic overturns in eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba after 1945 have in common . . . we reject both purely 'economic' and purely 'political' definitions of a workers' state."[1]

This last statement sounds "dialectical". In reality it is eclectic. Its insufficiency is revealed immediately the authors attempt to criticise their opponents:

"The cutting edge of distinction between bourgeois states and workers' states is not some decisive degree of nationalisation (Militant/CWI) nor the existence of 'central planning' (Workers Power/LRCI) nor the alleged 'commitment' of the state apparatus to defend the socialised forces of production (ICL and IBT) but which class interests the economy and state apparatus ultimately serve."[2]

But what happens when there is a temporary *contradiction* between the class character of the social relations of production (the economy) and that of the state apparatus? This, as the LTT admits, is a regular historical occurrence, common to both revolutions and counter-revolutions. Which then is decisive in assigning a class character to a state?

For the LTT it is always, ultimately, the *political intentions of those who rule* which gives the class character of the state.

Referring specifically to post-1991 Russia they write:

"The transition from the workers' state to capitalism is marked by a period of 'state capitalism'—mirroring the opposite development in eastern Europe in the 1940s . . . This process is the *consequence* rather than the *cause* of the creation of bourgeois states."[3]

Despite their avowed refusal to adopt a "purely political" definition of the workers' state, the LTT's definition is ultimately exclusively *political*. It leads them to misunderstand both the creation and the destruction of Stalinism in eastern Europe.

We maintain that, for revolutionary Marxists the class character of the state is, *in general*, determined by the decisively dominant property relations within its territory. [See article on page 40].

Defining the workers state

Before the isolation and degeneration of the Russian revolution, Marxists could simply define the workers' state as the working class in power carrying out the transition to socialism.

But in the early 1920s, Lenin had to confront the reality of a state where workers' power had effectively withered to Bolshevik party rule. He called it a "workers' state with severe bureaucratic deformations".

In the 1930s, after Stalin had crushed the revolutionary Bolshevik party, replacing it with the dictatorship of a bureaucratic caste, Trotsky defined Russia as a "degenerated workers' state". The proletarian character of the state rested on its economic foundation, which actively suppressed the capitalist law of value, replacing it with "command planning" as the key regulator of the economy.

The LTT's whole case against the LRCI's understanding of the current restoration process rests on making

Trotsky say something different. The actual analysis of economic developments in the former Stalinist countries hardly figures in their polemic.

They reject the notion that the class character of a state is defined by the prevailing property forms and social relations, asserting that:

"It is not merely a question of the *existing* forms of property but of those which the state *defends and strives to develop.*"[4]

Immediately the LTT are faced with an embarrassing fact. They have to admit that there are "numerous examples" in Trotsky's writings which contradict them.

For example:

"So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class".[5]

This, and other similar statements are dismissed as "examples of 'political shorthand', where Trotsky appears to equate the existence of the workers' state with nationalised property".

The LTT, however, "aims not to mindlessly repeat sacred texts, but to grasp the underlying method of Marxism".[6] The underlying method of Marxism on the question of the state can be found, they tell us, in a "succinct" definition given by Trotsky:

"The class character of the state is determined by its relation to the forms of property in the means of production", and "by the character of the forms of property and productive relations which the given state guards and defends."[7]

It is the last three words—*guard and defend*—which convince the LTT that the very existence of a government hostile to the post-capitalist economy transforms the class character of the state.

Trotsky versus . . . Trotsky?

First of all we should note that it is the LTT, not Trotsky, who are guilty of "shorthand" with the Trotsky quote in question. Given the importance they attach to it, they ought to have quoted it in full. Here it is:

"The class nature of the state is, consequently, determined not by its political forms but by its social content; i.e. by the character of the forms of property and productive relations which the given state guards and defends."[8]

What Trotsky actually said immediately distinguishes the *property relations* from the type, or form, of *political regime* as the determinant of the class character of the state.

Of course, in the case of Stalinism in its heyday, the bureaucracy, for its own reasons, intended to guard and defend the property relations of the workers' state. But this was never, in Trotsky's view, the key determinant of the class character of the state.

This did not make Trotsky an "economist", even in the sense of the word used by the LTT. He understood that the bureaucracy's social base in proletarian property forms (as a cancerous growth on them), obliged them, for a time, to defend these property forms.

He also understood that the property forms could not survive *without* a state which actively defended them. Unlike capitalist property relations the property relations of the transition period are not spontaneously self-reproducing.

This is the meaning of Trotsky's statement:

"The character of the economy as a whole thus depends on the character of the state power".[9]

Hence, in a passage which the LTT holds aloft triumphally in confirmation of its own view, Trotsky writes:

"The inevitable collapse of Stalinist Bonapartism would immediately call into question the character of the USSR as a workers' state. Socialist economy cannot be constructed without a socialist power. The fate of the USSR as a socialist state depends upon that political regime which will arise to replace Stalinist Bonapartism."[10]

Elsewhere Trotsky even writes:

"The collapse of the Soviet regime would inevitably lead to the collapse of the planned economy".[11]

But none of this confirms the LTT's characterisation of eastern Europe today as capitalist.

The collapse of Stalinism certainly "called into question" the workers' state property relations. Indeed, without working class resistance their collapse is inevitable.

But it is a process. And stating that the process has begun is not the same as understanding the process, or knowing when it has effected a qualitative transformation.

Trotsky was confronted with a similar mistake in the shape of Burnham and Carter, who claimed that the USSR could no longer be defined as a workers' state because the bureaucracy was *actively* destroying proletarian property relations. Whilst disputing this fact Trotsky still pointed out that the intention would not equal the accomplished fact:

". . . 'During the past year', they write, 'the bureaucracy has definitively entered the road of destruction of the planned and nationalised economy.' (has only 'entered the road'?) Further we read that the course of development 'brings the bureaucracy into ever-increasing and deepening conflict with the needs and interests of the nationalised economy.' (only 'brings it'?) The contradiction between the bureaucracy and the economy was observed before this, but for the past year 'the actions of the bureaucracy are actively sabotaging the plan and disintegrating the state monopoly.' (Only 'disintegrating'"? Hence, not yet disintegrated?)."[12]

For Trotsky even if the bureaucracy *were* actively engaged in disintegrating the planned and state owned economy, the process was not complete and capitalism had therefore not yet been restored.

The state would still be defined by the class character of its economic base. Hence Trotsky insists that:

"Only the intrusion of a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary force *in property relations* can change the class nature of the state".

For Trotsky, so long as the contradiction between the bureaucracy and the workers' state:

"has not passed from the sphere of distribution to the sphere of production, and has not blown up nationalised property and the planned economy, the state remains a workers' state".[13]

The moribund workers' state

Today Yeltsin's bourgeois restorationist government aims directly to uproot the vestiges of planning. The political and economic conflicts unleashed by this are the source of Russia's continuing instability and the impoverishment of the masses. But the process is not complete. Hence a new transitional form has been created by history, the moribund workers' state.

We have no doubts about where the moribund workers' state is heading. Without the revolutionary intervention of the working class it is towards restoration. But the moribund workers' state is, contrary to the LTT's assertion, something different from a "state capitalist" form of weak, emergent capitalism. To find out why, we have to venture into a sphere the LTT itself never visits—the actual political economy of Eastern Europe and the CIS under restorationist governments.

The Remnants of Planning and the Law of Value

The LTT's treatment of the restoration process in the economic sphere cannot be described as detailed. It does not need to be. Once it is theoretically established (with half a quote from Trotsky) that the fate of the property relations is not decisive to the class character of the state, there is no need for economic analysis.

Instead sweeping assertions can be offered, such as:

"What remains [in the ex workers' states] is a substantial legacy of state property which, despite its origin, now performs approximately the same function that it does in weak semi-colonial capitalist states".[14]

The case for describing these economies as moribund—i.e. dying—workers' states rests on the *difference* between the role of the state sector here

1 LTT "The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism". (*In Defence of Marxism* 3 June 1995) p10

2 ibid p10

3 ibid p48

4 ibid p10

5 Trotsky, *Writings*, 1933-34, Pathfinder p104

6 LTT op. cit. p10

7 ibid.

8 *Writings*. 1937-38. p61.

9 Trotsky *The Revolution Betrayed* New Park p250

10 *Writings* 34-35 p182

11 Trotsky *The Revolution Betrayed* New Park p250

12 LTT op. cit. p61.

13 ibid p63

14 LTT op cit p14

and in, for example, Nigeria.

- In Nigeria the state sector exists to ensure that the law of value can operate as the determining mechanism of the entire economy, and that the national economy can operate efficiently within the world capitalist economy.
- In classic Stalinism, state ownership, planning and the monopoly of foreign trade operated to ensure the reverse; the active suppression of the law of value.
- In the moribund workers' state this system has been broken down; the law of value is invading, but has not yet overcome the final economic barriers to its untrammelled operation. A certain remnant of the state sector is what constitutes that barrier.

Incidentally it is redundant for the LTT to tell us that:

"The suppression of the law of value . . . is defective as a determinant of the workers state. The very nature of transitional society right down to 1989-91 ensured that the law of value never entirely disappeared."15

The LRCI has never claimed that it disappeared; only that the property forms were designed to suppress it, and did suppress it, qualitatively, *as the main mechanism of the economy*, although never completely eradicating it.

The key question is: what happens to the law of value during the much shorter process of transition which covers the fall of Stalinism to the reintroduction of capitalism?

Our contention is that, up to now, it has not been reintroduced as the decisive mechanism. We hold to this, not because of the existence of nationalised property or even, as the LTT claims, a central planning apparatus. We identify one remaining element of planned property—the state banking system and its soft credit to huge firms that could not survive the operation of the law of value—as the final obstacle to restoration.

As far back as the summer of 1991[16], we pointed to the specific problems that restorationist governments would encounter in dismantling planning mechanisms. We drew attention to the means by which state planning had been functioning in Poland and Hungary throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[17]

"Planning is the sum total of all the instruments the bureaucracy uses to direct the statified economy [to] prevent the operation of the law of value dominating. The central planning ministry was a key, but not the only, element of this. The totality of the planning mechanisms involved the planning ministry, the industrial ministries and the centralised monopoly banking system. This totality has been weakened and eroded by market reforms prior to 1988-89. Since that date it has been increasingly dismantled. Its last remaining element—and one which holds it

Trotsky, the state and social relations

The problem with the LTT's approach is their confused use of the very term *state*. An elementary study of the Marxist use of the term reveals that it is regularly used in two senses, one narrow and one broad.

In the first place the term state can be used as a shortened term for the bureaucratic-military state apparatus, the means of repression, the "bodies of armed men" famously referred to by Engels. On the other hand, however, the term state is commonly used to refer to the ensemble of political apparatus and mode of production located on a given territory.

With this distinction in mind, Trotsky's use of the term *degenerated workers state* becomes absolutely clear. In this broad sense he is using it to refer to the totality of social relations *and* political institutions prevailing within its borders—base *and* superstructure, to use terms anathema to all fashionable idealising trends in Marxism.

When considering a degenerated workers' state, the social relations of production are ultimately determinant in revealing its class character. If this were not the case, what possible sense could be made of Trotsky's assertion that "In its *social foundation and economic tendencies*, the USSR still remains a workers' *state*."?[1]

Despite accusing the LRCI of an "addiction to formal logical categories" which do not "allow for the contradictions of the real world", it is the LTT who fall into precisely this trap.

Thus they are enraged by our designation of eastern European states and the states of the CIS as *moribund workers' states*, which we define as "degenerate workers' states that have restorationist governments in power which are actively demolishing the foundations of planned economy".

For the LTT this is "clearly a description of a bourgeois state" because of the subjective intentions and historic role of the government.

But in reality the question begins at the precise point the LTT regard it as concluded: to what extent has the restorationist government completed its task of establishing capitalism as the prevailing mode of production within the territory it rules?[2]

Economism

Contrary to the LTT's claims, there is nothing "economistic" in this approach, unless the whole of historical materialism is economistic. Economism, for Leninists, does not mean a stress on the ultimately determining character of economic factors, the "production and reproduction of human life" as Engels called it. This incorrect use of the term "economism", which stems from Gramsci, has been the hallmark of those idealist "Western Marxist" and academic trends which have attempted to deny Marxism's materialist stress on economic determination. [3]

We have pointed to the very real political (class and inter-state) barriers that have impeded the necessary measures being pushed through which can qualitatively transform the accumulation process.

Struggle

But these cannot be achieved 'automatically'—as we have consistently argued, they will be the outcome of a bitter and protracted struggle between workers, managers, bourgeois politicians and bureaucrats.

The LTT try to bolster their tottering theory by using an argument always raised by the bureaucratic collectivists and state capitalists—the early months of the Soviet state.

Certainly the Bolsheviks could not abolish capitalism overnight—nor did they intend to. They were well aware of the bourgeois character of the social relations prevailing in Russia, which they set out to control, and by progressive stages, to overturn. In fact the logic of the class struggle, the outbreak of civil war, forced the Bolshevik government to do this far more quickly than they had originally intended. (As in Lenin's *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it*)

Correctly pointing out that "between 1917 and 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled over a bourgeois economy", the LTT ask how this can be squared with

together as a system—is the banking network.

In the last two decades in countries such as Hungary and Poland central control over banking and monetary/ credit policy was used to negate the untrammelled operation of the law of value. Money exchanges existed but money was not allowed to operate as money-capital, as self-expanding value, essentially free to assume any form it liked and to move relatively unhindered in the search for exploitable labour and profits."[18]

To be sure, an economy dominated by huge *state capitalist* trusts is one possible outcome once this obstacle is breached.

But this is a source of struggle within the embryonic capitalist class in Russia. Another, powerful faction wishes to see a massive, neo-liberal economic transformation, in which the "entrepreneurs" and their western imperialist backers become the ruling class, not a transformed "state capitalist" class of big state enterprise directors.

Paradoxically the knowledge that the ending of soft credit and the collapse of the state sector would destroy the social basis for a future state capitalism has made the would-be state capitalists the most vociferous supporters of the state bank policies.

The LTT were initially unable to respond to this argument—indeed they merely describe it as "unconvincing" and add the non-sequitur that, "it must be obvious that it is impossible to 'plan' the economy of a country such as Russia which is experiencing hyper-inflation."[19]

However, since publication of their pamphlet, the LTT's British section, the Workers International League, have found a vicarious means of responding to our arguments, in the form of an article by Brian Green, published in their paper *Workers News* in August 1995.

The WIL remain sceptical of Green's own restoration theory, telling their readers that it differs from their analysis in seeing the key moment of restoration as being economic rather than political. Nevertheless they consider there is much "common ground" between them. What is this? His economic argumentation against the LRCI comes as a much-needed boost to their own sparse theoretical efforts. As we explain on page 43, Green's analysis is mistaken.

Quantity into quality?

Throughout the LTT's polemic there are constant and heavy handed appeals to the dialectic. The LRCI is accused of being addicted to "formal logical" categories, fitting reality around a schema etc.

This is a smokescreen for the fact that, even by its own criteria, the LTT cannot tell us *when* the Stalinist states became bourgeois. This is because they

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

18 ibid p14

19 Not 1993 as the LTT suggests. "Poland's Transition to Capitalism", *Permanent Revolution* 8, Summer 1993

20 Ibid p71

21 LTT op. cit. p15

economic definition of the class character of the state.

It does not have to be. Because in these circumstances, the state superstructure was modelled not on the bourgeois state form, but was a proletarian semi-state. Under these revolutionary circumstances, which have unfortunately not been repeated in this century, the state derived its proletarian character not from the predominant property relations but from its own revolutionary proletarian form. In this case—and this case only—it is entirely permissible to derive the proletarian class character of the state from the superstructure rather than the base.

Apparatus

Any attempt to apply a similar method to the Stalinist military-bureaucratic apparatus must—if applied consistently—result in grossly Stalinophile conclusions. The apparatus was modelled on and similar to the bourgeois type of state. It derived its proletarian character from the property relations. Thus Trotsky pointed out that in the absence of the post-capitalist property relations, the regime in USSR would be indistinguishable from a fascist state.

The healthy Soviet state superstructure was dominated by a party committed to the elimination of capitalism. Because of both its structure and its political leadership, the soviet regime directly responded to the conflicts between capital and labour by resolving them in the interests of the latter. Therein lay both its proletarian form and character.

Why then cannot this "political" definition of the state be applied to the degenerated workers' state in transition back to capitalism?

In essence because the degenerated workers' state itself is already "defined" by the absence of direct proletarian rule.

Does this mean, as the LTT suggest, that, for us, "the concepts of a 'healthy workers state' and a 'degenerate workers state' have nothing at all in common"?

No. Both are *expressions* of proletarian rule: the one direct and political, in advance of the transition to socialism, the other indirect and political-economic. The degenerated workers' state was a set of proletarian property relations defended by a state machine and a bureaucracy with roots in those property relations.The need for a new category, the moribund workers' state, arises precisely from a new and sharpened contradiction between the state machine and the economy.

Where social counter-revolution originates from within the bureaucracy, the political intentions of the bureaucracy are not enough to redefine the state.

In fact even the LTT recognise this, when they the post Stalinist states: "workers states paralysed as defenders of nationalised property relations".■

1 *Writings* 1934-5 p182, emphasis added.

2 We should note in passing that the LTT wrongly maintain that the category 'moribund workers' state' was developed by the LRCI's Third Congress in August 1994. In fact in its resolution on Russia after the Congress of Peoples' Deputies passed in January 1993, the International Executive Committee of the LRCI stated clearly that:

"the decisive qualitative point in the restoration process has not yet been passed; Russia remains a degenerated workers' state albeit a moribund, disintegrating one." *Trotskyist Bulletin* 3, April 1993.

So much for the LTT's claim that this category was introduced 18 months later "to prepare the evacuation from such untenable positions and to accommodate evident internal opposition"!

3 In its Marxist usage, the term Economism refers to those tendencies that believe that the economic struggle between workers and capitalists over pay and conditions at the point of production spontaneously acquires a revolutionary socialist character. A disembodied process replaces the conscious struggle for socialist class political consciousness.

cannot ever spell out, decisively, what combination of economic and political factors makes them bourgeois.

Obviously it cannot be a change at the economic level. But neither, say the LTT, can the character of the state be deduced simply from the political character of the government.

Thus, on the overturns of the late 1940s, they correctly attack the Vern/Ryan tendency in the SWP-US which said:

"from the time of the occupation onward, the designation of these states as workers states is an inescapable Marxist characterisation".[20]

They also, correctly, reject the view of Westoby and Wohlforth that a "transitional state" having no class character, presided over the initial stages of the overturns.

The LTT date the post-war social overturns as occurring, via the smashing of the bourgeois state and a "break with the bourgeoisie", "between late 1947 and early 1948".[21]

So what was the class character of the state *between* "late 1947 and early 1948"? And, more importantly, what was the class character of the state between the moment of the fall of the bureaucracy in 1989 and the point at which it became bourgeois?

Even within the confines of their flawed theory of the state it ought to be possible to examine when the capitalist *mode of production* can be regarded as dominant within the territory of the new "capitalist state".

Yet, abandoning dialectical logic altogether, they deny that the law of the transformation of quantity into quality—for Marxists a ubiquitous feature of all natural and social phenomena—can be observed in the restoration process.

They deride our attempt to "isolate a defining moment to 'date' the emergence of deformed/degenerate workers' states", and assert that:

"... the attempt to theorise a 'purely economic' point of no return for the workers' state has been doomed to failure."[22]

This neatly absolves them from the messy task of identifying the point at which capitalism becomes dominant according to their own "non-economist" criteria.

Here it is important to spell out the contradictions of the LTT's own analysis. After listing the dates of the fall of the Stalinist dictators they say:

"In each of these turning points the restoration of capitalism was far from accomplished; indeed each of them contained the possibility of struggles to defend nationalised struggles to develop. But in the absence of revolutionary leadership each of these events paved the way for the creation of bourgeois states committed to building and protecting capitalism. To attempt to focus on some single economic measure in order to be able so as to establish (sic) exactly the date when the transition from a workers state to a bourgeois one took place is a pedantic academic exercise, divorced from the real settlement of accounts which took place on the plane of the class struggle."[23]

If we accept this analysis, then it is legitimate to ask when the "real settlement of accounts" and the decisive acts of the class struggle took place.

In Russia, according to the LTT, it was not the collapse of the August 1991 coup. Neither was it Yeltsin's monetary "big bang" of January 1992 that changed the class character of the state—a contrast to the position of Brian Green.

The LTT comes close to identifying a common date of transformation for eastern Europe: the Conference for Security and Mutual Co-operation in Europe in 1990, when:

"all the ruling bureaucracies undertook to restore capitalism in their respective countries."24

Did this make them bourgeois states, then? Not according to the LTT:

"From the point at which the leading elements of the Stalinist bureaucracies opted to restore capitalism, the workers' states were paralysed as defenders of nationalised property relations ... the destruction and transformation of the state apparatuses governing the economic system began".[25]

So the LTT *does* envisage a transitional period where there is a pro-bourgeois government and the remains of a workers' state economy. It has its own term for it. In complete contradiction to its own theory it calls these: "workers states paralysed as defenders of nationalised property relations". Exactly when such states become bourgeois is not spelled out.

But how should a Marxist characterise a "paralysed workers' state"? Definitely not as a "moribund workers' state" say the LTT.

And how would Marxists decide when the "paralysed workers state" becomes bourgeois"? What changes at the level of the *government and its intentions* are we to find?

Its *government* cannot get any more bourgeois, from a qualitative point of view. Yeltsin wanted to "guard and defend" a restored Russian capitalism from the moment he seized power in 1991—and before. In Russia from 1991

Russia under Nazi occupation

The most inane argument raised by the LTT concerns German imperialism's invasion of the USSR in 1941.

In a crude attempt to shock their readers by posing the contradiction between state form and property relations at its sharpest, they conclude their chapter on the LRCI thus:

"... it is sobering to consider that, had Nazi Germany succeeded in conquering the Soviet Union, it might well have retained a substantial state sector. According to Workers Power's theory, the workers' state would have survived - albeit with a fascist government."[30]

It would be difficult to compress more confusion into so few words.

Had Hitler's armies defeated the USSR, Germany would *certainly* have retained a substantial state sector. Despite the destruction and evacuation of most of the industry of the Ukraine, for example, the Nazis did retain the rest as state property.

It was German state property and was subordinated to German monopoly capital.

Because we do not equate all and any state ownership with the property relations of a workers' state, for the LRCI it is obvious that if the Nazis had transferred Russian into German state property, as happened in the occupied Ukraine, this would constitute a form of state capitalism.

So in 1990 when the GDR state property was subordinated to the *Bundesbank* and the *Treuhand* it was transformed into the state capitalist possessions of German imperialism.

The point is that all the efforts of the Nazi regime were aimed at the promotion and protection of the law of value as the dominant mode of operation in the occupied East.

Insofar as wartime conditions and the brevity of the occupation allowed, they made concrete steps towards this goal.

In this form of social counter-revolution, where the Stalinist state machine is smashed and replaced directly by an imperialist state machine, the economic determinants of its class character are also clear: complete subordination to the German imperialist economy.

Thus our readers and the LTT can be assured Ukraine under Reichskommisar Erich Koch, from 1941 to 43, was definitely not a degenerated workers' state. ■

the bourgeoisie was no longer "politically suppressed" as the LTT's definition of a workers' state demands.

Once we reject the seizure of power by Yeltsin as the decisive turning point only economic factors can indicate the qualitative leap in the class character of the state. But according to the LTT—against both the LRCI and Brian Green—economic transition to capitalism is:

"the *consequence* rather than the *cause* of the creation of bourgeois states".[26]

Whilst the LTT's pamphlet has many strengths, and shares many of the LRCI's criticisms of "orthodox" centrist Trotskyism, it has one great weakness. It contains no answer to the central question: *when was capitalism restored in Russia and by what means?*

Conclusion

The supreme criterion of human thought, as Trotsky observed, is experience. How has the LRCI's analysis stood up to the test of events? Is it true, as the LTT maintain, that our theory has "broken down in the face of real events"?[27]

No, our analysis has provided the only sure guide to the conflicts—political and economic—that have shaken Russia over the past four years.

It enabled us to chart the dynamics of the long struggle between the fast-track restorationists headed by Yeltsin and the political representatives of the enterprise managers and bureaucrats associated with the powerful military-industrial complex.

We were able to explain the reasons for the instability of Yeltsin's Bonapartist rule, balancing as he was between those sections of the bureaucracy that had integrated into the rising capitalist class and those that had not, and could scarcely hope to survive the destruction of the remnants of planning with their privileges intact.

Our predictions in 1991 concerning the role of state credit in offsetting the law of value were strikingly confirmed in 1992 when inter-enterprise credit rose from 100 billion roubles at the start of the year to 600 billion in April and 3,000 billion by the autumn.

We can continue to predict that to force the main industrial enterprises to produce for the market and private profit will necessitate breaking the cycle of inter-enterprise debt and soft credit, leading to the closure of thousands of unprofitable enterprises and the sacking of millions of workers.

The LRCI has been able to develop a sophisticated analysis of the moribund workers' state phenomenon, identifying the sub-phases of economic policy pursued by the restorationist governments and explaining the concrete interplay of the class struggle, the inter-party struggles and the economic developments within, for example Hungary and Poland (See TI16).

The LTT admit the deep crises shaking Russia. But in order to present them as features of a newly restored capitalism they must reduce their significance, arguing merely that they represent a conflict between those who want a strong state sector and those who want wide scale privatisation.

The underlying causes of this in the sphere of production are lost on them. Their theory is thus devoid of predictive force and programmatic consequence.

In the LTT's own words, "So long as Trotskyists are unable to provide a convincing analysis of the debacle which Stalinism produced, the task of politically arming a new generation for the revolutionary struggles of the future will be all the harder."[28]

True. But on the evidence of this pamphlet, the LTT won't be arming anybody.■

Money and restoration

Brian Green[29] argues that the abolition of price controls, introduction of currency convertibility and the reintegration of the economies of the workers' states into the world economy - epitomised by the Big Bang in Poland in the first half of 1990 - constituted the qualitative point of capitalist restoration.

But the argument is not convincing.

The imposition of trade and price liberalisation does impact powerfully on the moribund workers' states, beginning to convert goods into commodities.

But it does not complete this process overnight. A convertible currency will assist in transforming both manufacturing output and labour power into commodities - so long as there is free access to hard currency, free trade with the West affecting the formation of prices of production in the enterprises in the country concerned, and if hard currency purchase for purposes of trade is checked and limited by controls exercised by the agencies that issue money.

Here it would be fatal to ignore the influence of the state banking system which constitutes a residual element of non-capitalist economic direction.

If money is supplied in abundance to enterprises at negative interest rates there will be gross inflationary effects, and enterprises will be able to secure hard currency by demanding more and more credit from the central bank.

This will prevent the price and currency reforms from forcing the enterprises to act as if they were private capitalists.

Nor does this state-printed money act as a measure of real value. The extension of this "soft credit" to the enterprises operates to obstruct the law of value as the key determinant of economic life at the level of *production*.

As Trotsky anticipated, the decisive change must occur at the level of production not in the sphere of exchange.

The bourgeoisie recognise the obstacles to the restoration of their own social system more readily than much of the left.

As the *Economist* magazine has noted, it was wrong to argue:

"for instance, that free trade and currency convertibility are the keys to reform. If enterprises and consumers are allowed to trade with foreigners, economists said, the pressure of competition on Eastern Europe's producers will force them to become more efficient. The advice ignores the distortions in the financial system. By itself convertibility can lead to a chase for limited supplies of hard currency, explosive growth in the supply of local currency, and spiralling inflation . . . Thanks to soft budget constraints, the enterprises will be willing to bid almost any price in local money (supplied on demand by the central bank) to get hold of foreign money."

"To avoid this, convertibility must be accompanied by steps to impose financial discipline on enterprises."

We hold to our view that, to really restore the law of value to its dominant position, the banking system and its limitless investment fund has to be destroyed. Even where the state monobank has been broken up into separate banks these remain in most cases adjuncts to the industrial monopolies which thus allocate themselves credit. The enterprises have to be converted into state capitalist or private trusts to allow them to act as capitals.

This will require the enforced bankruptcy and closure of vast swathes of the economy as they are subjected to the brutal dictates of the market. The last four years have witnessed such a struggle. Relentlessly the restorationists have made progress, breaking up the state bank, imposing credit limits, converting the enterprises into legally private entities. Yet still the dominant heights of the economy are not occupied by firms acting as capitals, and the massive job shedding and closures are yet to occur. Production is not for profit but to preserve the enterprises and the jobs of their workers and managers.

Until that point has been reached, the bulk of the productive economy will continue to operate on a non-capitalist basis.■

20 Quoted in LTT op. cit. p16

21 ibid p19

22 ibid. p12

23 ibid. p14

24 ibid p36

25 ibid p37

26 ibid

27 ibid p48 emphasis in original

28 LTT op. cit.. p13.

29 Brian Green (*Workers News* 55) drew political conclusions from his analysis, in particular that the LRCI were wrong to fight for workers' political revolution and the defence of planning in Eastern Europe in 1989-90, that the consequence of the collapse of the degenerate workers' states was "the greatest tragedy in the history of the modern working class", and that with this world history had moved into a protracted period of a pronounced counter-revolutionary character. Attracting little support for his arguments, he resigned from Workers Power and the LRCI in 1994



The Irish famine 1845-52
A catastrophe

Maureen Harrington reviews **This Great Calamity, The Irish Famine 1845 -52** by Christine Kinealy. Gill & Macmillan, 1994 £17.95

At a commemoration of the Famine held at Dublin's Botanic Gardens this August, Minister of State Avril Doyle described the potato as a vegetable that "so callously robbed the lives of over one million Irish in the 1840's".

That the commemoration should focus on scientific identification of blight—as though a fungus were the fundamental cause of the mass starvation of 1845-52—shows the extent of the present official downplaying of capitalist colonialism's part in the Famine. This is a feature of the revisionism that has been growing in Irish historiography over the past 30 years, and which has reached a new peak in the 1990s.

As a consciously anti-revisionist study Christine Kinealy's book is welcome. She challenges the apologetic view that plays down the role of the British government in the great famine of 150 years ago.

Kinealy correctly examines economic developments in Britain as the background to the events of 1845-52. When the potato blight first hit Europe in l845, Britain had already emerged as the "workshop of the world".

It was at the forefront of capitalist development. The British bourgeoisie was intent on clearing away all obstacles to the further accumulation of capital.

The British bourgeoisie carried out its historic mission with brutality and ruthlessness. The consequences for the toilers and oppressed were drastic . The British ruling class employed the *laissez faire* ideas of Adam Smith and his successors, freeing up the market in commodities—including labour power—as a necessary precondition for "wealth creation".

While Kinealy presents a well documented outline of political and economic developments in Britain at this time, she seems uncertain about the relationship between the ideology of political economy and the capitalist mode of production. For example she says:

" The outcome of a *slavish* adherence to self-adjusting mechanisms would inevitably be human suffering. Yet this appeared to be of little consequence to those who worshipped at the altar of *laissez faire*". (p356; emphasis added)

But it was not a question of the bourgeoisie taking or leaving the ideology of the free market (*laissez faire*). The ideology expressed and reflected their material needs. The role of political economists in the 18th and 19th centuries was to legitimate the domination of the market economy.

Reform

With regard to Ireland, the British government's intentions had for some time been centred on the reform of landlordism and the capitalisation of land. The famine presented an opportunity to press ahead with this through the elimination of the landless rural poor and their small holdings, the consolidation of property, the sale of bankrupt estates and the encouragement of emigration.

This was the Irish version of what had happened in Britain in the preceding two centuries. Large scale clearances were to create generalised commodity production.

Efforts were made to help the emerging bourgeoisie as against the landlords. The Poor Law Act of 1838 was meant to facilitate this as were subsequent acts during the famine itself, such as the "Quarter Acre Clause" of 1847 and the "Encumbered Estates Act" of 1848.

Apart from the industrial enclave around the Lagan valley in the North-East, Ireland in 1845 was a predominantly backward agrarian economy, under direct British rule since the Union in 1800.

While periodic food shortages were a common occurrence in Ireland and indeed throughout Europe, the potato blight that appeared from 1845 to 1852 was unusually long and hit an economy in which about one-third of the population relied on the potato as the main ingredient of their subsistence diet.

Catastrophe

What started as a food shortage due to potato blight in 1845 turned into a catastrophe of gigantic proportions. It lasted for seven years during which one million died and a further one and a half million emigrated.

Given the enormous decrease of population this represented, from around 8 million in 1845, this was indeed a Great Famine. Why did this food shortage turn into such a calamity when such famines did not arise from previous Irish food crises?

Kinealy correctly and unambiguously points the finger in the direction of the British bourgeoisie:

"The policies of the government, and the way it perceived its role, are crucial to an understanding of the Famine years.

Changing

"The changing perceptions and strategies of the British government determined the type of relief provided and the method and timing of its allocation. Charles Trevelyan represented a school of economic orthodoxy which advocated both non-intervention and fiscal rectitude. The British government's

made in Britain

policy was to be as little intervention as possible in terms of direct aid. And in fact all that was spent was under £10m—half of it to be repaid in loans. How little this amounted to can be assessed when compared to the £63m spent on the war in Crimea some little time afterwards."

Kinealy outlines the famine as it progressed, and the official response to it. While the main subsistence crop failed by 50% in 1845, this did not result in emigration or deaths.

The second season of blight in 1846 marked the real beginning of the famine.

The poor harvest in 1847 was caused by a small crop rather than reappearance of the blight. Blight then reappeared in 1848 and persisted unevenly throughout the country until 1852, particularly in the West.

Crisis

The Poor Law Relief was initially left to cope with the crisis. As in Britain, only workhouse relief was envisaged. The law expressly forbade "outdoor relief", which was seen as a hindrance to a free market in labour.

However as the crisis deepened, aid for labour was introduced in the form of Public Works. With deaths and emigration soaring in 1847, Public Works were abandoned and direct aid in the form of soup kitchens was introduced for a few months.

In late 1847 the Poor Law Relief was reverted to as the main means of relief. The horror of starvation, fever, disease, death and emigration that was suffered by the Irish masses are documented by Kinealy with terrifying clarity.

Britain's overall plan for Ireland manifested itself in the details of their policy. Relief was to be funded by a tax on all land over four acres (the Poor Rates).

Kinealy's account of the Irish Famine should be read by everyone as an example of capitalism's ruthless drive for accumulation and profit even at the cost of what must surely be among the cruelest calamities of modern times.

That the tax weighed heavily on landlords and hardly at all on merchants or industrialists was indicative of the British bourgeoisie's schema for the development of capitalism in Ireland. As the famine progressed it had the effect of transforming land into capital as destitute small farmers were forced to sell their plots.

The 1847 Quarter Acre Clause denied relief to anyone with more than a quarter of an acre of land, thus ensuring a clearout of destitute farmers owning small holdings, in many cases through evictions.

Similarly the 1848 Encumbered Estates Act speeded the transfer to the commodification of land. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 contributed to a shift from tillage to cattle farming. The British bourgeoisie felt they were achieving their goals in Ireland: the 1851 Census Report claimed that Ireland had "benefited" from the changes brought about by the famine.

The role that the Irish bourgeoisie played in the famine, through their complicity in defending both their own and British profits, is brought out well in this account.

The British government assured the native Irish merchants that they would not interfere with their role in the importation of food, that they would not undermine their profits by selling food at below market prices, and that they would not open the food depots until absolutely necessary.

As the food that the merchant capitalists imported into the country was insufficient to meet the population's needs, the laws of supply and demand meant that the price of food was unaffordable to the starving Irish, earning less than subsistence wages on the Public Works.

In addition, indigenous capitalists who had bitterly resisted the closing of the ports in 1782-4 (by Grattan's Parliament), found that this time round there were to be no restrictions on the export of food.

The export of food from the country at a time of food shortage, coupled with inadequate food imports, which in turn led to very high prices, enriched native capitalists at a time when the Irish masses were dropping dead from starvation.

Christine Kinealy's book is an important empirical study of the Great Famine. It is well researched and carries a wealth of detail on all aspects of this tragic episode in Irish history.

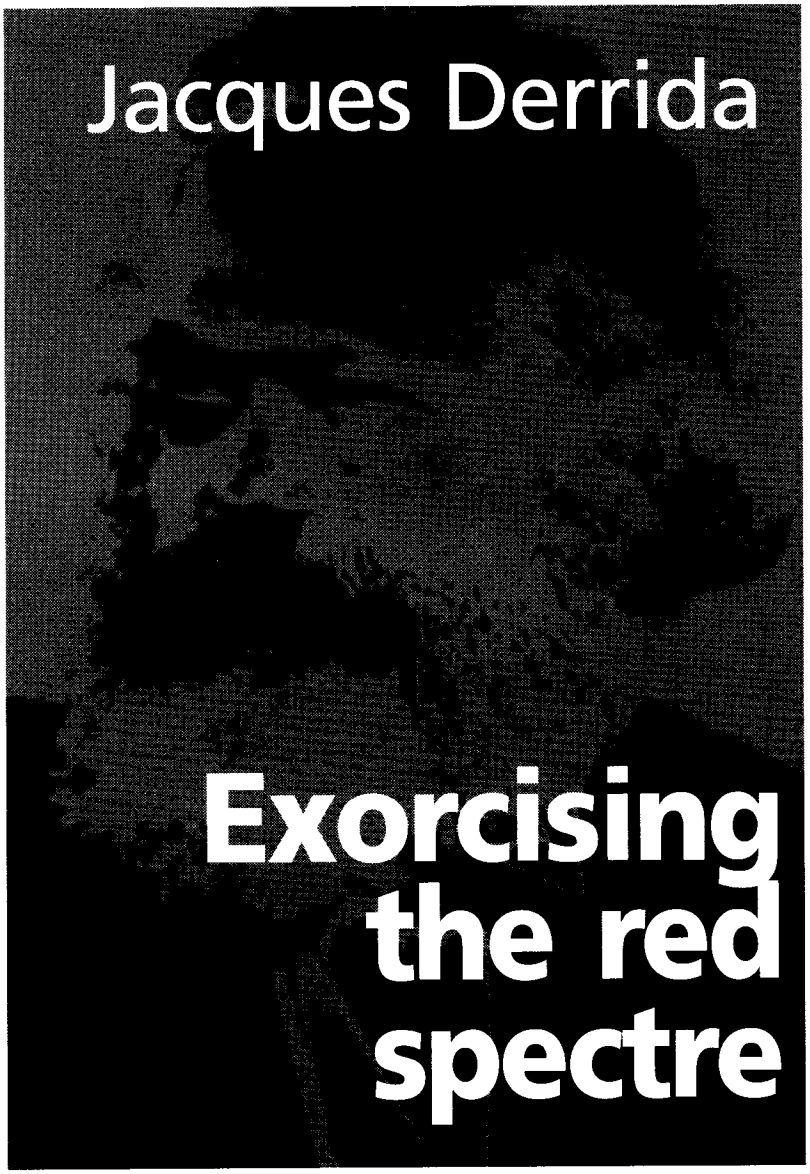
Oppression

She challenges the revisionists' downplaying of Britain's role in the calamity. But she also refuses to fall into the opposite trap of seeing the famine as simply an example of national oppression, as nationalists have argued.

In spite of a lack of sharpness on the dialectic between political economic ideas and the accumulation of capital, she nevertheless presents the wider picture of Ireland as a nation savagely oppressed by a British colonialism muscling up to defend and increase its share of the developing world capitalist arena.

Kinealy's account of the Irish Famine should be read by everyone as an example of capitalism's ruthless drive for accumulation and profit even at the cost of what must surely be among the cruellest calamities of modern times.

The Famine remains one of the greatest indictments of the ideology of *laissez faire*, whether in its 19th century version or in its contemporary renaissance, neo-liberalism.■



Exorcising the red spectre

Gil Hyle reviews **Spectres of Marx, The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and The New International** Jacques Derrida, Routledge, London & New York 1994

Some years ago, the sedentary continuity of Cambridge University was disturbed by a proposal to give an honorary degree to Jacques Derrida, the French theorist of "deconstructive" literary criticism.

The befuddled Dons wrote letters to *The Times* suggesting that it was improper to give an honorary degree to someone who didn't really make much sense.

A reasonable initial reaction to this book by Derrida on Marx might be that, for once, Britain's academic establishment got it right.

As everyone knows, the *Communist Manifesto* opens with the declaration: "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism".

Marx also used the image of the "ghost" as a central motif in his massive polemic against Stirner in *The German Ideology*, which is correctly recognised by Derrida as Marx's major statement on philosophy.

Derrida's book is a meditation on this choice of image: the bourgeoisie haunted by Marx, Europe haunted by capitalism, Marx haunted by Hegel, and perhaps humanity haunted by its own shadows.

Derrida's main argument is that Marx's use of images of ghosts and metaphors of haunting reflects his own relationship to bourgeois thought. For Derrida the bourgeoisie is haunted by Marxism and Marxism is haunted by the bourgeoisie.

He argues that Marx is best valued as a spectral image to help philosophers today to escape persistent limits on their own views.

The hidden agenda is Derrida's critique of Hegel. He argues that Hegel's dialectic could never encompass the existence of the objective realities it refers to, and thus cannot be used to achieve a real reconciliation of contradictions.

Derrida believes that this argument, which is set out in his earlier books, undermines all dialectics.

Hegel

In fact the criticism is simply that made of Hegel by Feuerbach in the 1830s and 1840s.

It is a criticism of Hegel's idealism rather than his dialectic. Against a *materialist* dialectic it has no effect. The materialist dialectic can only function if it is understood as an abstraction from a more complex and concrete objective reality. This requirement is imposed on Marxism by its political priorities, rather than by any aspiration to mere philosophical coherence.

The assumption that there can be no dialectical reconciliation between ideals and realities is at the heart of Derrida's argument.

He observes that people do not merely live in the present; they also project themselves into the future through ideals.

But the ideals which arise from this search for a better future cannot be realised, according to Derrida. They can only haunt us - like ghosts. Yet for the same reason, Derrida believes, such ideals are not easily eliminated by our failure to achieve them. Ideals linger on and facilitate our ability to live into the future.

For Derrida, Marxism is one such ideal.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the bourgeoisie have claimed that Marxism and all the ideals it supposedly stands for are dead. Derrida objects to this, arguing that Marxism helps us grasp the ideal of a better future world and is an essential source with which to criticise false current ideas:

"No one can contest the fact that a dogmatism is attempting to install its worldwide hegemony in paradoxical and suspect conditions. There is today in the world a dominant discourse on the subject of Marx's work and thought, on the subject of Marxism . . . on the subject of the Socialist International and the universal revolution, on the subject of the more or less slow destruction of the revolutionary model in its Marxist interpretation; on the subject of the rapid precipitous recent collapse of societies that attempted to put it into effect . . . This dominating discourse . . . proclaims Marx is dead, communism is dead, very dead, and along with its hopes, its discourse, its theories and its practise. It says long live Capitalism, long live the Market, here's to the survival of economic and political liberalism . . . this triumphal conjuration is striving in truth to . . . hide from the fact that never, never in history has the horizon of the thing whose survival is being celebrated (namely all the old models of the capitalist and liberal world) been as dark, threatening and threatened." (pp. 51-52)

This sounds progressive. But in fact Derrida is only advocating that bourgeois thinkers, with no loyalty to the

working class, should use Marxism to broaden their horizons.

In this book Derrida departs from his normal approach, which is to provide detailed "readings" of texts in order to go beyond their accepted meaning.

It is evident that Derrida has read the relevant text by Marx - the polemic with Stirner in *The German Ideology* - but he categorically refuses to give a "reading" of the text.

It would be difficult to overemphasise how radically dissonant such an omission is in a writer whose life's work has been devoted to arguing for the irreducibility of the written text.

Instead the central and incorrect interpretation of Marx is casually taken over from another writer - Blanchot. It is used to establish the supposed inadequacy of Marxism as anything other than a useful set of "ideals".

Derrida attempts to turn Marx into an icon, whilst rejecting his dialectical method. Any "structured messianism", as he calls it, is attractive because it allows intellectuals to point to something beyond capitalism. But that is as far as it goes.

His rejection of the substance of Marxism is complete:

"We would be tempted to distinguish the spirit of the Marxist critique, which seems to be more indispensible today at once from Marxism as ontology, philosophical or metaphysical system, as 'dialectical materialism', from Marxism as historical materialism or method, and from Marxism incorporated in the apparatuses of party, State or workers' International." (p.68)

Derrida does not resist this "temptation" - and there isn't much left of Marxism after that.

Derrida's central idea has always been "intertextuality" - the observation that any piece of writing is made possible by and derives its character from its relationship to other writings. To be aware of those linkages enhances our understanding of the text.

Illusion

If we fail to be aware of these, we fall into the illusion that one way of reading a text exhausts its potential. The ambiguity of a text becomes a nuisance rather than a substantial and valuable part of its role in relating the intentions of individual writers to the social structure of ideas.

His "deconstructive" readings of texts point out the violence that is done to our expression of our ideas in writing by understanding concepts in terms of opposites (black/white, good/bad, speech/writing, true/false).

We should recognise the flexibility of meaning which exists because of the complex forms of expression which have become possible with the development of writing.

This "deconstructive turn" is the way Derrida usually tries to escape the oppressive limits of argument within the dominant ideology.

He escapes to the margins, to footnotes, to formal similarities, to vocabulary, to structures of reference. By doing so he broadens the scope for understanding and criticism of dominant ideas without *replacing* those dominant ideas.

The value he places on writing about writing (literary criticism) is a celebration of individual subjectivity.

In the subjective, arbitrary and trivial character of deconstruction lies the fundamental opposition between Marxism and Derrida's outlook.

Derrida attempts to turn Marx into an icon, whilst rejecting his dialectical method. Any "structured messianism", as he calls it, is attractive because it allows intellectuals to point to something beyond capitalism. But that is as far as it goes.

While Marxism also escapes the limits of the dominant ideology, it escapes not to the kind of individuality which preoccupies Derrida, but to the affirmation of class struggle.

Derrida is oracular, poetic, seeking a rhetoric of dissuasion. Marx is political, factual, seeking a path of significant action.

Marx recognised that those failings in the dominant ideology which facilitate internal criticism are not ultimately a matter of accident or illusion; they are the ideological consequences of the form of social organisation. Exposing the rhetorical devices and logical inconsistencies of capitalist ideology will not seriously dent capitalism as long as its *material* foundations are in place.

Social organisation contains class divisions. The social division of society make it possible to speak from the point of view of the working class, and in so doing to break with the "rationality" of capitalism and its ideology, by building a new perspective from the revolutionary material interests of the working class.

Thus Marxists do exactly what Derrida believes cannot be done - they criticise capitalism from outside the philosophy of the bourgeoisie.

Substance

While Derrida's intentions may have been honourable, his work is just one more reassurance to the intelligentsia that the substance of Marx can be ignored. Writers like him are themselves haunted by the logic of hypocrisy - they have come not to praise Marx but to bury him, and their eulogies depend on his being safely dead.

Derrida, along with Foucault, Lyotard, and all the other French "post-structuralist" and "post-modern" writers, represents part of a wider intellectual experience, of a left-leaning intelligentsia appalled by the face of late twentieth century capitalism.

For many of these people - particularly the semi-professional literary strata so well represented in France - both bourgeois nationalist ideologies and Marxism appear outdated.

Social democracy has continued to hold some attraction for them - but only because of its ability to command workers' votes and, in office, dispense government finance on cultural projects. Environmentalism has been attractive as a new a-historical humanism. But the dominant feeling has often been one of isolation and political paralysis.

Derrida has often appeared better than most writers in this tradition, for whom rationality threatens to be equivalent to repression. He has at times produced effective arguments to show that criticism of the dominant consensus is possible, if only obliquely so. This sets him apart from the most uncritical writers like Baudrillard or Rorty who argue for intellectual submission under the guise of relativism.

But Derrida, Habermas, MacIntyre and other similar "critical" postmodern intellectuals still uncritically adhere to the fundamentals of the bourgeois ideological perspective via their strict confinement of their criticism to its margins.

They justify their own passivity by presenting their personal circumstances and limits as universal conditions.

Their fundamental motivation is adaptation to the temporary success of capitalism in the twentieth century. No ideas of lasting value can come from that.

For a writer who values reading above all else, this book proves an effective, though unintended, autocritique by spectacle.

The inability of "deconstruction" to encompass Marx testifies clearly to its historically limited and uncritical character. The curse of Karl Marx strikes again!■

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