Trotskyist INTERNATIONAL

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Elections, SPD and the working class

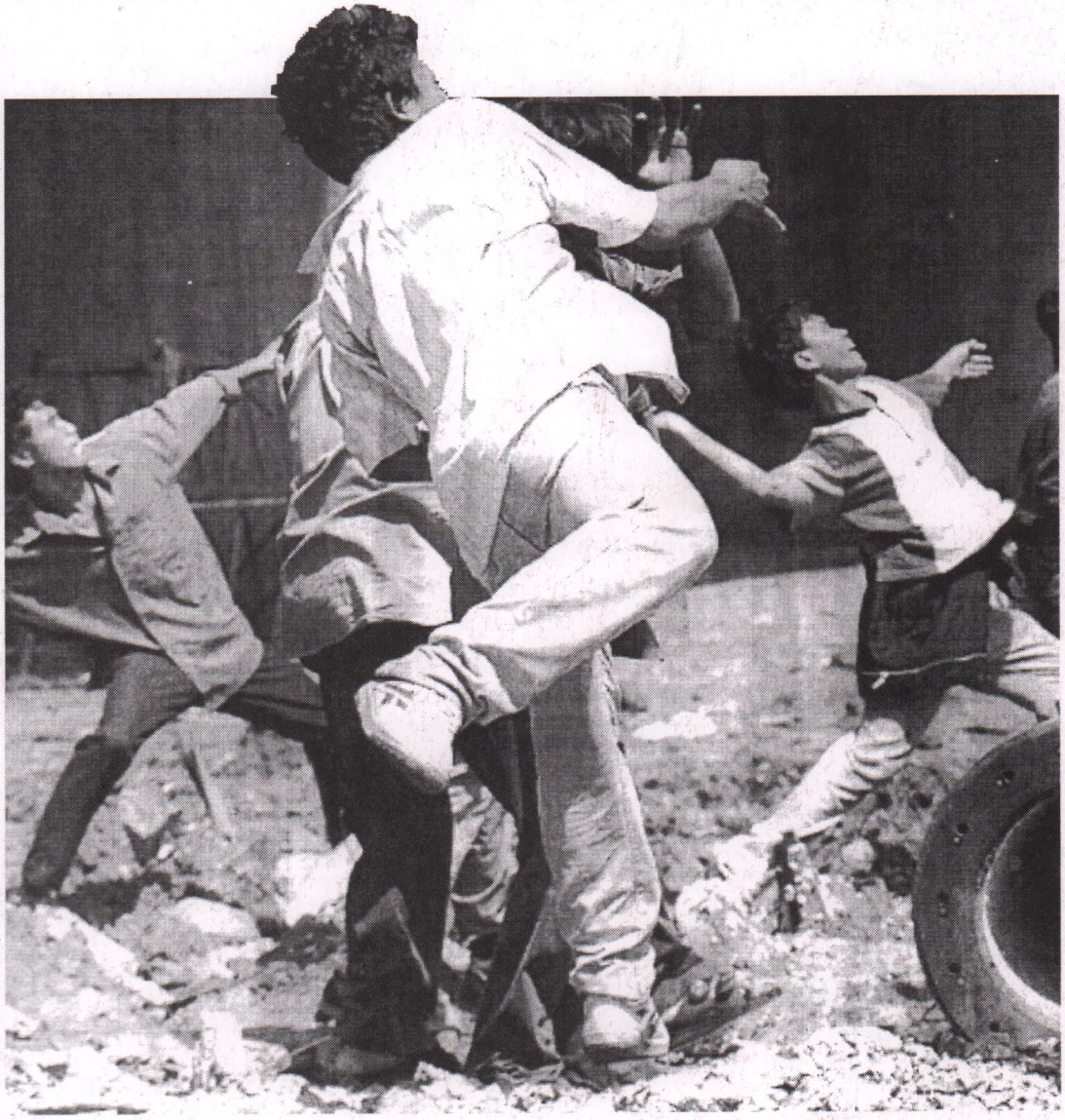


Unbroken resistance
The growth of the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia



French Trotskyism 1934-36
Turn to the masses!

Indonesia



in revolt

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Cover photo: Jakarta students fight the police

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INCORPORATING PERMANENT REVOLUTION

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Indonesia meltdown

The Indonesian revolution has begun

John McKee looks at the acute economic crisis, the students' struggle for democracy and the potential for a workers' and poor peasants' revolution in South East Asia's largest country.

THE INDONESIAN revolution has begun. The ousting of Suharto marks the beginning, not the end, of the Indonesian revolution. For nearly a third of a century he exercised an iron grip on this vast country of 210 million people. The coalescence of a student-led movement for democracy with a revolt of the urban masses against the economic crisis and the IMF austerity measures, brought about his downfall.

However, Suharto's replacement by his vice-president Jusuf Habibie is an attempt to save the bureaucratic military regime not to replace it with a democratic one. It is an attempt to head off revolution. The old elite who bled Indonesia white for so long are trying to engineer a slow, controlled, "democratic opening" which will give them a breathing space to create "new" political parties and a restrictive constitution. They hope in this way to swindle the masses out of their full democratic rights and relief from the acute economic hardship arising from the crisis and the IMF's "therapy".

But the deep roots of the political, social and economic crisis in Indonesia will make it impossible to limit things to changing a few personnel at the top, to releasing a few well-known prisoners and eventually holding a highly undemocratic election. Such cosmetic changes will not satisfy the masses who are breaking out of the atomisation and enforced passivity that Suharto and his cronies kept them in. The people of this huge country are awakening to political life, overcoming decades of enforced silence. Parties, trade unions and peasants' organisations are already emerging.

The Indonesian ruling class was split from top to bottom by the protracted crisis that opened last year. Army commander-in-chief General Wiranto has succeeded in removing Suharto's son in law General Prabowo, the man who gave the order to open fire on the students in May. For the moment, Wiranto is clearly the man in command, the one most trusted by imperialism and the Indonesian ruling class. But relations between Wiranto and Habibie are, reportedly, far from cordial.

The army has strengthened it's grip on government, holding three key ministries (Defence, Interior and Information). But the divisions within the ruling class exist within the military hierarchy as well and will probably erupt into open conflict as the crisis deepens. When elections come there is already a queue of former generals offering to play the role of "Mr Clean", a minimum job requirement for a presidential candidate given Suharto's record. But the Indonesian people – even if such an "anti-corruption government" replaces Habibie – will rapidly discover that they have swapped a swarm of gorged locusts for a swarm of hungry ones.

Sooner or later, such a revolutionary explosion was inevitable. Suharto's Indonesia had no democratic safety valves. All real opposition parties, all genuine trade unions and mass organisations – even reformist ones – were banned. The official party, Golkar, and the tame opposition parties, could not play that role. The leaders and militants of the illegal opposition have been repeatedly imprisoned or killed.

General Suharto's regime, which came to power in a military coup in 1965, destroyed the mass Communist Party (PKI) which had a claimed membership of two million. In this coup hundreds of thousands of PKI militants perished. For three decades, Suharto savagely crushed any sector of society which challenged the dictatorship. He waged a genocidal war against the people of East Timor, a country invaded by the Indonesian armed forces in 1975. Some 200,000 people died as a result of oppression and famine .

Massive loans and investments from the imperialist countries, allied to a very high rate of exploitation, resulted in a long period of economic growth under Suharto. But eventually the limits of world market growth and the overaccumulation of both Indonesian and imperialist capital have caused the current crisis. An added factor has been the wastefulness and corruption of the regime. Suharto used his political power to seize for his extended family an incredible slice of Indonesia's wealth. This has been estimated at anywhere between $17 bn and $46 bn. At least 80% of the top 400 companies in Indonesia are controlled through massive conglomerates run by 20 to 30 families, many linked to the Suharto family.

Suharto's decision earlier this year to stand again for president sent the Indonesian currency, the rupiah, into free fall. The privately held foreign

debt of the country stood at $70 bn. $50bn of foreign capital has fled Indonesia since the economic crisis started. The IMF, the commercial banks and Washington were worried sick. The IMF rushed in to bail out the regime with three successive packages of loans. But they did not do so out of disinterested concern for the country's development. They demanded the removal of all obstacles to foreign ownership of Indonesian industry. With their "debt for equity" schemes, the international monopolies sought to swallow up whole sections of bankrupt or ailing industry and banking.

The IMF's packages are at one and the same time a giant takeover of key assets of the Indonesian ruling class and the restoration of western commercial confidence in Indonesia by the imposition of a savage austerity programme on the mass of the people. No wonder Suharto and the Indonesian business elite jibbed at fully implementing these measures. They naturally resisted their own expropriation but they also hesitated to carry through the austerity programme in full because they realised it would goad the population to revolt. Yet the IMF and the international speculators pressed on and brought Suharto to his knees, economically, shortly before the masses brought him to his knees politically. Against their will, Washington and Wall St brought about a revolution in Indonesia.

Washington's nightmare now is that the entire political and military regime could fragment if popular mobilisations continue against austerity, inflation and price rises. They are right to be worried. Indonesia is a powder keg. In outlying islands there are long standing guerrilla movements fighting for independence, most notably in East Timor and Irian. Religious antagonisms, especially between Muslims and Christians and ethnic tensions, between the Chinese minority and the majority population, have increased as economic conditions have deteriorated. In the Javanese countryside decades of growing land hunger and polarisation between rich and poor farmers and landless labourers have only been held in check by the economy's rapid economic growth and efforts to export "surplus population" to the outer islands.

Who brought down Suharto?

The protest movement against Suharto developed in two phases. In February the students began their demonstrations for democratic reforms. Then, in early May, the students challenged the attempt to restrict their protests to the university campuses and took to the streets. When Suharto raised the fuel prices by 70% (as dictated by the IMF) the workers and the urban poor joined the movement en masse. Serious clashes took place with the army in many areas.

At Sudiman University in Central Java, 65 students were injured by rubber bullets and baton charges. In Medan, capital of Northern Sumatra, a week after students had marched through the streets, a massive riot took place following the ending of subsidies on fuel. This entry of the masses onto the stage opened the second phase which immediately threatened the existence of the Suharto regime.

Faced with the escalating scale of the mass protest, there were only two alternatives: deploy the army to bloodily repress the protests, or dismantle the regime. To choose the first option would have threatened the army with disintegration and led directly to the second scenario – but "from below"– by a popular revolutionary upheaval. The entire state machinery might then have split or disintegrated.

This became clear when a section of the army opened fire on protesting students, killing six from the elite University of Trisakti in Jakarta. The capital exploded on 14 May and rioting spread to other major cities. The army pulled back from an all-out confrontation, especially since many rank and file soldiers openly showed their sympathy for the protesters.

Faced with the escalating scale of the mass protest there were only two alternatives: deploy the army to bloodily repress the protests, or dismantle the regime

The Jakarta poor, normally confined to the massive slums surrounding the city, took to the streets in an orgy of looting and burning. The fact that troops did little to stop the rioting showed that the upper circles of the military and indeed of the Indonesian bourgeoisie were not prepared to go down with Suharto. While Chinese shops and businesses were often the target – because Chinese businessmen make up a heavy proportion of the retail sector – so too were symbols of the regime, especially those belonging to Suharto's family.

Of course, anti-Chinese chauvinism can play a dangerous and reactionary role. So too can political Islamism if it develops strongly. For the real enemy of the Indonesian masses is not to be located by nationality, religion or ethnicity but by class – the capitalist class in Indonesia and its overlords in the US, Europe and Japan.

By mid-May it was clear the regime was in its death agony. The Indonesian ruling class was simply unable to go on in the old way and the masses were unwilling to do so. As the students demanded the removal of Suharto and an end to the corrupt regime, other powerful figures joined them. While in some areas the army greeted the students with repression, in others, particularly in Jakarta, many soldiers showed open sympathy with the students' demands.

The US, which had been very circumspect in its comments throughout the early protests, made it clear to Suharto that it was time to go. Once this advice was widely known, the parliament, despite having been stuffed with Suharto and military appointees, called for him to go too. Realising the ruling class was turning against Suharto, the students occupied the parliament building. This nationwide media focus and the refusal of the military to clear the building meant simply Suharto had to go. But he tried to preserve the essential core of his regime by handing over to his deputy Habibie.



Sukarno in 1965, ousted by Suharto

His resignation thus represented only the most partial victory and the students knew it. They were demanding the trial of Suharto and investigations into the corruption of the regime, the release of political prisoners, the legalisation of political parties and new elections. They knew Habibie would not deliver any of these things voluntarily and correctly continued the occupation, demanding his resignation.

But the Indonesian ruling class, as represented in the parliament, was satisfied with Suharto's departure even if it was divided as to what should come next. They wanted the students off their back. Habibie used his support in ICMI, an Islamic organisation set up by Suharto, to send students from one of the Islamic universities to end the occupation by force. The political struggle moved into the streets and as legal rights are wrung out of the regime, old and new parties will enter the field.

The working class has hitherto played a restricted role. This is in large measure because all its organisations were crushed by Suharto, several times over, and because of the sudden onset of mass unemployment. It will now have the opportunity to build trade unions, factory councils and political parties.

The East Asian economic crisis

The underlying cause of the revolutionary situation in Indonesia lies in the deep economic crisis of the whole

region since mid-1997. Industrial growth, which was running in double figures each year for nearly two decades, has slumped to declines in the range 5-15%. Starting in Thailand last year the crisis spread to Malaysia and then to Indonesia. By early 1998 1.7 million Thais, 1 million Malayans and 2.3 million Indonesians had lost their jobs.

Both Malaysia's Mahatir Mohammed and Indonesia's Suharto resorted to racist demagogy – both blaming "the Jews" who "run" the IMF, before capitulating to its dictates. Across the region, the huge capital flows from Japan, the US and Europe which fuelled the tiger economies have gone into reverse. During 1996, the last year of south East Asia's "long boom", some $93 bn of new private capital was invested in Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea. In 1997 the net figure was a $12bn outflow. The overall swing represents 10% of these countries' GDP. The former "Asian Tigers" are now wracked by a terrible economic crisis which reveals their continued status as semi-colonies; politically independent but economically subordinated to the great imperialist powers of North America, Europe and Japan.

It is plain, even to bourgeois apologists, that their spectacular growth from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s was not the result either of neo-liberalism or an "Asian model" of capitalism. These countries have not achieved "take off", that is, independent development which will rapidly make them the equals of Europe and North America. Their growth was the product of massive investment by western and Japanese multi-nationals, massive loans foisted on them by globally powerful banks and generous credit to their governments tied to the purchase of capital equipment and military hardware.

The initial reason for the US-sponsored drive to develop South-East Asia was to build a bulwark against "Communism" in the region during the Cold War. The reason for global finance's eagerness to invest was somewhat different; the overproduction of capital and the stagnating profit rates in the metropolitan heartlands drew it towards the temptingly high rates of exploitation in South East Asia. As a new proletariat, many millions strong, was assembled under the control of bonapartist or semi-bonapartist regimes, it seemed that this bonanza would go on for ever. But every capitalist crisis is rooted in its preceding boom. Capital chokes on its own superabundance. The bigger the boom the harder the slump.

However, these millions of new proletarians would not indefinitely suffer such super-exploitation and political oppression. Even highly industrialised South Korea is groaning under the yoke of an IMF package which demands privatisations, closures and massive layoffs, as at Hyundai. The Korean workers have shown they will not remain passive before this challenge. Their resistance is an inspiration to workers facing similar attacks as in Taiwan.

Adding depth to the East Asian crisis is the current mess that Japan – the region's superpower – finds itself in. An acute banking and industrial crisis is forcing the Japanese ruling class to face up to the need to "reform" its entire post-war system – a reform which will seriously undermine its social stability.

In Indonesia, the effects of the Asian crisis have been made even worse by the IMF-dictated "bail out plan" which in the short term means misery for the masses and in the long term the complete opening up of Indonesia to US, Japanese and EU multinationals. Whilst throwing a lifeline to the regime by offering $43bn. to bail out the bankrupt banks and businesses run by Suharto and his cronies, the IMF insisted that state expenditure had to be slashed on welfare, education and above all on state subsidies on basic goods, which kept prices down for the poor.

The IMF insists that state industries be targeted for closure or privatisation. The only buyers in present conditions are, of course, the western multinationals which will buy them up at rock bottom prices. The IMF and its imperialist masters are playing a dangerous double game. Whilst criticising corruption, and advocating a turn to democracy – that is, suggesting an end to the dictatorial regime – the IMF package puts any new regime which carries it out against the wall.

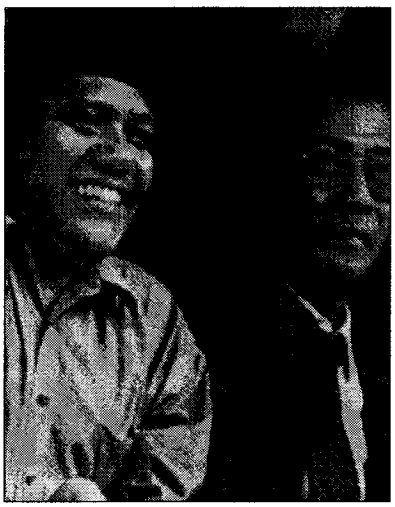
In Indonesia the effects of the Asian crisis have been made even worse by the IMF-dictated "bail out plan" which in the short term means misery for the masses and in the long term the complete opening up of Indonesia to US, Japanese and EU multinationals

The really explosive social fuel of the movement for democracy was, and remains, resistance to the economic hardship. But this hardship is caused not only and not mainly by the Suharto clan's corruption, but by the crisis of Indonesian capitalism, by imperialist disinvestment and last, but not least, by IMF "aid" and its strings. The new regime inherits all of this.

The struggle after Suharto's fall

Habibie may have been installed by Suharto to change only the facade of his regime, but to hold onto power he has been forced to make a few limited concessions. He has been forced to promise elections, though as yet without a date. He has announced that he will legalise parties. He has released Muchtar Pakpahan, the leader of the Indonesian Workers' Welfare Association (SBSI) who had been sentenced to four years in prison for "inciting work-





Seeking to prevent further revolution in Indonesia: Left to right, General Wiranto, Rais, Pakpahan, Pamungkas

ers". But hundreds of political prisoners still languish in jail, including the leader of the East Timorese national liberation movement Xanana Gusmao who is serving a twenty year prison sentence.

The prospect of Habibie lasting for long is slim. He is respected and trusted neither by the business elite nor the army. Nor is he fully trusted by the imperialist banks because he was formerly the advocate of state sponsored industrial development in aircraft and shipbuilding, precisely the areas targeted by the IMF for closure or privatisation.

If the movement for democratic rights once more shows its power on the streets, Habibie cannot rely on the army to crush it. The soldiers and their families have also suffered the economic effects of the crisis. They have shown their sympathy for the students and clearly do not wish to fire on the people.

The students, and indeed the rioters from the shanty-towns, wisely did not provoke the heavily armed troops but fraternised with them. A revolutionary movement in the streets can take advantage of these divisions by making propaganda for soldiers' democratic rights, the election of committees in the barracks, the election of officers and the investigation and purging of the corrupt and reactionary officers. By such persistent agitation, the army ranks can be won over to the side of the people.

But there are real weaknesses in the democratic movement led by the students. The students want reform and they want democracy. But what sort of reform and what sort of democracy? The "economic reforms" demanded by the IMF go beyond the ending of nepotism and corruption. They want the full neo-liberal shock therapy to be applied to Indonesia. This means the even greater prostration of the country before the multinationals.



Britain's Gordon Brown gives Suharto a helping hand

As for democracy, if it is a democracy for the millionaires, for the landowners, the press lords and the clergy then it will not meet the simplest needs of the youth, the urban poor, the peasants or the working class. Many student leaders have kept their distance from the workers' movement and expressed open disapproval of the uprisings by the urban poor in Medan and Jakarta. But others have held a series of meetings between student and workers' representatives and in one case the latter signed a national platform demanding the resignation of Suharto, radical democratic and economic reform, and no further attacks on the workers.

It should be no surprise if, after thirty years of dictatorship, most students and workers have as yet no clear vision about which kind of society they want. Nevertheless, after the downfall of Suharto the student movement will tend to divide in its aims and programme. What united them up to the fall of Suharto was the struggle for democratic rights, the destruction of the old regime, the ending of corruption and winning of free elections. To the extent that these goals are won, the students will tend to divide along political and, indeed, class lines.

Those students from the more privileged classes will see the answer as the free market, neo-liberal "reforms" advocated by the IMF. Others may see the answer as the continuation of the Indonesian mixture of private and state capitalism of Suharto and Habibie but one radically cleansed of corruption – a utopian project if ever there was one.

One wing is more Islamist and looks to figures like Amien Rais – who demagogically denounce corruption – to lead the struggle against the regime. Rais played a key role in voicing the "Suharto must go" sentiments, unlike the secular bourgeois nationalist Megawati Sukarnoputri, who was very nearly silent. But Rais showed himself to be no revolutionary at the decisive moment, retreating at the first serious threat by the army, demobilising the mass demonstration called for 20 May. He cautiously welcomed the army's role in changing the Presidency while leaving the regime completely intact.

Another wing of the student movement is at one and the same time pro-bourgeois democracy and pro-IMF. They could provide the cadres for the building of a new bourgeois neo-liberal party around figures like Ginandjar Kartasasmita. Such a development, similar to what happened in the Philippines after the downfall of Marcos, would be a serious threat to the masses. But, as the experience of the Cory Aquino led "people's power" revolution in the Philippines shows, bourgeois parliamentarism linked to a popularly elected executive presidency will do nothing to end the poverty and misery that afflict the Indonesian people. Far from challenging the IMF programme, which will cause even more unemployment and poverty for the masses in the years ahead, it will prove an instrument for imposing it.

The obstacles to this reactionary project are, on the one hand, the most rapid, full and revolutionary democratisation as possible – as many students demand. This would weaken the state apparatus and expose the bourgeoisie's weakness amongst the masses before they can build new bourgeois parties and structures.

On the other hand, a retreat can be blocked by the the political and trade union mobilisation of the working class against the IMF austerity package and the "economic reforms".

The most consistently revolutionary of the students, those who want to smash the entire military apparatus which can launch new coups, those who want to root out all the corrupt businessmen, without handing the country over to the IMF and the multinationals, will have to turn to the workers' organisations and those of the urban and rural poor. They will have to put their literacy and other skills, at the service of building a revolutionary workers' party which alone can complete the Indonesian revolution.

Already one strand of student activism has shown its willingness appeal to the workers for support. Where students have invited workers to join their demonstrations they have responded. For example, 300 factory workers from east Jakarta, wearing red armbands, joined a medical school demonstration in early May, while the SBSI held a demonstration of several thousand to protest the IMF attacks. Obviously, it is this current which can play the most progressive role. It is precisely the organised workers' movement and the masses that hold the key to fundamental and lasting change in Indonesia.

The workers' movement

The Suharto regime allowed no genuine independent mass labour organisations. The official union federation, like all like other official unions in East Asia, was a stooge of the old regime and is useless for waging the class struggle. An independent trade union, the SBSI, was founded in 1992 and survived the repression. Many of its ten thousand members were leading activists in their enterprises. The SBSI has already led several militant local strikes. Muchtar Pakpahan, its leader who was released from jail in May, has said that he supports the former finance minister and now "superminister" for economic affairs, Ginandjar

Kartasasmita. This man is very much pro-IMF and is a candidate for a future neo-liberal party. Pakpahan has been immediately drawn into discussions with IMF envoys.

Clearly, the SBSI is politically very weak. Indonesian workers need to learn the lessons of the so-called "independent" unions in Russia – strong initially amongst the miners – which soon fell into the hands of the neo-liberals. This led to class collaboration, the creation of a corrupt trade union bureaucracy in the pockets of the managers and employers, and unpaid wages for the workers. The only unions which can defend the jobs and wages of Indonesia's workers, especially in the crisis conditions wracking East Asia, will be militantly anti-capitalist and anti-IMF ones.

To prevent existing union leaders selling out, and to be able to replace those who do, a powerful democracy of rank and file workers has to be built in the unions as they recruit millions of new members in the coming months. Factory and workplace councils, elected at mass meetings, whose delegates are open to immediate recall by their electors, must control the leaders. Officials must also be instantly recallable and paid the average wage of their members. But the key to a workers' movement that really fights and defends its members' interests lies in the field of politics. If the workers are to escape domination by neo-liberal politics then they need revolutionary communist politics.

Many militants of the Communist Party , the PKI, are still in jail. The PKI could become a significant force again. At the moment, however, the most important left party is the People's Democratic Party (PRD) which has significant support in the working class and the peasantry. Its militants were in the forefront of the struggles in 1996, when Suharto had Megawati Sukarnoputri ousted from the leadership of the legal opposition party the PDI.

Its programmatic statement – The New Order and Capitalism – calls for "people's power that will lead to an economic, political and cultural democracy", i.e. that the current struggles must be limited to the fight for democratic rights. The culmination of these struggles it sees as a "People's Coalition Government". Moreover it sees figures and parties such as those of Megawati and/or Amien Rais as necessary participants in, if not leaders of, such a government. This is the classic Stalinist popular front strategy.

Even if one measures the PRD in terms of its struggle for democracy, it is far from revolutionary. Indeed it abdicates from any leadership of the masses in the fight to overthrow and smash the military regime. This can be seen in its position after Suharto's resignation. It called for Suharto's puppet parliament, the MPR, "to hold an extraordinary session within one month". It called on this session to reject Habibie as president, legalise parties, end the military's role in politics, release all political prisoners, respect self-determination for East Timor and set up a transitional government.



Jakarta students celebrate the downfall of President Suharto; many want Habibie to go

Only if the MPR refuses to do this will PRD then "call for a general election to be held within three months". Once again this election should have to be supervised by "a transitional government composed of the different forces and individuals which have and are playing a critical role in the struggle against the dictatorship" (Morning Star Saturday May 30 1998).

If the PRD is to play any progressive role in the Indonesian revolution then its cadres and working class base will have to dump this wretched programme and oust those leaders who stand by it.

It is significant that the army wants to release Pakpahan and some East Timor independence leaders but not the PKI supporters of 1965 and not the eight prisoners of the PRD. It is the duty of all leftists to campaign vigorously for their release. But there are also reports that other labour activists have formed an Indonesian Workers' Party. Wilhelmus Bokar, its spokesman, is reported as saying, "we will stage an all out battle to win the general election and improve the welfare of the workers. If a labour party can govern in Britain and Australia, why not in Indonesia?"

All signs of the urge to class independence are important. The working class must not be dragged in the wake of some military, populist or islamist demagogue. It needs organisational and political independence in order to play a leading role in the struggles ahead. Organisational independence or even the labels, "worker", "socialist" or "communist" are not sufficient. Workers need to make sure that their party is a revolutionary party which has learned the lessons of the past. Neither Labourite nor Stalinist reformism can provide the Indonesian workers with the instrument they need to take power.

The working class must not allow itself to be dragged behind some military, populist or islamist demagogue

Only the perspective and programme which the Bolsheviks worked on in 1917 and which is embodied in Leon Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring the workers victory. This strategy supports and pushes to the forefront the vital demands of the workers, the peasants and students for democracy, land, jobs, increased wages. It spells out how the workers and their allies must establish control over the economy and society, win over the rank and file soldiers and arm themselves against the counterrevolution.

But it recognises that the goal during the revolutionary crisis, be it of long or short duration, must be the establishment of a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government based on councils of the workers, the poor peasants, the urban poor and the soldiers. Only such a government can set about ending the exploitation of Indonesia by "native" capitalism and imperialism.

Whither Indonesia?

Fundamental change in Indonesia will come about only by a firm commitment to carry through the democratic struggle to the end. In short, it needs to be waged by revolutionary means and its goal become real power for the majority, the workers and the poor peasants. The working class, leading all the oppressed into battle, must fight – by mass demonstrations,

factory and land occupations, the general strike and uprising – to sweep away the entire foundations of corruption and exploitation. It must break up the military hierarchy and win the soldiers to forming a mass democratic peoples' militia, controlled by the workers, poor peasants and rank and file soldiers themselves. This means specifically:

- End all restrictions on the formation of political parties, lift the specific bans on the PKI and all Marxist parties;
- Release all political prisoners!
- Freedom to form trade unions, student unions and peasant unions independent of all state control!
- Freedom of assembly; against censorship in the media. For an end to big business and state control of TV, radio and the press;
- In order to thwart all attempts to restrict constitutional reform as much as possible it is crucial to fight for the convening of a sovereign constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage of all over the age of 16;
- Its delegates must be instantly recallable by their constituents so that they cannot break their mandates to the people;

The working class, leading all the oppressed into battle, must fight – by mass demonstrations, factory and land occupations, the general strike and uprising – to sweep away the entire foundations of corruption and exploitation

- It must immediately set about the resolution of the major problems facing the poor – breaking free from the shackles of the IMF, expropriating the great landowners, expropriating the 30 families who own industry and commerce, liberating the peoples of East Timor and Irian.

The latter aim is not so as to Balkanise Indonesia, thus putting its human and natural resources even more at the mercy of the imperialist predators, but to lay the basis of an expanding union of the workers and popular masses. This can only be based on the freedom to secede or – as is greatly preferable – to unite. Last, but not least, there must be no question of imposing sharia law as the Islamists wish. There must be a total separation between the mosques, temples and churches and the state and the school.

An emergency plan needs to be adopted to combat the catastrophe ripping through the Indonesian economy and to meet the needs of the masses . This should include the following key demands;

- Reject the IMF programme and retain subsidies on food and fuel. Form committees of workers and housewives to control prices and prevent hoarding of food by distributors;
- Renounce all the debts run up by Suharto and his clique with the imperialist banks. Demand the return of the looted billions salted away in the western banks;
- Expropriate the Suharto clan's property and that of the 30 families;
- Put Suharto and his principal supporters on trial before a tribunal of workers, peasants and the oppressed nationalities for their genocidal crimes;
- For a living wage as calculated by the trade unions and factory committees. For a sliding scale of wages to protect against inflation;
- Immediately reinstate all workers made redundant or laid off. Expropriate any firm which refuses reinstatement, or declares itself bankrupt;
- Place all nationalised industry under the control of the workers. Remove all industry from army control and place it at the disposal of the state;
- For an agrarian revolution: cancel the peasants' debts to the money lenders, expropriate the big landlords and redistribute the lands to the peasants and rural labourers. Introduce a massive aid programme of loans, fertilisers and machinery to increase the productivity of the land. Expand and promote co-operative production;
- Recognise the right of self-determination, up to and including complete secession, for the nations such as East Timor, Irian and Aceh, where there are movements for independence;
- To fight the IMF and the imperialist multinationals, a voluntary union of the peoples of the entire region is necessary. For a Socialist United States of East Asia.

The full programme of revolutionary democracy and of economic measures to defeat the IMF, the multinational plunderers and their Indonesian agents, can only be carried out by a workers' and peasants' government that acts in the interest of the masses and not the capitalists, native or foreign. But it will only be able to do so if its is based on councils of delegates of the industrial, commercial and rural workers, the urban poor, the peasants and the rank and file soldiers.

Moreover, these mass organisations have to arm themselves and win the soldiers to their side, if a repetition of 1965 is not to occur. These councils need to spring up all over Indonesia now, to lead the struggle and to make sure that the likes of Amien Rais or Megawati Sukarnoputri do not take it over and betray it, as Cory Aquino did in the Philippines.

Moreover, the example of such a revolutionary struggle can spread like wildfire in the whole region, which is suffering in different degrees from the same crisis and faces the same enemies. It could spread to countries like Korea and China where the working class and its gains are under attack.

But to win the masses to this programme needs a party of militants to fight for it today – a new revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) party, part of a new Leninist-Trotskyist International. The LRCI is fighting today to build such parties and such an International.

What can workers in the imperialist countries and the semi-colonies do to aid the revolution in Indonesia? First and foremost they can expose their own governments' collusion with Suharto's dictatorship and their plundering of Indonesia. The reformist leaders – agents of imperialism – should be pressed to abandon their support for repression against the Indonesian people.

In Britain the Labour Government has carried on the Tory policy of arms sales to Indonesia. The water cannon and gas used against demonstrators are British made and supplied, as are the light tanks which stand guard outside the Presidential Palace. The US and Australia continue their "military co-operation" and joint exercises with the Indonesian military. Australia recognises Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. Until recently, the US was secretly training the most notorious death squad grouping in the Indonesian army – the Kopassus Red Berets.

As to the exploitation of Indonesia by the multinationals and the IMF, all socialists and class conscious workers should fight to force the G8 governments to withdraw support for the IMF deal, return Suharto's plunder secreted in their banks and send massive aid, without strings, to the workers and peasants of Indonesia.

In all countries, the unions and political organisations should mobilise financial and material aid to rebuild the Indonesian workers movement. At the first sign of imperialist intervention, the workers' movement of the imperialist countries and the semi-colonies should take direct action to stop it.

- Down with the Indonesian military dictatorship!
- Down with IMF sponsored hunger-reforms!
- Down with the multinational plunderers of Indonesia!
- Long live the revolutionary struggle for full democratic rights!
- Long live the struggle of the people of East Timor and Irian for their freedom
- For a revolutionary workers' and poor peasants' government in Indonesia!■

With the fall of the dictatorship, old parties and old programmes will resurface. In the heat of battle a new generation of activists will have to learn from tragedies. Foremost among them is the disastrous strategy of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) that had its bloody denouement in 1965.

The road to a bloodbath

WHEN THE five year war to establish Indonesian independence was finally won against the Dutch in 1950, a troubled democratic interlude in the life of the country began. In the 1950s, Indonesia faced the same the problem as other newly independent nations after World War Two. Despite its victory over the Dutch, it was a nation still held in the economic grip of imperialism. Oil, the second largest foreign earner after rubber, was in the hands of Anglo-Dutch Shell and a number of US companies.

Rubber, tea, coffee and sugar plantations were largely owned by Dutch and British concerns. Banking was dominated by the British and Dutch, with the indigenous Chinese community as a minor partner. Inter-island shipping was in the hands of the Dutch owned KPM. The new government was even saddled with the old colony's "debts" to the Netherlands, despite the massive profits drawn from the country by the Dutch over the centuries.

The economy was in poor shape. Agriculture and transport infrastructure had been severely damaged by the Japanese occupation and the war against the Dutch. The population, especially on Java, was increasing dramatically. In 1950, it stood at 77 2 million, by 1961 it was over 97 million. As the rural population increased, the size of family landholdings declined. Plots became uneconomic and were mortgaged or sold. Peasants became rural labourers or moved to the burgeoning cities looking for work.

A new government, dominated by the major parties that had existed before the war, was established. President Sukarno had led the struggle against the Dutch. Sukarno stood "above" the parties but he possessed few formal powers under the provisional constitution. Elections were delayed as the parties and the army jockeyed for power.

Sukarno's party, the PNI, drew its support from the abangan (nominal) Muslims in the rural areas as well as from the Christians of the outer islands and the Hindus of Bali. It also had major support in the cities from the state bureaucracy and white collar workers.

The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which had been suppressed but not illegalised in 1948, made a spectacular recovery in the years of democracy. It rapidly came to dominate the urban workers' movement through its trade union organisation, SOBSI, and its Indonesian Peasant Front, (BTI) expanded rapidly amongst the peasants and rural labourers of central and east Java.

The PKI was, however, wedded to the Stalinist theory of "stages" in the revolution. Indonesia was correctly characterised as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country, where the struggle against imperialism and for a solution to the land question remained central. For the PKI, however, this meant that the current stage of the struggle was to be limited to the fight to remove the remnants of colonialism . Hence, the key tasks were to win back Irian and take over the old colonial holdings, and redistribute the land to the peasants by breaking the hold of the landlords.

For this, it was argued, a National United Front was needed, a block of all "progressive" classes against the reactionary "feudalists" and those sections of the bourgeoisie tied to imperialism, the so called "comprador bourgeoisie". Above all, this meant making a block with Sukarno and the PNI who, it falsely claimed, would lead the petit-bourgeois and the progressive bourgeois forces in the fight for genuine independence.

The reactionary parties were the Masyami, linked to landlordism and feudalism, and the small socialist party, PSI, which was characterised as a stooge of western, especially American, imperialism, something its leadership certainly was.

This classic "popular front" conception of the struggle meant that the demands of the workers had to wait until the "democratic stage" of the revolution had been achieved. This was combined with a slavish support for Sukarno who was seen as the key figure that the PKI could influence and push leftwards. The President was seen as the vehicle to achieve one of the PKI's key aims – entry into the government. The results of this policy were not slow to be seen. By March 1952 the PKI was informing SOBSI that striking for higher pay was "sectarian" as it threatened the united national front policy.

In the 1955 elections, the PNI gained the largest vote, 22%, and 57 seats in parliament. The PKI did unexpectedly well with 16.4% of the vote and 39 seats. But the results ensured the continuation of a series of coalition governments, all aimed at excluding the PKI, and all inherently unstable. In this situation, Sukarno became an increasingly influential figure and arbiter between the parties.

By the 1960s, Sukarno had constructed a classic "left bonapartist" regime, by which he attempted to raise himself through control of the state above the parties and classes. But he also needed to lean on the masses and, above all, the PKI, in order to pursue the struggle with the Dutch and even up to 1961 against a rebel CIA-backed government in Sumatra.

By 1962, the PKI was growing, under Sukarno's protection, into an apparently unstoppable mass organisation. Its peasant organisation claimed 5 7 million members. SOBSI had over 3 million members and the PKI itself claimed a membership of 2 million, with youth and women's organisations adding another 3 million sympathisers. That year two leaders of the PKI were finally appointed ministers although, in deference to the army, not in the inner cabinet.

In 1963, after a visit to Moscow and Beijing, the PKI linked itself firmly to the Chinese side in the Sino-Soviet split and immediately stepped up its work amongst the rural masses. In 1963, the PKI launched a campaign in the rural areas under the slogan "class struggle in the countryside". It involved a series of, "unilateral actions" to enforce the land reform laws which had been passed in 1959 and 1960 but never properly implemented.

These laws, which placed a maximum and minimum limit on landholdings, fell well short of the PKI's formal commitment to "those who work the land should own it". Nevertheless, because Sukarno had proposed them, the PKI had supported them in parliament. However, even these mild land redistribution proposals were thwarted.

Of the 337,445 hectares of land meant for redistribution, by 1963, only some 35,000 had been, often because leading PNI and NU figures in the localities were landlords themselves. The BTI's occupations and seizures of land were accompanied by demands for a purge of the Agrarian Department. This campaign was partly intended as a challenge to the block on the entry of the PKI to the highest levels of government and its exclusion from key ministries and committees.

The tactic backfired dramatically, despite the belated support of Sukarno. In central Java, stronghold of the right wing of the PNI, the landlords mobilised against the BTI with unexpected force. In east Java the NU youth group, Ansor,

with the connivance of the police and civil authorities, organised flying squads to attack the BTI occupations. The Muslim religious institutions, themselves owners of large tracts of land, called for a religious war against the atheist PKI/BTI. By early 1965, after serious clashes with Police and Ansor thugs, the PKI was emphasising the need to "avoid provocation" and "improve Nasakom co-operation with all patriotic elements including the armed forces".

The PKI's political retreat in its main strongholds in East and Central Java gave confidence to the reactionary forces and weakened the BTI's credibility amongst the peasants.

By the mid-1960s, Indonesia was facing an economic and political crisis. The announcement by the British of a new state, the federation of Malaysia, replete with British bases and containing parts of Borneo that Indonesia had originally laid claim to, provoked a confrontation. The announcement of independence led to mass demonstrations and the burning of the British and Malayan embassies. Military confrontations took place on the Kalimantan and Borneo border. The PKI organised takeovers of British holdings and plantations, which the army then quickly stepped in to run and control.

The PKI proposed to Sukarno the establishment of a "Fifth Force", an armed organisation of workers and peasants, alongside the armed forces and police. Zhou En Lai offered to provide arms for such a militia when Indonesian minister and leftist Subandrio visited China in 1965. Shell and the American oil companies were placed under government supervision and Indonesia withdrew from the IMF and World Bank.

By August 1965, Sukarno was declaring a new anti-imperialist axis of Jakarta, Beijing and Hanoi and accusing the army of dragging its feet on arming the people. Sukarno instituted a purge of the PNI to remove many of its right-wing, anti-PKI elements from leadership positions. The Indonesian ruling class was now deeply divided. The masses were constantly on the streets and the army feared that the PKI was pushing for power. The airforce, under Omar Dhani, an ally of Sukarno, had started training the "Fifth Force", actually PKI cadres, at its Halim airforce base in Jakarta. Omar visited China to arrange for small arms shipments. In September, Ahmed Yani one of the army commanders, announced that the army was against the "Fifth Force".

Rumours of coups abounded as army day approached on 12 October and troops arrived in large numbers in Jakarta. It was clear that one side or the other would strike to try and resolve the duality of power that was arising within the state forces. On 30 September, an attempted coup was launched from Halim airforce base.

Sukarno quickly went to Halim for "consultations" with the 30 September Movement as the rebel forces were called. Meanwhile, General Suharto, in the absence of the high command, had taken control of the army. The Halim forces failed to press home their attack and Suharto organised forces against them. Within 24 hours he was firmly in control of Jakarta and declaring he would crush the conspiracy. On the 2 October, the PKI's paper declared its support for the 30 September Movement which it described as an inter-army conflict. This sealed the party's fate.

With the defeat of the coup and the discovery of the generals' bodies at Halim, the right wing moved in for the kill. Although Sukarno, who had never been directly implicated in the coup, remained President, the anti-Sukarno element in the army now had the upper hand. The PKI was blamed by the army for the coup and mass arrests began. Anti-PKI student organisations were formed and protected by the army while they burnt down PKI headquarters and attacked the SOBSI. 10,000 PKI activists were in prison by December in Jakarta and West Java.

The real white terror was launched in the countryside, in the PKI/BTI strongholds of Central and East Java and in Bali. In October, Suharto sent trusted commandos into Central Java and ordered out unreliable troops. Wholesale massacres of suspected PKI sympathisers took place. Muhammadiyah proclaimed that the extermination of the PKI was a "holy war", a factor that accelerated the massacres, especially of abangan villagers. Leftists from the PNI who had participated in the land campaigns also fell victim to the terror. In Bali, it was not the Islamists but the Hindu landlords, in conjunction with the army and police, who instituted the massacres.



PKI militants await their fate after their arrest in 1965

Within a few months, over half a million Indonesians, mostly peasants, had been slaughtered. Some put the figure as high as a million.

Mass arrests continued and even a decade later 100,000 suspects remained incarcerated in prison camps across Indonesia. The PKI was paralysed throughout, making no attempt to mount a defence despite organising over twenty million sympathisers.

The PKI had never been organised as a combat party, instead, it sought to gain power through parliamentary or bonapartist methods.

It was a party unprepared for revolutionary struggle and civil war, despite the fact that twice before in its history it had been bloodily crushed by the military. It had little in the way of an illegal apparatus and when its leaders were arrested, and then shot, its Central Committee remained dispersed and in hiding.

The leadership vainly looked to Sukarno to protect them, but the President himself was afraid of the high command of the army. He watched as his mass base of support was destroyed.

The PKI militants, and the peasants who supported them, paid the price for its leadership's commitment to a block with the "progressive bourgeoisie" as the route to power.

Suharto's bloody destruction of the PKI still weighs heavily on the opposition movements in Indonesia. The lessons of that bloody counter-revolution need to be learnt by a new generation of workers, poor farmers, urban poor against the native and foreign imperialist exploiters.

First amongst these lessons is never to rely on another Sukarno as the PKI did. To give no political support to Sukarno's daughter, Megawati, nor other figures like Amien Rais or General Wiranto.

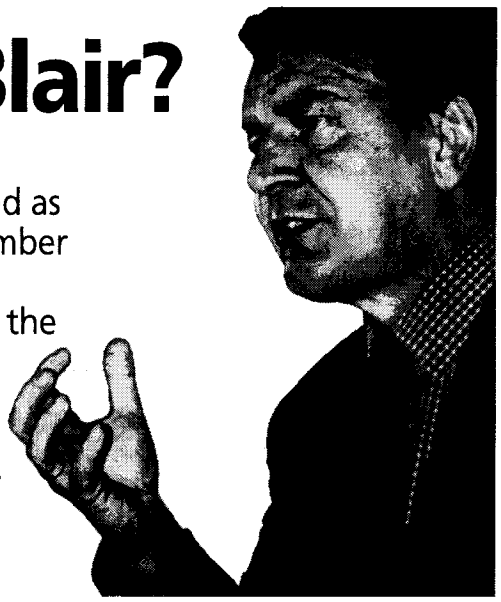
No section of the bourgeoisie is a national revolutionary force that can be relied on to bring democracy or fight against imperialism.

A united or popular front with such figures, one which subordinates the workers and poor peasants struggle to end their exploitation to a stage under such rulers is a noose around the .necks of the oppressed as 1965 showed in the most bloody fashion imaginable.■

German elections

Gerhard Schröder

Germany's Tony Blair?



In March 1998, Gerhard Schröder was nominated as the SPD's candidate for Chancellor in the September general election. His long time rival, SPD party leader Oscar Lafontaine, nominated him. This is the SPD's "dream ticket". **Martin Suchanek** of Gruppe Arbeitermacht analyses the background to his rise and his prospects should the SPD form the new government after the elections.

GERHARD SCHRÖDER established his uncontested place as SPD candidate for Chancellor after a landslide victory in the provincial elections in Lower-Saxony. The party leader Oscar Lafontaine, was forced to nominate his rival. Thus the most popular SPD politician with the electorate was proposed by the most popular SPD leader amongst the party membership. What are the differences between these two men?

Schröder certainly represents the right wing of the SPD. Like most of the current party leaders, he started his political life on the left wing of the party. In the 1970s he was the leader of the Jusos, the SPD youth organisation and a supporter of the pro-Stalinist wing of that organisation. In the early 1980s he defended anti-nuclear power protesters as a lawyer, calling for nuclear disarmament and the closure of nuclear power plants. He was the first regional SPD leader to form a coalition government with the Greens, in Lower Saxony.

As late as 1994, when he lost against Rudolf Scharping in the race for the SPD candidacy, he was perceived as the left wing candidate as against the "traditionalist" Scharping. However, Schröder was already moving rapidly to the right, as could be seen from the fact that he was supported by the right wing of the trade union bureaucracy - most importantly the IG Chemie (chemical workers' union) leader, Rappe.

Therefore it was no surprise that, as soon as Tony Blair became the leader of the British Labour Party, Schröder began to imitate him. He declared "law and order" central to social democratic values. He "discovered" the need to tighten immigration controls. He publicly disagreed with his own party's policy of a guaranteed apprenticeship for all young people, paid for by the bosses. He worked hard on projecting an image as "young and dynamic", as a "moderniser" in German politics.

However, it would be wrong to regard Schröder and Blair as identical. There are important differences both in terms of their aims and the relation they seek between their party and the trade unions.

Unlike Blair, Schröder does not aim to break the organic links between the SPD and the German working class. Rather he represents a wing of social democratic reformism with roots in both trade unions and the party bureaucracy.

This wing sees the way forward for the unions and the party as accepting neo-liberalism and "globalisation" whilst softening their social effects. It represents a type of "business unionism", willing to concede a scaled down role for itself in a leaner, fitter, "restructured" German capitalism. This part of the labour bureaucracy sees no alternative to working harmoniously with the bosses to make German capitalism more competitive on the world market. It hopes to win a slice of the pie for itself and some crumbs to placate its social base in the labour aristocracy.

These bureaucrats and politicians do not want to lose their lucrative positions within the gigantic system of social partnership which ties the unions up with the employers and the state, even if this has to be scaled down. This could mean reducing the role of national bargaining over working time and wages and bonuses, replacing it with more plant based agreements. For this section of the unions the role of the SPD would be to introduce political measures to ensure that the unions still play a role in German politics.

A second difference with Blair is that Schröder is not a convinced "anti-statist". He agrees to privatisations, to reduce taxes on profits and to make cuts in welfare spending out of desperation rather than enthusiasm. He personally would prefer Keynesian counter-cyclical intervention in the economy. He, like many German politicians, spontaneously prefers a "strong" (and paternalist) state. But, unlike his rival Lafontaine, and the more "traditionalist" wing of the trade union bureaucracy around IG-Metall leader Zwickel, Schröder is convinced that Keynesianism will not work in the present period.

That is why he is the SPD politician most liked by the bosses. The model he espouses for the future of German capitalism is the one pioneered by Volkswagen. As the prime minister of Lower Saxony, whose Land government is the largest share holder in Volkswagen, he was important in pushing through the deal between the unions, the Betriebsräte (works' councils) and the VW management to introduce a 28-hour week with a dramatic drive for flexible working in the company. This model of enterprise corporatism is the sort of thing many of the labour bureaucrats and those

parts of German capital, which want to stick to a modified form of social partnership, envisage for the future.

Schröder's problem, however, lies in the fact that this model does not suit the interests of all sections of German capital. As could be seen in the struggles around sickness pay in Autumn 1996, there is an important faction of the German bourgeoisie which is looking for a strategy to break up the social partnership system and with it the influence of the labour bureaucracy altogether.

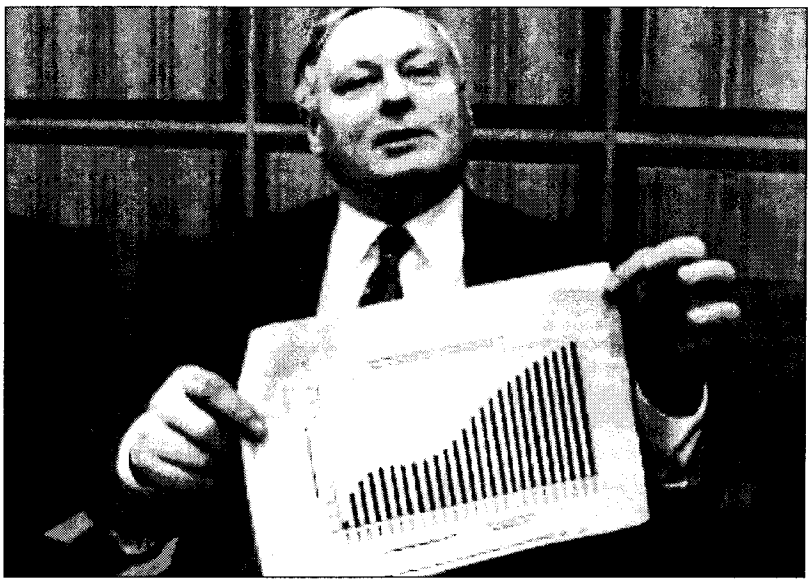
However, before we turn to the problems Schröder may face if he becomes Chancellor, we have to look at the third and most important difference with Blair. It is also the most important in terms of future conflicts in the workers' movement.

When Tony Blair became leader of the British Labour Party, he worked systematically to take control of the party. Whilst Blair's rule is certainly not absolute and the Labour Party still rests on the organised working class as its social base, Schröder is very far from dominating the SPD in the way Blair and his faction now dominate the Labour Party.

Schröder is not the chairman of the SPD, and will not become the party leader over the next period. His followers are in a clear minority both amongst the membership and in the leadership of the party. Therefore, Schröder is far from being free from inner party pressures and the need to compromise with other sections of the social democratic apparatus and the trade union bureaucracy.

This is personified in Lafontaine's role in the party. Not only is he the leader but he is bound to get a key post in the next government or else become leader of the party's parliamentary fraction. It is also reflected in the fact that the only minister Schröder has yet appointed for his cabinet (if he is the winner in the elections) is a trade union leader – Franz Riester, the deputy leader of IG Metall. Whilst Riester is one of the "new realists" in the German trade unions (and that is why he has been appointed by Schröder) this also reflects the fact that the working class and the trade union movement expect the SPD to fulfil a number of its promises.

It also reflects Schröder's recognition that the SPD remains a focus for the hopes of workers and youth and needs the mechanism to control them. Trade unionists become ministers when working class expectations cannot be ignored but have to be channelled into an endless series of parliamentary manoeuvres and compromises, until hardly anything is left of them. Of course the union leaders can also be expected to keep "their" members' dissatisfaction under control, since it will be "their" minister and "their" government which will be overseeing German capitalism for the next period.



Oscar Lafontaine: the SPD's party leader who declined to fight Schröder

Thus, the so-called "twin peaks leadership" of the SPD, Schröder as candidate for Chancellor and Lafontaine as party leader, not only reflects a conflict within German reformism, it also serves an important purpose. The party simultaneously shows its right-wing face to bosses but its fake left face to the working class, as a way of maintaining the loyalty of workers to the party. So, when Schröder is meeting senior managers, industrialists and bankers, promising measures to improve the competitiveness of German business, Lafontaine will be calling for an increase in corporate tax at a Juso conference or at a trade union meeting.

However, it would be wrong to exaggerate these differences, since they are also the result of a quite conscious division of labour between the leading figures. When Schröder speaks in front of working class voters, at May Day rallies or in factory assemblies, he makes more or less the same promises as Lafontaine.

Conflicts and unity

We can expect that a future SPD-led government in Germany will also be the arena for a struggle between these currents as will the parliamentary fraction. Schröder will not be able to simply push through his right wing agenda. This conflict is likely to take place in a period of rising working class demands, particularly from the organised sectors of the class, and a rising tide of class struggle. This upward swing is already underway as is shown by the increase in strikes and important economic and political disputes over the last few years.

The bosses have scored isolated successes. More importantly the German working class suffers from a post-war record level of 4.5 million unemployed. That is if we take the official figures: if we take into account "hidden" unemployment, the number would be almost 8 million! Nevertheless, the German labour movement has clearly has not been decisively beaten by these attacks. What is more, this reserve army of labour does not, as in the 1929-33 depression, undermine most trade union resistance, nor have the bosses got the whip hand in the factories.

As the strikes against the cuts in sick pay and the occupation of Bonn by the miners demonstrated, the German workers are able and willing to defeat the bosses or even a government. Reformist politicians fear such a strong workers' movement. A mobilised and confident working class creates different pressures on them. These work as both unifying and dividing forces on the labour bureaucracy.

Unifying, because all wings of the bureaucracy share a common need to keep the working class under their control. A fully mobilised and self-organised class that transcends their political objectives and outflanks their "plans" is clearly the worst case scenario for many of them. On the other hand such working class pressure divides the bureaucracy because the various sectors of it are differently affected by the pressure of the workers and by the attacks of the capitalist class and the government. They are thus forced to react to this situation with different reformist strategies.

Schröder and Riester represent the wing of the trade union bureaucracy which wants to secure the position of the labour movement by scaling down its influence voluntarily, but they are opposed by a "traditional" wing of the bureaucracy in the unions and the SPD. The "traditionalists" aim is to return to the "golden age" of German

corporatism in the 1960s and 1970s. In terms of international politics they are modelling their perspectives on Jospin rather than Blair.

These groupings are represented throughout the entire apparatus of the unions. Of course, each has its strongholds. The right is strong in the IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (the industrial unions of miners, chemical workers and energy workers) and the IG Bau (building workers' union), whilst the "traditionalists" in the bureaucracy have their strongholds in some of the smaller unions, IG Medien (print workers) HVB (trade, banking and insurance workers) and above all in the IG Metall, which is still the flagship of the German trade union movement. However, as can be seen in the case of Riester, there is a strong right wing tendency even in this union. A similar situation exists in the public sector union (ÖTV).

In addition to this, a "left wing" of the reformist apparatus has been developing, particularly amongst the middle and lower ranks of the bureaucracy and some elements of the Vertrauensleutekörper (the bodies which represent trade union members at enterprise level).

The two factions have other things in common beside their fear and suspicion of a militant upsurge of the workers. They are both agreed on important elements of the programme of a future SPD-led government. This is summed up in the call for a "pact for work". This is the demand for the government to bring together the unions and the bosses to agree a set of measures to reduce unemployment in exchange for concessions on the wage front, a reduction of taxation, a further drive on flexible working time and a general intensification of work.

It must not be forgotten that the originator of this strategy was IG Metall leader Klaus Zwickel, who proposed it at the IG Metall conference in autumn 1995. For the first time in its history, the union itself proposed a reduction in wages, in order to get the bosses to create jobs. It was the Kohl government which refused to participate in this and thereby encouraged the bosses to demand more concessions and to attack sick pay a year later. It has to be said, however, that even then the "pact for work" was not just an abstract idea. A number of important local "pacts" were struck and these led to "voluntary" wage cuts and the reduction or abolition of overtime payments.

A future SPD government will take this plan up again, but, as Schröder and Lafontaine, Riester and Zwickel all repeat time and again, "the bosses have to do their part of the deal as well and create jobs".

Although such a pact will not meet the needs of the working class, the German bosses have made it clear that it will not meet their goals either. Despite the fact that the SPD enters the election campaign with the most right wing leader it has ever had, the bosses are still campaigning massively for the ruling governmental coalition. Despite their repeated, and sometimes savage criticism of the Kohl government for its reluctance to push through the attack on the unions and its "betrayal" of the bosses in their struggle against 100% sick pay, the bosses have unleashed a full scale propaganda war for this government, a mixture of enthusiasm, desperation and brazen lies.

For example, one of the bosses' leaders, Olaf Henkel, praised the government's record. All failures were just the result of the SPD's "blockade" in the second chamber, where the social democrats stopped the introduction of the governmental "pension reforms" and some other reactionary bills. In a speech at the beginning of the year, Henkel even went on to calculate that there would be a reduction of the unemployment figure by 500,000 by the end of 1998 as a result of the government's politics. This "miracle" was performed by not mentioning the fact that at the same time nearly as many workers would be made redundant. Of course, such buffoonery rebounds on them almost immediately , but it shows how desperate the German bourgeoisie feels and how uneasy it is about entrusting the political executive to the Social Democracy at the moment.

The role of the unions

If all they had to worry about was the SPD's policies and programme, there would be scarcely any reason for them to lose sleep. Of course, the SPD is making some promises to the working class, but, like Jospin at the beginning of his term, most of them are made under the proviso that there is "enough money" to finance them. Therefore, most of the SPD's promises are made in areas where the government will not have to pay the bill, i.e. outside of the public sector. They have promised to abolish a number of laws which reduced working class and trade union rights. These include not only the 100% sick pay guarantee, but also laws which regulate the right to strike and the right to appeal against being made redundant. In addition, they want to introduce a guarantee of apprenticeships for young people, paid for by the employers.

What is worrying the bosses is not these promises, but the fact that an SPD government might be coming to power as the result of the rising tide of activity and expectations of the working class. This can be seen not only by the recent increase in struggles and mobilisations but also in massive trade union support for the SPD's election campaign. The DGB headquarters alone has started an advertising campaign "for jobs and social justice" which is costing DM8 million (£2.7 million). When we take into account that the major industrial unions are investing similar sums in such campaigns, this not only shows the determination of the trade union bureaucracy to get "its" government into power, but also the will and determination of the organised working class to get rid of the Kohl government. Slogans like "Down with Kohl!" and "Fatty must go!" are the most popular slogans in Germany today .

A "left wing" of the reformist apparatus has been developing, particularly amongst the middle and lower ranks of the bureaucracy

Neither is the trade unions' campaign confined to advertising. The May Day demonstrations focused on the call for a new "political majority". There will be a series of demonstrations up to the elections in September together with factory meetings and trade union representatives visiting apprentices' schools to get their message through. Even the monthly unemployed demonstrations have been largely focused on the elections. This is, for all its low level political content, beyond doubt a campaign by the whole German labour movement, its trade union and political wings.

Indeed this campaigning by the unions has caused a lot of anger from the government and the bosses, who accuse the unions of "embezzling" the subs of their members. The DGB campaign, they claim, constitutes a breach of its character as a union of all workers, irrespective of their political affiliation, taking the Christian-Democratic workers hostage to the SPD. If anything, this attack actually strengthened support for the campaign. Even the Christian-Democratic Workers' Association, which is a part of the CDU, immediately distanced itself from the government's criticism in order not to be seen as too close to the CDU leadership and the government.

The reason for the growth of sup-



Miners occupy the streets of Bonn

port for the SPD amongst the working class is easily explained. The social democracy is still seen as "its" party by the majority of the working class in Germany (a position which it has to share with the PDS in the former "East Germany"). Despite their official "political neutrality", the trade unions are strongly tied to the social democratic party. For historic reasons, however, this important organic link with the working class via the trade unions is organised very differently from other bourgeois workers' parties of the British Labour Party type.

The unions and SPD

Unlike the Labour Party in Britain, the SPD was not founded by the trade unions. Because of the belated development of German industrial capitalism, the trade unions, as a national movement, came into being at a time when the Social Democracy and its formally "Marxist" leadership had already been constituted as a mass nation-wide party.

Also unlike the British party, which was a reformist party from the outset, the German Social Democracy only developed into a reformist bourgeois workers' party in the early twentieth century. Indeed its definitive political collapse in came in 1914. In that process of conversion, the trade union bureaucracy played an important role as a support group for the revisionists in the party, calling for the "independence" of the unions from the party; that is from the potential "danger" of being forced to call for political strikes, particularly from supporting what the union leaders considered a "general nonsense" (the general strike).

Although organisational closeness and political partnership with the unions is nowadays the most important element of the SPD's organic link to the working class, it is clearly not the only one. Leaving aside important historic ties, the SPD is also a party with mass working class membership

Even in the early days of its development, German social democratic reformism had features which became dominant, particularly after the Second World War. A clear division of labour between the party and unions was worked out: the unions (i.e. the union bureaucracy) were responsible for the economic struggle, the party (i.e. its apparatus) had to deal with electoral politics.

Between the wars, the ADGB (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, the German TUC) was the trade union of workers affiliated to workers' parties (Social Democrats, Independent Social Democrats, Communists) and independents, but not of the open bourgeois parties. After the war, the Christian Democratic unions did not reconstitute themselves, but the trade unions were built anew as "unity trade unions", i.e. also including the members of the Christian Democrats and the Bavarian Christian Social Union.

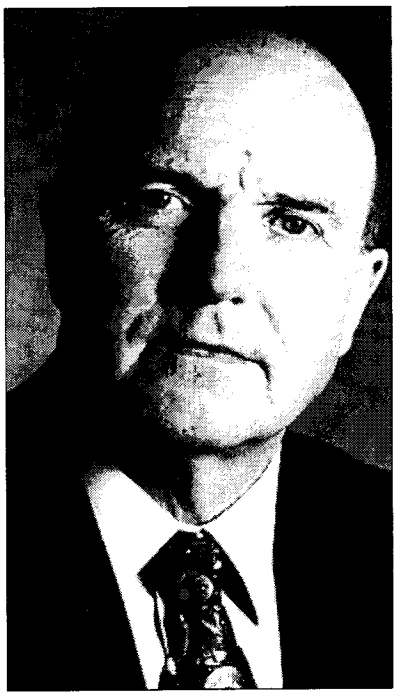
Of course, the fake character of this political "neutralism" is obvious when we bear in mind that all the central leadership bodies of the unions were stuffed with SPD members in the late 1940s. The division of labour between the SPD and DGB was strengthened in 1952, when Adenauer's government pushed through laws which limited political rights within the enterprise and introduced the dualism between trade union and workplace representation of the workers in Germany.

This had two effects. On the one hand, the trade unions almost exclusively limited their activity to wage bargaining, on the other hand, the SPD's hold on the unions was strengthened. An almost monolithic control of the bureaucracy over the working class and extremely vicious purging of the left wing in the unions and workplaces started from that period onwards.

Whilst the SPD clearly did not change its relation to the working class, it changed its politics during the 1950s towards a very right wing reformism. This was politically marked by agreeing to "West Germany" joining NATO, accepting that capitalism should now be called the "social market economy" and so on. All this was codified in the Bad Godesberg programme in 1959, which formally broke with "Marxism" as the ideological basis of the SPD, i.e. with the Kautskyian cover for its politics. "Socialism" - the traditional Sunday speech - became a humanist vision from then on.

For the German Left, however, Bad Godesberg not only signalled a right wing move of a bourgeois workers' party, but became the point when the SPD ceased to be a workers' party altogether. This view was backed by the SPD's claim that it had become a "people's party".

However, what people are and what people claim to be can be quite different things. In terms of its politics, the SPD had not been a "Marxist" party expressing the interests of the working class since the early 20th century. In that respect the idea that the SPD changed qualitatively in 1959 is nothing but a pseudo-left cover for an opportunist view of the SPD before that period. In qualitative terms, the SPD's programmes and politics were, of course, as bourgeois before 1959 as they were after.



Klaus Zwinkel, head of IG Metall

The apparently "left" side of the argument that the SPD had no specific relation to the working class anymore, that it was no different from the CDU or the FDP (or the Greens today) led to catastrophic, politically self-defeating consequences for the German Left. They claimed that the SPD (and even the unions, since they were so closely allied to the SPD) were outside the workers' movement! Never mind that this almost emptied the "workers movement" of most of its workers, leaving a few official Stalinists and some Maoist sects. The workers in the unions and the SPD were described as workers without any element of working class consciousness. The weapons for fighting social democracy were, therefore, limited to denunciation and self-proclamatory efforts by various Maoist "parties".

It is not accidental that these erroneous ideas did not originate in the workers' movement, but in a movement which was totally isolated from the organised working class, the student movement of 1968.

Since then, different currents of the German far left have confused the right wing form of social democratic reformism in Germany with its break from the organised working class. In reality, the rightward move of German social democracy from the 1950s onwards was the result of important defeats of the German working class (demobilisation of the masses after the breakdown of the Nazi regime; reconstruction of bourgeois rule under the surveillance of imperialism

and Stalinism; the workplace laws of 1952, the smashing of the East German workers' uprising of 1953). This allowed for the stabilisation of the capitalist order in West Germany and laid an important basis for the "economic miracle". The latter then laid the basis for a large labour aristocracy and a bureaucracy which based itself on it.

Organic links

This domination of the workers' movement by social democratic reformism is not only seen in the close ties between the trade union and SPD bureaucracy. What this means in practice is that the overwhelming majority of trade union officials are SPD members and, similarly, some 90% of SPD MP's are trade union members, although obviously not all are leading figures. SPD members also frequently hold the seats on enterprise boards which the unions or works' councils appoint.

Of course, there are also managers who are members of the SPD, but, unlike the open bourgeois parties, the SPD has no representation or say in the bosses' associations. Its strength and function for the German capitalist class lies not in the fact that it represents the interests of any particular fraction of the bourgeoisie but that it represents and controls the working class politically.

Although organisational closeness and political partnership with the unions is nowadays the most important element of the SPD's organic link to the working class, it is clearly not the only one. Leaving aside important historic ties, the SPD is also a party with mass working class membership. Whilst the branch meetings of the party have clearly become boring and dry, it would be wrong to think that they just exist on paper. It is not accidental that the SPD and the PDS are the parties which are most dependent on individual membership dues, which finance their activity and count for more than 50% of their income. On the other hand, they are also the parties with the lowest percentage of corporate donations to their total income (only around 10%).

Regular financial contributions are typical for parties with mass working class membership. It is little wonder that open bourgeois parties and the petit-bourgeois Greens show a different trend in their income structure. More than a third of the income of the FDP and the Greens comes from donations and around a quarter of the CDU/CSU income. Only one third or less of their income comes from regular membership subs.

Obviously, the relation between the working class and a party is also expressed in voting patterns. Unlike repeated bourgeois (and radical petit-bourgeois) assertions, which are little more than prejudices, electoral results show that the SPD vote still rests on the working class. Indeed, the SPD's share of votes amongst working class people increased strongly after the Second World War. That can be partially explained by the fact that both the SPD and KPD (German Communist Party) had weak roots amongst catholic workers between the wars. It was only after the second world war, that the SPD broke into that layer and turned areas such as North Rhine-Westphalia into Social Democratic fortresses. In 1957, it gained an absolute majority of votes amongst blue collar workers for the first time in its history. Apart from the 1990 elections, where the vast majority of workers in the East voted CDU, the SPD has maintained that position. It reached its high point in the early 1970s and again in 1987, when almost two thirds of all blue collar workers voted SPD.

The SPD's success in recent elections and in the polls also largely came from their ability to mobilise workers to the polls. In Lower Saxony, the SPD had its best results in working class strongholds like Salzgitter and Braunschweig. What is different from the 1980s, is the fact that the SPD has also begun to gain (whilst clearly not so strongly) amongst white collar workers and the "middle strata".

These voting patterns are not only important to demonstrate that a relation between the SPD and the working class still exists. The example of Salzgitter also helps to illustrate how this relationship works. Salzgitter is a small town around an important steel plant. An Austrian company wanted to take over this plant, threatening the loss of thousands of jobs in the region. The workers demanded that their jobs be saved from this takeover. The SPD government of the Land, none other than Gerhard Schröder, reacted quickly. It nationalised the plant (of course with compensation) and resold it to a capitalist who "guaranteed" the jobs. No wonder then, that the SPD vote was 70% in the town.

This model can be generalised insofar as it points to what many workers expect or hope an SPD in power will do: secure "standard" rights of the workers, no further attacks, no further job losses, significant reduction of unemployment, in short a "breathing space" after one and a half decades of conservative government.

However, as the electoral result of the fascist front organisation DVU showed in Sachsen-Anhalt, there are clearly limits to the influence of the SPD. Whilst the SPD did well amongst workers who still have got a job, be it industrial or service sector, the DVU gained strong support amongst the unemployed and the youth, who, even if they have a job, see little prospect for the future in a country with more than 20% unemployment.

After the elections?

Given more than 16 years of Kohl's government, of constant attacks on social benefits, of mass unemployment and of attacks on trade union and democratic rights, it is small wonder that the working class wants to get rid of this government. In addition, the struggles against the bosses and the government over the last year demonstrated to many activists in the factories, in the offices and amongst the unemployed and the youth, that militant industrial action alone cannot solve these problems. The working class needs a political answer to political attacks. Also, trade union struggle cannot solve the question of mass structural unemployment. The working class needs a government which will solve these problems.

Of course, no future SPD-led government will do anything of the sort.



German metal workers protested against proposed sick pay cuts during 1996 and 1997

Only if there is an electoral landslide will it even be a government of a bourgeois workers' party. Most likely the SPD will be in coalition with the Greens. If Kohl stages a comeback or the SPD underperforms there could even be a "Grand Coalition" with the CDU/CSU. But in order to fight the present government, the working class uses the political tools it has to hand and that means the organisations which exist. For the vast majority of the organised working class this is the SPD (or the PDS in the East).

For all the reasons that the SPD leaders fear an enthusiastic and confident working class and would prefer a coalition, revolutionaries wish to see them put into office with the largest majority possible. This will give them the least excuse for their betrayals when they come

Therefore, it is almost certain that the SPD will become the strongest party in parliament after the forthcoming elections. It could, together with the other bourgeois workers' party, the PDS, even be strong enough to command an absolute majority of MPs.

It could base itself on the mobilisations of the working class to push through its most pressing demands and form a minority government. Or it could attack the open bourgeois parties as an opposition.

That, however, is most definitely not what the SPD leadership intends to do. It clearly does not want to form a government which could become a "hostage" to working class demands, protest or even support. It would prefer to form a coalition with the Greens or even with the CDU/CSU. Whilst there are obvious differences between these two coalitions, the working class must oppose both of them.

For many workers, this is obvious for a coalition with the CDU. However many believe that an SPD/Green government (irrespective of whether this would include the PDS or not) would be a "left" government; indeed that the Greens would play the role of a left wing pressure on the SPD.

Whilst such a petit-bourgeois party may appear more left wing on some issues, it clearly is not a party rooted in the workers' movement. Unlike the SPD and the PDS, which are characterised by a contradiction between their social base and the bourgeois politics of the parties, such a contradiction does not exist within the Green Party. There are no channels by which an organised workers' movement (or even a fraction of it) could exert pressure on their leaders and put them to the test.

Therefore, the Greens inevitably would become a vehicle for the bourgeoisie to exert pressure on an SPD-Green coalition, rather than a "left wing" corrective.

For the SPD and trade union leaders, who themselves do not want to break with capitalism and therefore with "their" ruling class anyway, this is not a problem. On the contrary, it gives them an additional excuse for not implementing working class demands, since the "coalition partner" has to be respected.

The likelihood of such a development can also be seen from the development of the Green Party over the last two decades and the role it has played where it is already in coalitions.

In Bremen, for example, the Greens have been in the forefront of the privatisation of public services. The call for an "ecological tax reform" by Greens is a classic example of making the working class pay for capitalism's destruction of the environment, raising energy prices for consumers via indirect taxes.

For all the reasons that the SPD leaders fear an enthusiastic and confident working class and would prefer a coalition, revolutionaries wish to see them put into office with the largest majority possible.

This will give them the least excuse for their betrayals when they come. It will be vital to intervene in the election campaign against the coalition plans of the SPD leadership, to demand an SPD or an SPD/PDS government (if the PDS makes the 5% hurdle) and nothing else. Even more important, however, will be the struggle against the concessions to the bosses on wages embodied in the "pact for work" and against a revival of the social partnership which ties the unions to the bosses and the state.

Clearly such a struggle will last beyond the election period and will require a lot of tactical skill by revolutionaries, since it has not only to be conducted against the trade union and social democratic bureaucrats, but also, in part, against the reformist consciousness of the working class masses and their very real illusions in corporatism.

The election campaign, however, will inevitably increase political awareness and activity within the class. Revolutionaries have to take advantage of this to popularise a programme of demands focused on the most urgent needs of the class: for example, immediate repeal of all restrictions on political and trade union rights, an end to business secrecy, open the books of profitable and unprofitable firms to workers' inspection, a programme of public works, paid for by a wealth tax, to bring down unemployment, especially in the East and amongst the youth.

Such demands will only be won when the working class itself is mobilised. Given the obvious fact that millions expect the SPD to act in their interests, we have to campaign alongside them to put "their" parties into government but also to demand that the party carry out these demands in office.

This is the only way in which German revolutionaries can take forward both the fight against the bosses and against the parties which currently have the allegiance of the working class. ■



The unemployed ridicule Chancellor Kohl's job destruction record

Women in the workplace

From reserve army to front line troops

Marxists have traditionally seen women workers as particularly likely to become part of the "reserve army of labour", prone to being thrown back into the home with a recession and drawn back into the workplace during a boom. But in fact women are an increasingly stable part of the working class, its trade unions and political parties. **Lesley Day** looks at the evidence and what this means for the socialist strategy for women's liberation.

WHEN THE early socialist campaigners talked about women's liberation they saw the right to work, access to an independent wage and integration into the collectivity of the workplace as key steps to freedom from subservience and family drudgery. Today, more women do paid labour than ever before. But what does that mean for women's liberation?

A feature of capitalist development in the last part of the 20th century has been the sustained rise in the female workforce; women now account for 36% of the world's paid labour force.[1] Since the 1970s, women's rates of "economic activity" – work measurable in capitalist terms – have risen worldwide. The only areas to buck the trend have been parts of sub-Saharan Africa and some countries experiencing the restoration of capitalism. In parts of Europe and North America, women now make up between 40% and 50% of the paid workforce.

Much of this expansion has been in service industries. While heavy industry and mining jobs have declined, service industries have expanded. A substantial proportion of the new jobs are also part-time and temporary – for instance in both Australia and the UK close to half of the female workforce is working part-time. Of Europe's entire part-time workforce, women, according to Patricia O'Donovan of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions, constitute a staggering 82% of the total.

The concentration in service industries, however, is not universal. In countries marked by rapid economic development in the 1970s and 1980s, such as those in South East Asia, young women have been drawn into manufacturing. This is also true of other areas where there are Export Processing Zones (EPZ's) such as Central America.

The reasons for the sustained rise in the female workforce are varied and the subject of considerable debate. Overall, they reflect both the impact of international capitalist restructuring and changes in the family and domestic labour. These "pull" and "push" factors are interrelated. For instance, in western Europe, Australia and North America, the availability of contraception, the existence of state welfare provision and the reduction of the costs of reproducing the workforce – through cheaper ready-made consumer goods and food – have made it easier for women to look for work. At the same time employers have taken advantage of women's second class status and role within the family to use women workers as a cheap labour force.

This is a different pattern from that of the mid-20th century when women workers were pulled into and then expelled from production, most notably during two world wars but also in synchronisation with the economic cycle (see *Trotskyist International 13/14*). The OECD now reports that "the fluctuation of women's economic activity rates according to the economic cycle is now barely visible".[2] Today the bulk of places in the "reserve army of labour" are increasingly filled by the youth in the metropolitan countries, although in some semi-colonial countries women are still the "first in and last out". Women are also an important component of the migrant labour force, frequently as domestic servants.

The rise in the number of women workers has both underpinned and been affected by a substantial change in women's social status, especially in the imperialist countries. This has been the result of gains made by the women's movement, women's increasing participation in social and political life, and their greater access to education. Yet at the same time women continue to be paid less than men, to have less access to household income and to work longer hours – if all kinds of work are included. For millions of women in the world increased access to the labour market has been combined with continued

disadvantage and inequality, leading the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to conclude that "the great majority of women are simply swelling the ranks of the working poor".[3]

Women tend to work in different kinds of jobs and the entry of more women into the workforce has not altered the degree of labour force segregation. They also tend to be restricted to the less well-paid jobs within any sector. The average pay gap is between 30% and 40%. And although this gap has been narrowing it has not done so universally or consistently; indeed, it has increased marginally in Japan in the last two decades. It has also increased in the ex-Stalinist states during the period of capitalist restoration. Last but not least, increased female employment has not eliminated employment discrimination. The EU's latest unemployment figures reveal that unemployment among women workers is 12.2% compared with 8.9% for men, with young women being particularly hard hit.

Overall, if domestic labour is included along with other forms of work, then women work longer hours than men everywhere except in North America and Australia. The "double shift" is a worldwide pattern.

In this article we first examine some of the debates thrown up around the question of women and the "flexible" workforce, particularly in Britain and the USA; secondly, we consider the extent of the the expansion of the female workforce on an international level and the implications this has both for women and for the working class movement as a whole.

Feminists fall out

In *Trotskyist International 13/14* we highlighted the contradiction for capitalism posed by the increased employment of women. Capitalism needs women's cheap paid labour at work but it also needs women to continue to carry out unpaid labour at home. This problem will become more acute in the imperialist countries as governments try to slash welfare provision in order to shore up profit rates. Bitter debates have broken out between those who are aghast at the social consequences of the changes in the labour force and those who want to see an ever more flexible workforce. Feminists in Britain were dismayed when Labour minister Harriet Harman justified an attack on benefits for single mothers in the language of women's emancipation. Work is liberating – so we'll cut your benefit to make sure you get a job, was Harman's message.



Neo-liberals see homemaking as a "rational choice" for women

Linked to this public furore is a debate among various feminists and academics to explain the rise in the female workforce and the continued disadvantages women experience at work.

One group of theories is effectively "gender blind" – or at least it deliberately ignores the realities of women's oppression. Neo-liberal economists and those embracing the ideas of the "new household economics" describe an ideal type of household where the family as a whole makes rational decisions about whether and which family members should enter the paid labour force. So if men can earn more, women will stay at home involved with childcare or other domestic tasks that otherwise the family would have to pay for. This division of labour is a "more efficient" use of the household's resources.

It is true that such factors do influence family decisions, but the theory doesn't tell us anything about why women earn less, nor does it examine the impact of oppressive relations within the household that may affect decisions – nor how these may vary between societies as a result of the differing pressures of state, religion and culture.

For instance, in some areas which have experienced recent industrial expansion, such as East Asia, the massive growth in the female workforce was largely made up at first of young single women. Married women with children still leave the workforce for considerable periods. In other parts of the world, for instance in the Caribbean, women with children have a higher rate of employment in paid work.

Such patterns reflect family pressures, childcare availability and also the deliberate policy of employers. Employers may positively choose women workers. They often give nonsensical explanations for this such as women's "nimble fingers" to hide the real reason: that women's continuing subordinate position and role in the family make their labour cheaper. Sometimes the employers are better served by young women who do not need maternity rights. In other cases women's dual role at home and at work is the best guarantee that they will comply with the "flexible" hours and practices that accompany low pay.

Sometimes state sponsored family policies have worked against women's employment. In Ireland, it took longer for the impact of industrial growth and export-led development to affect women's employment since church and state policies have disadvantaged women workers.[4]

The neo-liberal theorists don't worry either about discrimination and segregation in the labour force. This is simply "how it is". It is the market that dictates that 60% of women workers are to be found in just ten out of 80 occupational groups in OECD countries – largely clerical, sales, caring and teaching. Market forces dictate that women's hourly earnings in the UK are around 70% of men's, according to this theory. And it all happens because of the "rational choices" of individual families.

While these extreme neo-liberals would be happy to let the market follow its own course, most governments and international bodies, such as the OECD, UN and ILO, advance various types of reform programmes to correct these imbalances. The reformist perspective of mainstream modern feminism provides the justification for these policies. "Human capital" theorists open up the possibility of intervention to improve women's status in the workforce. This means positive action policies, education and increased childcare. If women had the skills and education to improve their "capital" then they

would improve their chances of better paid and more secure jobs.

Many of the measures suggested are vital and progressive reforms – the ILO estimates that every added year of schooling raises women's earning power by 15%. But in the hands of the bosses, their governments and their international institutions these reforms are directed towards maximising profits. A telling example is the advice offered by the women's department of the World Bank for Russia and eastern Europe in their transition to capitalism. This combines neo-liberal measures for encouraging flexibility – removing protective legislation – with intervention where necessary to maintain and extend work-based childcare.[5] Capitalism can certainly carry out reforms but not the thoroughgoing changes necessary to eradicate women's oppression. Women's unpaid labour in the home is still needed and women's cheap paid labour is vital to employers.

For another section of commentators, the decline of the male breadwinner and rise of the working mother has brought the spectre of social breakdown. Such arguments are traditionally associated with the religious right or sections of the British Tory party, but these forces are so enamoured of unfettered capitalist expansion and profitability that their moralising is muted. The defence of the traditional family has passed to modern reactionaries such as, in Britain, Melanie Philips and Patricia Morgan. Morgan argues that "men's diminishing ability to provide for their families has contributed to the high number of casual unions and fatherless children on both sides of the Atlantic". Fulminating against both left and right for promoting women's employment, Morgan argues that society should value unpaid labour in the home more instead of inviting the "destruction of the social fabric".[6]

These arguments do relate to a genuine increase in human misery. Divorce rates have spiralled in Europe and North America. Insecurity at work means insecurity in the home. Balancing work with childcare is simply not the rational choice implied by the neo-liberals but a never-ending nightmare inflicting hardship on working mothers and condemning their children to inadequate childcare facilities.

But the real responsibility for such problems does not lie with the increase in women's employment per se. Rather, it stems from the increasingly deregulated and always unplanned capitalist economy. Morgan's solution, of turning back the clock to a golden age of patriarchy in the family home, is reactionary. Such families may be more economically stable but they are also a prison house for women and children. At best, women existed in a state of dependence, at worst, they were trapped in miserable, loveless and violent relationships.

Not only is the restoration of the "traditional family" a reactionary aim it is also a complete anachronism. Capitalism's ruthless competition and drive for profits means it needs women's labour. It also needs the family and women's unpaid work at home. How can it square the circle? Enter Catherine Hakim, an academic apologist for capitalism's ruthless exploitation of women. We need not worry, she claims, about the substantial layer of women who combine paid and unpaid work and are exploited mercilessly in doing so. Women who work in part-time jobs do so because they want to.

There are two main elements in Hakim's explanation of developments in the female labour force. First, she tackles the question of explaining the rise in this section of the workforce by denying that much of it has happened. She argues that there was little real increase in women's employment until the late 1980s. There are both rational and ridiculous elements in this position. Hakim is able to point out, correctly, that women worked throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Even during the period when women left the paid workforce in substantial numbers, in the second half of the 19th century, many women were working in informal and uncounted ways – for instance, helping out in the family run shops or in domestic service.

But this does not refute the fact that the numbers of women in the paid workforce did increase from the late 1950s onwards in Britain – and in Europe and North America in the 1970s. Hakim vainly attempts to get round this by talking about full-time equivalents, so two or three women working part-time count as only one.

Such women are just one part – the "family-centred" part – of a heterogeneous female workforce. These women have "qualitatively different work priorities" from the other section which seeks full-time work and has a higher degree of commitment to their jobs. In this cheerily optimistic, and totally unreal, version of the world of work there is no need to worry about the prevalence of part-time and temporary work amongst women because "the great majority of part-timers actively prefer their shorter working hours". It is just bad luck that this inevitably restricts them to low-skill, low-paying jobs.[7] And it is just coincidence that these jobs are frequently the only ones women can get.

Hakim runs the danger of deriving intentions from results: many women work part-time so they must choose to. But she is also able to cite various surveys where women say they prefer to work part-time when they have young children. None of these survey results is surprising, in fact, the majority of workers both male and female consistently reply to surveys that they would like to spend less time at work! This hardly proves that part-time women workers prefer insecure and poorly paid employment and that men do not. And if the choice is low-paid and boring work or childcare and domestic labour then the former certainly has less appeal.



In Britain only 27% of households share domestic tasks equally between men and women

The neo-liberal theorists don't worry either about discrimination and segregation in the labour force. This is simply "how it is"

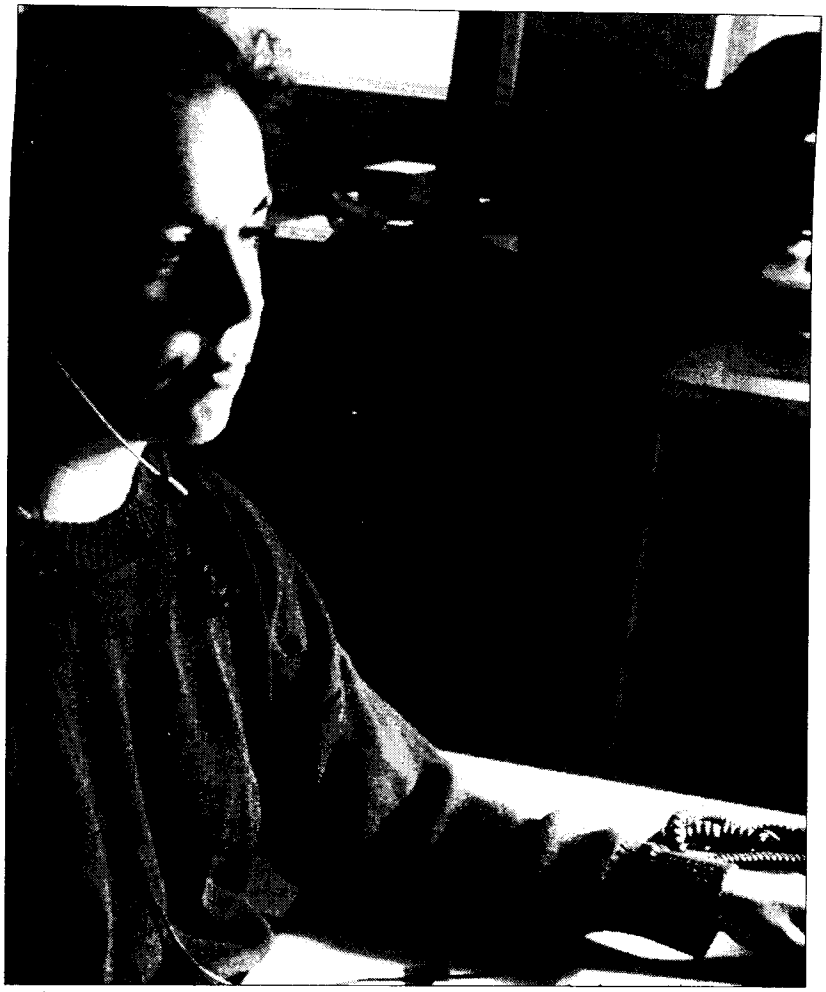
Other evidence tells a different tale. In France and the Scandinavian countries, the number of women in full-time work has been higher over several decades, mostly due to better childcare provision. But in France during the 1980s, the proportion of full-time to part-time women workers fell. This was the result of a conscious policy by companies who created part-time jobs to replace full-time ones. It did not follow from any "demand" by women workers.[8]

Over the EU as a whole, 18% of those working part-time said they would prefer to work full-time – a smaller proportion than male part-time workers but still representing three million women! And in Australia, "involuntary" part-time workers made up 7% of the labour force.[9]

Women are more likely to seek full-time work where they have access to good quality childcare and can afford

it. This means that women whose qualifications and skills enable them to get better paid employment actually labour for longer hours and are more likely to work full-time than women from poorer households. Put simply, it is worth working. Like their less well-paid sisters, these women might "actively prefer" shorter working hours but, strangely enough, they actually work longer. Of working mothers, 43 per cent with higher education used childminders or nannies whereas only 9% of those without formal qualifications did so.[10] In a similar vein, women with the high school leaving certificate in Germany return to the workforce quicker than those with only the junior high school certificate.[11]

In each case the women are taking perfectly rational decisions, but these decisions are framed by their position as oppressed members of society. Women's position in the family means being restricted to certain kinds of jobs. On top of this, employers positively welcome the existence of an insecure labour force. Flexibility is their watchword. Hakim ends up as an apologist for the supermarket bosses, who by encouraging all kinds of shift patterns to "fit in with what women want", get a round-the-clock cheap workforce.



"White collar factory" female workers are tied to the screen and phone

Hakim's views caused a bitter and continuing row among feminist academics and politicians. In Britain, Blairites like Patricia Hewitt and Harriet Harman, have avoided Hakim's "two-tier" model in favour of a pro-work policy that nevertheless shares the idea of promoting flexibility. In Hewitt's brave new post-industrial world the "male model" of full-time lifetime employment should go, to be replaced by a "female model". Combining home responsibilities and part-time paid work is supposed to give women more control over their lives! Flexibility shouldn't be restricted to just one section of the female workforce, says Hewitt, everyone should benefit.

Of course, in the official Labour Party propaganda before the last UK election, this flexibility was given a positive spin. Labour didn't talk about low-paid, casualised, flexible work but "family friendly employment policies where workers choose more flexible modes of working within better paid careers and without loss of employment security".[12] Flexibility is not a "choice" freely made by workers. It is a condition imposed on them by the bosses and accepted by women in many cases, because it is the only way they can balance work and childcare. Defending the bosses' right to do this, the Committee for Social Justice argued that it is "possible to over-regulate labour markets" and warned Labour against doing so.

What we don't get told by the Labour leaders is that one of the biggest contributors to narrowing the wage gap between men and women is trade union organisation. Women workers who work in unionised workplaces, and especially where there are collective agreements, are better paid and more secure. A decent minimum wage would also be a major boost to women's income. But at the same time that Harman and her supporters pretend to be fighting for pro-woman policies they are part of a government that is in flight from its pre-election pledges to concede proper trade union rights and a living minimum wage.

It turns out that one section of women were not to be allowed the same choice as the rest. Six months into office and Harriet Harman introduced the very "family friendly" policy of cutting the benefits of single mothers. Their flexibility was to be all one way. Similar policies have already been in operation in the US, in measures which deliberately penalise single parent families, pushing women back into dependence on men.

The truth is that for all the protective measures – for instance the EU has tried to enforce some minimum regulation – the Harman and Hewitt flexible workforce model is designed for the benefit of the bosses. It is an attempt to square the circle of bosses' demand for female labour and capitalism's continuing need for unpaid domestic work. It does not and cannot finally solve this problem.

The attacks on welfare provision in Britain and the US are just a taste of things to come as international competition intensifies and the drive for profitability demands increased cuts in government budgets. This means that despite the fact that some aspects of domestic labour will continue to be provided by society – either through the market or through state provision – other tasks will devolve back onto the family. Some women will work longer hours to pay for help and others will be be forced to combine low-paid work with hours of unpaid labour, but only a small number of women will seriously escape the effects of oppression. While Hakim tells us that there will be an "increasing polarisation between work-centred and home-centred women" the real difference will be between a small number of rich women and highly paid professionals and the mass of working class women.[13]

However, sections of employers are finding that total "flexibility" causes problems especially in periods of boom when workers can move jobs easily. Over-reliance on part-time staff also causes problems for work-

place discipline. Outsourcing and outwork leaves companies vulnerable. In this case the answer is less flexibility, for instance the rise of the "white collar factory" where young and predominantly female workers are tied to their screen and phone lines as much as any production line worker and are subject to even greater levels of monitoring. While these miserable working conditions weigh down on today's young workers they also point to the fact that, as ever, capitalism cannot escape the consequences of its own drive for profits. Once again, it is creating the conditions for new sections of workers to organise. Neither the pro- nor anti-work feminists understand this dynamic nor see in it the force that will actually help bring about genuine women's liberation.

Global restructuring

Women have been disproportionately involved in the shift of manufacturing production from metropolitan to less-developed and newly developed countries and, thus, in the growth in the working class worldwide. The major shift from agriculture to industry in the newly industrialised and less-developed countries has affected women even more than men. Between 1960 and 1980 the proportion of the male workforce in developing countries working in industry rose from 15% to 21%. But the proportion of the female workforce in industry doubled from 8% to 16%.[14]

In the last two decades the number of working women has reached, and exceeded, the 50% mark in areas such as the Caribbean and south-east Asia. In south Asia, which historically has had a low percentage of women in paid work, this has jumped from 25% to 44%.[15] After a partial reversal in the 1980s, female participation increased across Latin America and the Caribbean between 1991 and 1995.

While in some developing countries a higher proportion of women in these areas has been drawn into manufacturing than in the imperialist countries, women are nevertheless largely restricted to less well paid jobs and sectors. More than two-thirds of the global workforce in textiles is female. In better paid sectors women work at the lower end of the pay scale. Two thirds of women involved in manufacturing are "labourers, operators or production workers".[16] Indeed it is precisely because of this cheap labour that a substantial proportion of industrial relocation has taken place.

In east and south-east Asia, women make up to 80% of the workforce in the export processing zones (EPZs). Governments promote the docility or cheapness of their female workforce. In east and south-east Asia, management paternalism – providing hostels and social events, was intended to keep a patriarchal hold on the workforce. The same pattern appeared, with slight cultural variations, in Central America.[17] One advert stated: "Rosa Martinez produces apparel for US markets on her sewing machine in El Salvador. You can hire her for just 57 cents an hour. Rosa is more than just colourful. She and her co-workers are known for their industriousness, reliability and quick learning."[18]

There is some evidence that the proportion of female workers in the EPZs has fallen in the 1990s as more skilled work is needed. Rather than the women getting the necessary training, jobs have gone to men.

Another strategy, used particularly in textiles, has been to encourage homeworking. As noted previously, this has some disadvantages for employers but can be a way of maintaining profits in low-skill occupations where the employers are able to avoid paying insurance, pensions or any other kind of benefit.

For many women, their work continues to be centred on subsistence and domestic production, with increasing numbers working partially in the informal sector – that is they have paid work such as food processing and domestic work, but it is hidden and not subject to regulation. In countries such as Indonesia well over half of economically active women exist in this twilight working world.

And while the classic "reserve army of labour" pattern of women's work has receded worldwide, it was still noticeable in the 1980s debt crisis. A UN Report noted that in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America women were "the last to benefit from job expansion and the first to suffer from job contraction".[19] Women lost jobs at a faster rate than men throughout Africa and in many areas participation levels have still not recovered.

The structural adjustment programmes that followed frequently worsened daily life for women as a result of cuts in public services and agricultural policies which favoured the export-oriented crops where men were more involved. When women were drawn into production, they were being forced into this by loss of traditional means of support on the land. Women's unemployment rates are also higher than men's in most regions (Britain is one of the exceptions).

Women also make up a significant part of the migrant workforce. Although still a smaller proportion than men on a world scale, many more women than men leave the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.[20] Each year about 100,000 women leave the less developed countries in south east Asia to work in the newly industrialised ones – and many of them found they have been sent home as a result of the economic turmoil. In 1986 well over one million Asian women were working elsewhere in Asia or in the Middle East as maids, often in conditions of virtual slavery.[21]

In Russia and eastern Europe, too, women have been disproportionately affected by job losses. In some countries in transition back to capitalism, and in the period preceding this transition, women did lose their jobs at a higher rate than men. By 1996 women made up 71% of the unemployed in Russia and 70% in the Ukraine. In the early 1990s, Polish women workers lost their jobs disproportionately and found other jobs less easily. However, by 1996 a rather different pattern was emerging. In Central and Eastern Europe as a whole,

The major shift from agriculture to industry in the newly industrialised and less-developed countries has affected women even more than men

only the Czech Republic and Bulgaria recorded women's participation as having fallen farther than that of men over the period of the transition. This suggests that women are finding jobs in the restructured economies – while continuing to experience discrimination.

In Russia, women's position has fallen back markedly. In 1995 in Russia women's wages were 40% of men's whereas in the former USSR they had averaged 70%. In Poland, women have been subject to discriminatory job interviewing about marital status, family duties and obligations.[22] Not surprisingly, many women have been forced into the informal sector.

Former Stalinist rule in these countries had managed to bring many more women into paid work and to achieve higher levels of formal equality than in much of the capitalist world. But its failure to solve the fundamental problems of women's oppression: their "double shift", their responsibilities within the family, meant that, as capitalism took hold, women were disadvantaged. Marketisation policies "have further undermined their already tenuous hold on resources".[23] The wage gap is widening and gender segregation is also becoming more marked.

Women's position within the international labour force may not be as simply part of a reserve army, but it is still that of a socially oppressed group. In some areas women workers exist on the margins of production and service sectors, in others they are a permanent and necessary part of the formal workforce. Everywhere they experience disadvantage, a disadvan-

tage rooted in their role within the family.

Capitalism continues to transform housework, but unevenly. And women still do more housework and childcare in virtually every country. In Britain, where men have increased their role in the home (and working class men have done so more than managers) there is still a big gap between what both sexes say should happen and what actually happens. In one survey, 62% of the respondents agreed that household cleaning should be shared equally but this only happened in 27% of households. In every task except for "repairing household equipment" and DIY, men did far less than women.[24] In Japan, the amount of time women spend on unpaid work is nine times that of men. In many countries the total time women spend at work, when paid and unpaid labour is aggregated, is significantly more than men. For instance it is 12% more in Austria, 11% in France.

Does this mean that women's position has suffered as a result of their increased participation in the labour force? This is the argument put forward by a number of feminist commentators against the Marxist position. We explained in *Trotskyist International 13/14* that many of the criticisms were misplaced. Marxists have never argued that capitalism would deliver women's liberation; rather, that it opened the possibility for women to enter social production and social life, and allowed them a degree of independence. Participation in paid and collective work increases the class consciousness of women members of the working class. It works against atomisation and promotes collective struggle against exploitation and oppression.

Unlike the middle class feminists who object to the "growth model"and live comfortably on the proceeds of their writing and lecturing, working class women have no choice but to fight the effects of capitalism

An alternative feminist perspective argues that the actual experience of women, the combination of continued dependence, the subordination at work and so forth is actually a negative experience. For instance, Maria Mies suggests that "feminists everywhere would do well to give up the belief expressed by scientific socialism that capitalism, through its greed for never-ending accumulation and growth has created the preconditions for women's liberation, which can then be realised under socialism. Today it is more than evident that the accumulation process itself destroys the human essence everywhere because it is based on the destruction of women's autarchy over their lives and bodies".[25] The experience of the EPZs, the transfer of patriarchal relations into the factory, the extension of capitalist production through the payment of poverty rates for outwork – all these for Mies are evidence of the need to abandon the "growth model".

Mies is wrong on several counts. Firstly, she exaggerates the extent of control that women in pre-capitalist modes of production or in non-socialised domestic labour have over their work and life. Secondly, while for many women their entry into paid work means the "double shift" and continued subordination, it is the case that world wide, participation in paid labour does increase women's independence within the household. In Singapore a survey reported "an increasingly egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives" where wives were working. In Nepal, women increased their participation in domestic decision making where they found work outside the village. Other studies suggest that where men's status is threatened the first reaction can make life difficult for women and can lead to a more oppressive relationship, but this is a temporary phase. Daughters, particularly in the early years of the EPZs, found heavy restrictions placed on them but continued to battle against these restrictions, seeking escape in education or migration.

None of this is to deny the impact of oppression, restrictions and even violence against women; rather, it is to insist that capitalism throws up changing and contradictory social relations which contain the possibility of further change. In the working class, capitalism has created its own gravedigger. Increasingly women are a central part of that working class. They fight as part of it and for their interests within it. In West Africa women trade unionists are working to organise women in the informal sector; in Central America women workers defy harassment and violence to organise *maquilladora* workers. They have organised strikes in the Philippines. They continue to organise against both exploitation and their own oppression.

Unlike the middle class feminists who object to the "growth model"and live comfortably on the proceeds of their writing and lecturing, working class women have no choice but to fight the effects of capitalism. They have to fight within it and against it. They know that work under capitalism means exploitation, but that there is no salvation in a return to the confines of the home. That is why Marxists welcome the increase in the number of paid women workers. We are not blind to the alienation and misery of the world of work and to the problems it causes for individuals and families. But it is in that world that we can see the collective strength, manifested in a thousand struggles every day across the globe, of a class that has no historic interest in maintaining women's oppression – the working class. Women workers are increasingly in the vanguard of that class and will play their role in the struggle of that class for a socialist future that will create the conditions for the final liberation of women from their oppression.■

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Against the market

Planning the future

In the second of two articles **Keith Harvey** defends the idea of economic planning without which building socialism will be impossible.[1]

IF "DEREGULATION" was the buzz word of the 1990s boom, "supervision" looks set to be the received wisdom of the turn of the 21st century recession. Whether it is the European Union trying to make its economies converge for monetary union or the G7 responding to the Asian crisis by suggesting that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund should oversee international flows of capital, the need to control the anarchy of the market is evident to big business and bourgeois politicians alike.

We can predict that when the next recession hits the major economies, and the threat of militant working class resistance becomes apparent, the political parties that represent the "left wing" of the bourgeoisie will take up the call for the state to step in to counteract the spontaneous operation of the market. Whether this takes the form of counter-cyclical investment programmes, subsidies or even a return to state ownership of fundamental economic sectors, they will hope by such measures to neutralise and divert militancy away from the fundamental questions of who ultimately controls the economy

Revolutionaries will respond to such developments by explaining how they leave capitalist control intact, using taxation to compensate bankrupt companies or to modernise obsolete industries. They will demand expropriation and argue for the creation of organisations of workers' control as a step towards the socialisation of the entire economy and its subordination to the interests of the working class.

In the past, revolutionary propaganda has largely concentrated on this political aspect. Quite rightly, Trotskyists have emphasised that the creation of organisations, democratically based upon the workforces and fighting to impose control over management, was a crucial growth point for workers' councils which themselves will be the foundation of the workers' state. This was one practical expression of the whole political method of Trotsky's Transitional Programme.

Less attention has been paid to the economic aspects of workers' control, how "opening the books" or "control over hiring and firing" relate to the revolutionary programme for the transforming the economy. Yet, such attention is vitally necessary. Recognition of the need to go beyond workers' control in the factory, to the democratically planned control of the entire economy by the working class, is no more a spontaneous product of the economic struggle than is consciousness of the need to destroy the state and replace it by workers' councils.

Indeed, it could be argued that, in the aftermath of revolution and civil war, the lack of programmatic clarity on this question contributed to the emergence of bureaucratic planning in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Worse still, the key characteristics of Stalinist planning – the attempt to subordinate the entire economy to planning at a stroke, isolation from the world economy, exclusion of the direct producers from the development of planning targets and subordination of consumption to the maximum rate of growth in heavy industry, are widely considered to be the "classic" model of economic planning. In reality, it was the very antithesis of the revolutionary concept of planning advanced by Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Although the economic aspect of the revolutionary programme has been too long neglected, or traduced, today's revolutionaries can build on a rich tradition of theoretical principles and practical experience bequeathed to us by the founders of Marxism, by Lenin and by the Left Opposition of the 1920s.[2] On that basis, we have the duty to develop a clear, coherent and scientific exposition of the political economy of socialism, not as some idealistic blueprint, fabricated out of our imaginations, but as it will be built out of the dialectical negation of the dominant trends within modern capitalism.

We begin, therefore, with a brief reprise of this revolutionary tradition, emphasising Marx's fundamental proposition that the socialist economy develops out of the womb of capitalism and bearing its birthmarks. This means not only the physical proportions and disposition of the means of production and established economic linkages, but also the techniques of regulation, control and even planning that capitalism creates and recreates in its attempt to stabilise itself in the face of its own crises.

Marx and Engels on socialism

Just as the socialist economy has its material roots in capitalism, so Marx and Engels' theoretical insights into the political economy of socialism developed out of their understanding of the contradictions that drove capitalism forward, making it both dynamic and unstable.

The first and most general of these was that between the increasingly

social character of production and the continued private ownership of the means of production; that is, the private appropriation of what was produced, including the "surplus product". This was inherent in any system of commodity production because, by definition, a commodity is privately produced not for consumption by the producer but for sale on a market.

With the development of capitalism into a global system, the actual direct producers number many millions and, in that sense, production is "social production", but ownership of production and, therefore, decisions over what is to be produced, remains private. However, whether there will be a market for the goods produced is always, ultimately, unknown. Two years ago, highly successful South Korean corporations were confidently planning further increases in production. Today, their economy is in ruins. In order to safeguard what they can of their own wealth, the private corporations lay off the workforce, destroying the lives of millions. Thus, private ownership conflicts with social production.[3]

Capitalists take measures to negate important aspects of capitalism's own character

The second great contradiction of capitalism results from the commodification of labour power, the human capacity to work. As Marx showed, capitalist profit originates in the difference between the cost of employing a worker for a period of time and the value of the products that can be produced in that period of time. In order to maximise profit, each capitalist tries either to make workers work harder and longer, to which there are physical limits, or to increase output per worker through the introduction of improved technology.

As a result, output and productivity are increased but the fundamental source of profit, the employed workforce, tends to decline. Consequently, while the mass of profits may increase, the rate of profit tends to fall. Where, for example, investment of £1 million once generated a profit of £100,000, the same profit needs £10 million invested. As fewer workers operate more productive technology, the numbers of the unemployed swell, wasting society's most important resource.

In their attempts to combat this, capitalists not only drive forward production by introducing new technologies, new processes, new products, new ways of organising production and opening up new markets, they also take measures to negate important aspects of capitalism's own character.

In place of many competing firms they centralise and concentrate capital into huge corporations, instead of individually owned capital they try to spread the load by a degree of "socialisation" in the form of joint stock companies, pension funds and banks which channel private savings into investments the world over. As the corporations grow bigger they even try to offset the key characteristics of the market economy itself by monopolisation, sophisticated market research and forward planning.

Lastly, because capitalist profit is rooted in exploitation, capitalist society is permanently characterised by class struggle and periodically convulsed by open class war. This too exacts a cost on society ranging from interruptions and limitations to production, right through to the catastrophes of mass unemployment, famine and civil war.

Marx and Engels considered that the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism could overcome all these defects by making labour "directly social". That is to say that by taking all production into social ownership the activity of the entire workforce could be co-ordinated and integrated, instead of each particular production unit being related to others only indirectly via the lottery of the market:

"From the moment when society enters into possession of the means of production and uses them in direct association for production, the labour of each individual, however varied its specifically useful character may be, becomes at the start, and directly, social labour. The quantity of social labour contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; daily experience shows in a direct way how much of it is required on the average . . . it will still be necessary for society to know how much labour each article of consumption requires for its production. It will have to arrange its plan of production in accordance with its means of production, which include in particular its labour power. The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labour required for their production, will in the end determine the plan."[4]

Social ownership of production, therefore, immediately implies planning. The plan is a conscious instrument employed by society to "establish a relation between the volume of social labour-time applied in producing definite articles, and the volume of social want to be satisfied by these articles." Unlike capitalism, socially owned production is driven and regulated by the changing structure and expansion of the needs of society rather than the thirst for private profit.

From this conception further consequences follow. First of all, products cease to take the form of commodities since they are no longer exchange values, that is goods and services whose socially necessary labour is determined only in the act of exchange itself. Rather, this decision is taken in advance, goods are produced because there is a social need for them. Secondly, money loses its specific character as a universal equivalent of all exchange value. Instead:

"Society can simply calculate how many hours of labour are contained in a steam engine, a bushel of wheat at the last harvest, or a hundred square yards of cloth of a certain quality. It could therefore never occur to it still to express the quantities which it will then know directly and in their absolute amounts, in a third product, in a measure which, besides, is only relative, fluctuating, inadequate, though formerly unavoidable for lack of a better one, rather than express them in their natural, adequate and absolute measure, time . . . Hence, on the assumptions we made above, society will not assign values to products."[5]

If the profit motive, the desire to accumulate more and more surplus value, is no longer the guiding principle in the collective economy, and no longer the spur to innovation and increased productivity, what is? Marx argues that it is, "economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself," since "the less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental."

Freed from the compulsion to increase surplus labour (that is to say labour over and above what is necessary to maintain the workforce) society will be able to reduce working time and extend disposable, free time. Necessary labour will be reduced to a minimum and with this the separation of people into "mental" and "manual" workers will be overcome.

Finally, Marx and Engels recognised that communism would not arrive all at once or overnight. Whilst they recognised that, historically, the socialist revolution represented a "leap from the realm of necessity into that of freedom" this did not mean that a fully socialised classless society could be proclaimed on the morrow of this revolution. Economically speaking, there would continue to be a situation of relative scarcity for some time.

Hence, society would need to adopt a mechanism for deciding on the distribution of the fruits of labour amongst the members of society. They argued that under socialism (the lower phase of communism) each member "receives a certificate from society that he has furnished so much labour . . . and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour" after certain deductions have been made. These deductions would include:

"replacement of the means of production used up . . . additional portion for expansion of production . . . reserve or insurance funds to provide against accidents . . . general costs of



E. Preobrazhensky: revolutionary theorist of socialist planning in the USSR

administration not belonging to production . . . that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools . . . funds for those unable to work."[6]

Some social inequality would be inherited from capitalism and would have to be consciously reduced over time. Only under communism would the criteria for distribution change. Instead of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their work" society would be able to adopt "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". A superabundance of all necessary material goods and services would obviate the need for any form of rationed access to the products of social labour.

This is as much as Marx and Engels established about the political economy of socialism. It would be rational, planned, democratic. It would overcome the anarchy and disproportionality of capitalist production. It would release humankind from the oppressive effects of alienated labour and allow for the development of rounded individuality which, in turn, could only take place in a society which guaranteed freedom from want and oppression. It would overcome the under-utilisation and waste of labour. It would avoid the needless over-exploitation of nature and end the destructive antagonism between town and country.

On taking power

Marx and Engels' insights, as suggestive as they are, do not exhaust the matter of economic construction under the political rule of the working class. It fell to the next generation of revolutionaries to extend their conceptions in the light of the experience gained after the Bolshevik Revolution.

At the time of the Revolution itself, the Bolsheviks' ideas on the economics of the transition period did not extend much beyond the legacy of Marx and Engels. Lenin's writings, such as the "Impending Catastrophe" (September 1917) clearly draw on this tradition, arguing that the experience of state regulation of a modern economy such as Germany's held important lessons for Russia's future. The fact that he was simultaneously writing State and Revolution, with its emphasis on the destruction of the bureaucratic state and its replacement by the rule of the soviet "semi-state" already points to a qualitatively different conclusion from that of the reformists.

In the course of the revolution itself, various organs of workers' control, most importantly factory committees, were established and their right to veto management and owners' decisions was recognised by the soviet state. As the class struggle grew into civil war so these committees asserted their right to expropriate enemies of the workers' state and the majority of plants were, thereby, nationalised. However, although this gave the state the means to allocate resources, its objective in these early years was survival and military victory, not the construction of a socialist economy. It was in the 1920s that the most important gains in the study of the economics of the transition period were made.

The first of these concerned the relationship between the economy of the workers' state and still existing capitalism. In the Soviet Union this meant, above all, the internal rural economy but the same basic considerations will hold true for a workers' state in relation to a world market still dominated by capital. Unlike Bukharin, who argued that the tempo of development in the state economy had to be based on that of the still more powerful market economy, or the Stalinists who concluded that all links with the external market should be broken and the internal market should be liquidated, Trotsky explained the need to establish a regulated relationship with the market.

On the one hand, this meant protecting the fledgling workers' economy by enforcing a state monopoly of foreign trade but on the other it meant utilising the market as a source of necessary goods and as a criterion against which to judge progress in the workers' economy. To do this it would be necessary to maintain many of the mechanisms of the market, most importantly, a stable currency and prices which reflected accurately the costs of production.

Within the state sector, however, although it was essential to have accurate data on materials, workforces, productivity and the other key indicators of performance, production was not dominated by the law of value. There were very real physical limits to what could be done and economic proportionality had to be maintained but, within those constraints, the state could allocate resources according to political priorities.

At first, the benefits of state control

were felt principally in the sphere of distribution. The elimination of unnecessary expenditure on the aristocracy, Church and Tsarist system and concentration on production of essentials rapidly brought living standards back to pre-war levels. However, Trotsky argued that it would be the application of socialist economic principles to the sphere of production, via planned development of industry, that would allow rates of growth higher than those of capitalism to be achieved and sustained.

The actual techniques of planning: what to plan, how to plan, on what scale, over what periods of time, were also first investigated by the Left Oppositionists. Again, the differences from the bureaucratic system actually imposed could not have been greater. Perhaps the most fundamental difference was in the conception of all plans as hypotheses, not orders from above that could not be amended, let alone criticised. For Trotsky, "The checking of a plan of production is one of the most important points in its realisation."[6]

Although the first experience of planning was gained from the reconstruction of specific sectors, such as railway transport, Trotsky recognised from the early 1920s the need for industrial planning to be integrated across a range of sectors. In relation to Lenin's famous call for an electrification programme, for example, he argued that, "the orientation plan of electrification is entirely subordinate to the orientation plans of the fundamental branches of industry, transportation, finance and, finally, agriculture. All these partial plans must first be harmonised with each other on the basis of the data we have at our disposal about our economic resources and possibilities."[7]

Planning, however, did not mean aspiring to move directly to a plan for the whole national economy. On the contrary, it meant identifying strategically important projects and then planning their integrated development so that proportionality could be maintained between the different sectors of the economy and, vitally, the living conditions of the workers themselves could be improved in step with the economy as a whole.

Similarly, rather than a strictly delimited "Five Year Plan" during which all projects should be completed, the Left Opposition's conception was of "rolling planning" in which particular projects would naturally have a planned completion date but the overall plan would move forward year by year. This approach would have avoided the absurdities of bureaucratic planning which created disproportionalities by concentrating investment in the early years of each planning period.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, Trotsky recognised the necessity and potentiality of harnessing the creative power of the workers themselves in the building of their economy. In the Twenties this meant not only ensuring a systematic improvement in living standards but the revolutionising of education by its integration into production and the subordination of managements to the democratic decision-making of the workers. As a necessary corollary of this, Trotsky envisaged debates over the best priorities for the plan becoming the principal substance of political argument, even to the extent of faction formation over the rival claims of supporters of different priorities.

What is clear from even a brief survey of the classical Marxist writers, then, is that between the overthrow of the capitalist class and the construction of socialism there lies a whole period of transition from a world economy dominated and regulated by the market to one of abundance in which labour is so productive that it guarantees all workers most of their material and cultural needs as of right. During this transition period, the organs of workers' power, created initially in class struggle, have to take control of production and re-order it according to planned priorities. As Trotsky put it in 1923, the aim is to "spread the planning principle to the entire market, thus swallowing and eliminating it". This very way of posing the question suggests that the market cannot be abolished over night. Rather, for a whole epoch, it will be necessary to manipulate the market mechanisms (e.g. money, prices) in such as way as leads to their withering away.

Immediate economic tasks

On the day of its victory, the socialist revolution will transfer all political power to the semi-state institutions of the proletariat (soviets,



GOSPLAN building, Moscow: Planning for the bureaucrats not for the masses

workers' militia) and initiate radical economic measures. It is possible that a new workers' state will not immediately expropriate all the means of production. It will start with the expropriation of the big banks, large factories and trading organisations.

Simultaneously, the state will begin to construct an economic administration and planning agency that will broaden its sphere of operation over time. The time taken to nationalise the great mass of the means of production will depend on the level of development and the degree of working class control established in the class struggle prior to the revolution. Through the process of expropriation and socialisation, class exploitation will be progressively removed and the private appropriation of surplus labour will be abolished.

From the outset of the transition, the bulk of the surplus will belong to society; that is, to the democratic association of direct producers. The worker's labour will not become social through the act of private exchange in an anonymous market; it will be immediately and directly social since its content and form will be the subject of democratic discussion and debate.

Equally, the workers will not be alienated from the process of labouring. They will no longer be subject to oppression at work, subject to the tyranny of the clock and the manager. The machine will not dictate the pace of work to the machinist but vice-versa. In addition, workers will not be confined to one type of work throughout their entire lifetime. Access to training and education will not bear the stamp of class origin, still less access to private sources of wealth. Such training will produce diverse skills which can be put to use during each person's lifetime and therefore one will no longer "be" what one "does".

A society which is building socialism will ensure that each person's natural and acquired abilities are detected and nurtured to the fullest extent, free from the oppression that currently arises from class origin, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. As much hazardous, exhausting, dreary and repetitive labour as possible will be automated. All the producers will learn the theoretical, technical and organisational aspects of the production process as a whole. The division between mental and manual forms of occupation will progressively be overcome. The goal will be to progressively break down the distinctions between "labour", "education" and "recreation", and replace them with general human creativity in all aspects of life.

Will there be enough?

Every school student studying economics for the first time is appraised of "the economic problem" that all human societies have to confront; namely, how to satisfy a relatively limitless range of needs and desires with relatively scarce economic resources? How will production and consumption be reconciled when exploitation of the mass of human labour by a minority of private property owners has been overthrown? Democracy and empowerment are not sufficient conditions for the advance towards socialism in the economic sphere.

Economic life will have to be regulated in the transition to socialism by the conscious application of a series of laws of development that govern production and consumption, laws that guarantee both equilibrium and expansion.

In this process the market will no longer be a decisive factor but it will be a factor, nonetheless. In industrially backward countries, with a high level of private agriculture, commodity production and exchange, the dictatorship of the proletariat will have to adapt elements of the programme of the Left Opposition in the 1920s, seeking to accumulate resources for industrialisation in part through taxing a largely private agricultural sector so long as the technological or political basis for voluntary collectivisation of agriculture does not exist.

This situation is unlikely to trouble the domestic economy of any OECD country. There is unlikely to be any significant commodity production outside the provision of certain personal services which do not involve hiring wage labour. However, the transition to socialism in its early stages, even in these countries, will involve some exchange of goods and services between workers' states and capitalist countries.

Capitalism, then, will have an impact on the workers' states in several ways. First, it will affect the choice of whether to invest resources into producing the presently imported goods or continuing to import them. Secondly, if the workers' state seeks to compete for markets with capitalist rivals in order to gain export earnings this will compel the socialist-oriented industry to raise its productivity up to, or maintain it at, world market levels.

This is even more true now than in the Twenties, given the highly integrated international character of modern capitalism. The attempt at economic autarky in the Soviet Union added massively to the costs of industrialisation but for any modern, industrially developed workers' state to try to withdraw totally from the world market would be catastrophic. Thirdly, it may be necessary for some period to allow foreign-owned concessions to exploit labour in return for a portion of the profits or the output, rather than allow the under-utilisation of resources.

Money too has to be used and manipulated in the transition to socialism. Under capitalism, money prices revolve around the values of commodities, that is, the amount of socially necessary labour time they contain. But they only indirectly express this value. In the transitional economy of the workers' state, the abolition of private property in the main means of production immediately introduces important changes in the use of money and prices; but they are far from being "abolished".

On the contrary, as inherited instruments from capitalism they have to be used so long as commodity production and exchange exist either within the workers' state or between it and capitalist countries. Markets and money in the first phases of the dictatorship of the proletariat are the only methods of measurement and thus remain the basis of calculation.

A society which is building socialism will ensure that each person's natural and acquired abilities are detected and nurtured to the fullest extent, free from the oppression that currently arises from class origin, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation

At the start of the transition to socialism, planning has to compare its results with market standards and for this a sound monetary system will be needed. Trotsky argued that planning will be a real test "of an a priori calculation with the help of a universal equivalent, a thing that is unthinkable without a stable money system."[8]

Nonetheless, from the outset, there will be changes in the function of money. Market prices under capitalism indicate the ratios at which alternative goods are exchanged in the market. This conveys a very narrow range of information. Private commodity producers are not interested in a range of external (i.e. social) costs, nor are they interested in the long run effects of their decisions. What the workers' state needs are prices which express the cost of alternative uses of social labour. Without such prices, it would be impossible to measure productivity improvements or make rational judgements between alternative investment choices.

Genuine cost prices can take into consideration various social costs (e.g. environmental damage) that lie outside the scope of the individual firm. While the prevailing costs of production in the technologically developed capitalist world should provide a

bench-mark for cost prices in the transition, post-capitalist society will need to construct cost prices for goods and services that reflect these social costs in the short and long run.

Modern information technology has already simplified the task of drawing up spread sheets to indicate the effect on real cost prices of a number of variables (such as changing rates of investment in different sectors over time) which capitalist market prices are incapable of reflecting.

Such a system not only differs from the way money prices are constructed under capitalism but also from the use of prices under the bureaucratically planned economies. Attempts there to construct artificial prices (e.g. for bread) to affect demand should be rejected. Not only does this not accurately signal the real costs to society but it encourages waste in the use of certain products.

Although in the initial stages, the workers' state will consciously influence demand for some consumer goods and services through taxation or targeted benefits, it will still need to be able to accurately measure the real labour time costs of those goods and services. Clearly, even such subsidies will become superfluous to the extent that an egalitarian income structure prevails.

Naturally, as a means of exchange, the use of money will diminish during the transition to socialism. In the first instance, many commodities will be recognised by society as necessities and will be distributed as a right, and paid for out of social taxation (i.e. a minimum level of housing, clothing and food goods). There will be no need for these to be bought and sold, a transaction requiring money.

Under capitalism, most people only consume a few thousand different types of commodities in the course of a lifetime. Over time, more and more of these goods will be distributed freely and automatically as of right

Under capitalism, most people only consume a few thousand different types of commodities in the course of a lifetime. Over time, more and more of these goods will be distributed automatically as a recognised social entitlement. As the productivity of labour improves, the price of such goods (accurately reflecting a diminishing portion of social labour) will dwindle towards zero; they will become "too cheap to meter" and be added to the list of non-monetary exchanges. As communism approaches – a classless and stateless society – the role of money as an independent physical expression of different amounts of social labour will disappear and be replaced by mere accounting devices such as units/hours of social labour.

The building of a planned economy necessarily implies the conscious allocation of resources to achieve identified objectives. Lenin's aphorism, "Politics is concentrated economics", will be transparently the case in a workers' state. Decision making over the priorities of the plan will be a primary concern of the workers' councils and, no doubt, the subject of party conflict as the demands and interests of different sectors are weighed both against each other and against the long term priorities of socialist construction, nationally and internationally.

Laws guiding planning

Social production must seek to raise labour productivity over time through optimum (not necessarily maximum) use of all the factors of production. An optimum level of output is a level that is compatible with other goals such as shortening the working day and increasing the amount of time available for education and leisure as well as allowing for rational use of non-renewable raw materials and planned reproduction of renewable resources.

Without a progressive increase in disposable time it will prove impossible for workers to develop themselves as rounded individuals. Education and the pursuit of a range of cultural activities will be essential pre-conditions for active participation in the massively increased process of decision-making that will be a feature of the transition. Taking collective control of one's life, at work, in the local community and over the multifarious economic and political decisions will require time and study.

It flows from this that society may wish to concentrate productivity improvements in the industries responsible for consumer goods in order to reduce the amount of necessary labour-time required to reproduce labour. The aim in reducing necessary labour time is not, as it is under capitalism, to maximise the length of surplus labour time. It is to increase disposable labour time.

Once the length of the working day has been established and the amount of disposable time set by the plan, then there remains naturally the extent and structure of material production. The goal of production is not now production for its own sake, nor for profit maximisation. Rather, production must serve final consumption, the needs of the democratic association of producers.

Under capitalism, the only "needs" recognised as legitimate are those that appear through a market exchange and the ability to pay (or "effective demand" as the economists revealingly call it). This is so even if food is exported from famine-stricken areas or houses stand empty because they cannot be sold while thousands of people are homeless. By contrast, a rational "need" from a socialist standpoint is one related to guaranteeing provision of food, shelter, clothing, and access to recreation and education for all.

In order to achieve this, a massive increase in the level of the productive forces will be necessary. In this sense, production is governed by the law of socialist accumulation. It will be necessary to raise the rate of accumulation (especially of modern industrial investment) at the same time as raising the volume of consumption. This can be done through various means.

First, a reorganisation of the international and national division of labour will produce increased economies of scale and new efficiencies; these would include the gains to be made from an elimination of costly trade barriers and the rational dissemination of technological innovations throughout industry, now no longer prevented by private property.

Secondly, a drastic reduction in unproductive expenditures (e.g. weapons, specifically capitalist bureaucracy, marketing costs of most consumer goods, wasteful and socially harmful "luxury" spending) will allow for a redirection of social labour to productive uses. Thirdly, the expropriation of private property in the means of production will allow for the full employment of labour and other resources and thereby massively increase goods and services.

Fourthly, it can be expected that a significant increase in the productivity of labour would come from the removal of the oppressive character of waged labour. New scope for the initiative and inventiveness of collective labour will be possible. Fifthly, a revolutionary programme of land reform in many countries would lead to increases in production.

Production must expand in such a way as to ensure that different types of goods and services are produced in the necessary proportions (including between producer goods and consumer goods) to ensure equilibrium between different sectors of production and between production and consumption. This must include decisions about the pattern of final demand by consumers as well as the rate and structure of investment.

The pattern of final demand will determine the mix of producer and consumer goods and the investment decisions will include whatever level of current consumption is willingly deferred in order to guarantee future consumption. Planned over-production will necessarily be part of these calculations in order to cater for sudden demands not anticipated at the stage of initial plan formulation.

In making these decisions there will be objective economic criteria to be taken into account. A transitional economy would aim to increase its investment programme in the means of production up to the point where no further gain in productivity would

result and where total net output should be used for current consumption.

The rate at which investment should take place depends on the conditions existing at the time the transition is undertaken. Certainly, the present cannot be sacrificed for the future by squeezing current consumption and using all resources for investment.

It may be necessary to devote output in the short-term to raising the standard of living even at the expense of a less rapid rate of increase in the more distant future. On the other hand, a compromise may have to be made between this desire and investment demands where a country suffers from a low level of industrialisation, since a minimum level of industrialisation would be essential for establishing a centralised plan for the whole economy.

A federation of several workers' states, and even more so a world federation of soviet socialist republics, would aim at the rapid equalisation of levels of industrialisation between them. This implies to a certain extent a shift of resources to the "Third World" countries to compensate for the situation that prevailed under imperialism.

This does not mean that the standard of living of the more developed countries will deteriorate during this phase. It would only grow more slowly than it would without undertaking this act of international co-operation. Secondly, the tempo of industrial development in former colonies and semi-colonies must not be so high that the population could not adjust its culture without disruptive instability. The identification of the necessary balance between such competing demands on resources will be a fundamental task of revolutionary politics within the framework of workers' democracy.

Calculation by labour-time

A rational reorganisation of production and consumption will only bring about the first gains. As the transition progresses towards its goal of socialism, productivity will have to be systematically enhanced, production must be more efficient. At this point, Marxists confront the first challenge laid down by the earliest critics of socialism.

Marxists have established that the aim of reducing the length of the working day and increasing disposable labour time is sufficient motive for efficiency strivings. But various critiques have insisted that, having abolished market regulation, socialism would have no effective method of measuring economic progress. The Austrian school (von Mises, Hayek) argued that socialism, lacking a system of market derived prices, would have no mechanism for calculating rationally how to distribute productive resources between various uses. Of any two methods of production it would be impossible to say which was the "more economic" because any comparison of costs against their value-productivity would be impossible.

It is true that, in order to make a comparison between the efficiency of alternative uses of resources, qualitatively different goods must be reducible to quantitative terms. It is wrong, however, to believe that only market prices can produce this calculation. What is true is that reference to the movement of prices of intermediate and final goods is the only way that decisions over resource allocation can be taken in an atomised and individually competitive economy. Enterprises are forced to respond to these externally imposed conditions. However, as we have seen above, market prices express only a very narrow range of actual costs and, therefore, decisions taken on their basis are not by any means necessarily the best decisions that could be taken.

In the transition to socialism, the reduction of qualitatively different goods to a common quantitative standard will be done via the calculation of the labour-time embodied in the differing products and services.

All opponents of Marxism (including market socialists) insist that this is not possible. Von Mises, Tugan Baranovsky and Bohm-Bawerk rejected the labour theory of value as a whole and, therefore, also as a means of calculation according to embodied labour-time. Even Karl Kautsky believed that in practice it was impossible to calculate the amount of socially necessary labour time in a given commodity.

In contrast, Marx argued that under socialism; "labour-time would . . . play a double part. Its apportionment in accordance with a definite plan maintains the correct proportions between the different functions of labour and the various needs of the associations. On the other hand, labour-time also serves as a measure of the parts taken by each individual in the common labour and his share in the part of the total product destined for individual consumption."[9]

Labour-time provides the common basis for the calculations of costs involved in the allocation of social labour to different spheres of production as well as determining the distribution of means of consumption to the population. Consider the allocation of resources to social production. It is necessary to establish what sort of labour time is being referred to. Under capitalism there is a distinction between concrete and abstract labour. The act of exchange itself under capitalism reduces all concrete labours to so much abstract human labour-value. This value in turn can only appear in the form of a rate of exchange (exchange-value) between a definite quantity of one commodity and a definite quantity of another. Money is an independent representation of this exchange value.

Under capitalism, as a result of the constant experience of market exchanges and competition, a clear idea of what constitutes labour of average intensity for any given industry emerges, that is, socially necessary labour. In the transition to socialism, the abolition of commodity production eliminates the "blind", after the event, calculation of socially necessary labour. This calculation is now made consciously by society.

What counts as an averagely intense unit of labour time will be decided by workers' democracy and supervised and checked by workers' committees. The discussion of such standards will obviously consider capitalist comparisons but will not slavishly copy them.

Scientifically established standards of labour intensity would have to include both a physical and a psychological component in their evaluation of stress and exertion. If a specific type of work leads to a particularly high level of exertion and exhaustion this should not be seen as producing more value; rather, the concrete labour should be made to correspond to labour of average intensity by compensating rest periods, which become incorporated into the calculated work time.

In the transition to socialism, the reduction of qualitatively different goods to a common quantitative standard will be done via the calculation of the labour-time embodied in the differing products and services

The calculation of how much labour-time specific products represent will be the task of the workforce itself. For this, the workers simply have to add up the hours that their brigade or team is expending and add this figure to the sum that they received in the form of raw materials and initial products. They add an all-inclusive figure for wear and tear, energy and water etc. and compare the resulting total with the equivalent figures for all enterprises that produce the same product.

The average amount of labour time necessary represents the social labour-value, which may differ from the individual labour-values in both directions. During the transition period, education, training, job rotation and the general raising of the cultural levels of the workforce, will tend to make units of labour time commensurable across all areas of production. This is an important basis for the planning

authorities. "Labour certificate" entitlement[10] will be derived from the individual amount of hours expended, but economic calculations will have to be based on social labour-value figures. Such calculations (and thus the decisions based on them) will be highly transparent for all workers as they will be expressed in units of labour time.

This system will provide the basis for cost calculations and the allocation of resources to alternative uses. The "price" of goods and services will be measured in units of labour time. Producer goods and consumer goods will be priced according to their cost of production (i.e. raw materials, dead labour transferred from machinery), and the agreed price of labour (again, as measured in units of labour time needed to make the goods that reproduce labour to an acceptable standard). The amount of surplus labour time (or mark up) added to cost price will be set by society according to the agreed rate of investment.

Marxists reject out of hand the idea that workers should receive wage bonuses according to the improvements in productivity registered by their enterprise, a proposal put forward by "market socialists" such as Alec Nove

Once a scale of priorities is drawn up by the direct producers themselves as a result of collective debate, the actual productivities of the resources in various uses needs to be calculated. It is necessary first to discover the "costs" of resources and then find out their relative productiveness. Planning bodies would need to know how many hours of labour time would be necessary (stored up in machinery and labour itself) to produce an extra n yards of linen, compared to how many extra cars could be produced by the allocation of the same amount of hours.

It would be possible to arrive at an idea of which, out of a range of alternatives, would result in the greatest net productivity. In addition, comparisons with the immediate past would be used. Such detailed comparisons could be made from the national macro-economic level right down to the enterprise level (and even departmental level) depending on the technical level of the information system. The "monetary" or "price" expression of these relative productivities is entirely secondary and the only consideration is that it be stable and consistently applied to all parts of the economy.

The distribution of goods

The principles governing the distribution of the social product among the workers will be a matter for the society of direct producers themselves to work out. As mentioned earlier, Marx and Engels suggested that the principle would be that the worker receives a "labour certificate" equivalent to the work done minus the portion for insurance, investment and other agreed deductions.

Marx adopted this principle because he recognised that it would be impossible to leap to a society without generalised scarcity and hence there would be a need to regulate access to limited resources. But he was already aware that the slogan of "from each according to his abilities" was adopted "only for the sake of parallel with the production of commodities" and that the concrete method and norms of distribution of consumption goods will depend on the degree of development of the social forces of production.

The more developed the economy at the start of the socialist transition, the more will the needs of the general population be the starting point. It is likely that in the industrially developed imperialist democracies, the socialist transition will start from a fairly high level of guaranteed access to consumption goods, irrespective of individual abilities.

Although this would immediately be applicable to goods which can be simply given away by the state because productivity in that sphere is already so high that free distribution will not raise demand above possible production, it should not be expected that this will be possible for a majority of goods within any foreseeable time. If we think of socialism in world wide terms, demand (i.e. need, not ability to pay) will be so enormous that for decades it will be beyond the possibilities of production, even if we assume an accelerated growth of productivity under most phases of the workers' state.

The fact that "labour certificates" will be calculated according to how much work an individual has carried out, implies that there will be a degree of social inequality in the transition. This inequality will reflect, among other things, the need to provide social incentives to undertake unsocial tasks or normal tasks during unsocial hours or work in remote and inhospitable conditions.

In other cases, workers will prefer to trade-off increased disposable time against labour certificates. Definite limits must be established to this inequality and, where possible, other measures must be found for accomplishing the same ends by different means. For example, regular rotation of jobs, based on multi-skilling over a lifetime, may make it feasible for all workers to undertake certain tasks, in turn, as a social duty, hence eliminating the need for a permanent minority of workers to have to be induced to carry them out.

Marxists reject out of hand the idea that workers should receive wage bonuses according to the improvements in productivity registered by their enterprise, a proposal put forward by "market socialists" such as Alec Nove [11] In the first place, differing productivity levels of separate enterprises should not in general be the basis for differential reward since it will generally be a product of macro-economic investment decisions taken by society as a whole. The benefits of increased productivity should not fall to individual workers or plants but to society as a whole in the form of lowered prices and increased quality and diversity of goods. Every worker will thus have the same interest, a collective interest, in ensuring the maximum efficiency of production to achieve the most rapid fall in prices. Workers as consumers will benefit directly from the achievements of workers as producers.

The problem of skilled labour

All forms of concrete human labour, whether skilled or unskilled, are qualitatively different from each other and not measurable by a common standard as concrete labour. That is why, under capitalism, all concrete labour, including skilled labour, is reduced to abstract human labour, in the process of exchange. Marx considered skilled or "complex" labour to be only a multiple of unskilled labour. Does this mean it should receive higher wages under socialism or that it creates more value than unskilled labour?

Under capitalism, where the costs of training and reproducing skilled labour are borne privately, skilled labour receives higher wages. This will decrease during the transition to socialism. As Engels said; "in a socialistically organised society these costs are borne by society and to it, therefore, belong the fruits, the greater 'values' produced by compound labour".

So the remuneration for skilled labour must be the same as for all labour; egalitarianism must be the guiding principle. There are no grounds for challenging this with the view that skilled labour involves any greater physical or mental exertion than unskilled. Nor does skilled labour create more value during the course of an hour. This would be to confuse the exchange value of labour power with its use-value. Its "exchange-value" may be higher due to the higher costs of reproducing it but it does not have any mysterious higher power of creating more value. However, the higher reproduction-

value must be recognised in the planning and accounting process during the transition.

Take a project which requires 100 workers for ten days of whom ten workers must possess special training and this training embodies 200 working days in total. In this case, society has to account for these 200 days and thus the project would embody 1,200 days not 1,000. Hence, skilled labour in this sense, while it does not create more value than unskilled labour, does, like constant capital under capitalism, embody a certain proportion of stored labour that is transferred to the value of the final product.

The information problem

The problem of how changes in consumer demand would be dealt with in any socialist system of distribution invites the charge from bourgeois economists (especially Hayek) that no socialist planning agency could ever acquire the necessary complete picture of all the fragmented knowledge of consumer needs that exists in order to arrive at creative solutions to changing desires.

In response, we first have to say that in the first stages of the transition where "constructed prices" are necessary, these prices can easily be used to reflect certain fluctuations in consumer demand. Here, changes in inventories are managed by: (a) price movements which can match short-term disequilibrium in supply and demand and (b) changes in the respective production schedules. The law of value would have no role in either case since the higher prices would not be allowed to transform themselves into extra-profits and, thereby, regulate the production process.

Secondly, later in the transition, when socialism approaches and when electronic "labour certificates" are used to regulate access to those residual goods that are not yet available in "abundance", then the computerised information on stock control will suffice in almost all cases to correct impending shortages well in advance of any shortfall in the provision of goods at the point of sale. So "price fluctuations" to regulate supply and demand will no longer be necessary.

As to the general "informational problem" as stated by Hayek and others, this is based on the belief that Stalinist bureaucratic planning is the only possible model of a planned economy. We reply that any healthy workers' state would not build up a planning system in such a hyper-centralised manner. The supercentralism and hypertrophy of the planning system in the degenerated workers' states reflected the needs of the parasitic bureaucracy, above all the imperative to exclude the working class from decision-making, and did not flow from any "principle" of planning.



Changes in inventories will be managed more by shifts in production schedules than prices

On the contrary, proletarian planning has to be simultaneously centralised and decentralised. How can this be arranged? By the organisational principle of democratic centralism.

Proletarian planning implies decision-making at different levels. Each decision should be taken at the level that is best able to carry it out and which is affected by the decision; in other words, every decision is to be taken at as high a level as necessary and as low a level as possible. It reflects, and is related to, the system of soviets and factory/workplace councils. If it is possible to decide on changes in the product mix of a factory at a local (i.e. plant) level without disrupting the overall pattern, then this should be done and the available local knowledge can inform that decision.

On the other hand, if developments of a technological or ecological character demand certain adaptive changes within the production schedules of a range of factories, then the most effective level of decision-making must reside at a higher level, be that regional, national or international. In principle, there is no problem with locating decision-making at an adequate level as long as there is no bureaucracy that seeks to monopolise (central) power in its hands and as long as there is no nascent bourgeoisie that wants to decentralise economic decision-making into private hands.

Bettering capitalism's best

One of the best arguments for planning in the transition to socialism is the experience of capitalism in the twentieth century. It is well known that monopolies seek to remove as much uncertainty as possible from their economic calculations. Investment decisions and profit projections are vulnerable to the inherent anarchy of the market and competition from rivals.

Each planning decision should be taken at the level that is best able to carry it out and which is affected by the decision

By capturing as much as possible of a given market or supply of raw materials, by engaging in "price-fixing" with their supposed rivals, monopoly firms endeavour to inject as much certainty and planning into decision-making as they can. It is important that we take this experience as our point of departure – real tendencies within the capitalist mode of production itself, developments which prove both the possibility of planning on an ever more inclusive scale and the need to destroy private property in the means of production in order to fulfil the intrinsic possibilities of planning.

The growth of corporate planning has not only meant the attempt to guarantee market sales and hence realise their profits. The labour process itself is being transformed. One example of this can be seen in the "quality revolution" which in turn has accompanied and made possible "lean production". The success of the Japanese during the 1970s with these techniques, and the increasing competitiveness of the world market in the 1980s, forced these new techniques on every producer.

The "quality revolution" is based on giving workers more control of the production process. Hitherto, the dominant form of production since the 1920s has been the assembly line. This technique of production reduced workers to simple assembling machines whose activity was governed by the line which brought the work to them.

While this technique boosted productivity enormously, it did so on the basis of low quality of production. Quality departments had to be set up to correct defects created by this mind-numbing and body-destroying method of production. With mass line assembly work, workers were reduced to automatons with no say in the production process, let alone the pace of the line.

The "quality revolution" has sought to get rid of some of the alienation of the assembly line. Workers are now organised in work teams doing a broader range of tasks. Above all, they are now responsible for quality and that has meant greater consultation and the power to control the immediate work process.

However, giving workers increased control of the work process requires increased loyalty to "their" company lest it become a threat to capitalism itself. It requires class harmony within production. In the face of class struggle prompted by economic crisis, this will break down. Quality production under capitalism comes into contradiction with the competitive and anarchic character of capitalism. However, the experience of such production systems, coupled with a victorious struggle for workers' control and revolution, will be a powerful asset to the new workers' state.

The quality revolution also breaks down the divide between mental and physical labour. In the past, products were designed with scant regard to the production process. Designs were then modified by the production engineers to put them into operation.

With "quality production", workers are consulted at the design stage. Products are designed to be defect-free from conception, and this is only made possible by the collaboration of all those engaged in the design, development and production phases as a joint team. The result is that not only has the development cycle of major products been halved, but they are better designed and more worker friendly to produce.

In its most advanced form, this integration takes the form of concurrent engineering which indicates that capitalism is forced to minimise the disruption caused by the social division of labour. With concurrent engineering, design and production are tackled simultaneously. As the design progresses, so too does the method of producing it, with the one feeding back into the other. This requires the integration of design engineering, material sciences and manufacturing technology. It requires an even tighter co-operation between the design centre, suppliers and supportive services.

Just as "quality production" involves increased socialisation of the labour process within a factory or company, so it and "lean production" tend to socialise production between factories, their suppliers and all the contractors who support it.

Manufacturers not only demand defect-free supplies, but the minimum of supplies – Just In Time inventories. The best factories in Japan operate with only two hours' worth of parts. To achieve this level of efficiency, suppliers have to tap into the computer of the producer to determine the flow of production and the requirement, therefore, for their parts.

The next goal for the capitalist labour process is computer integrated manufacturing (CIM)-an automated shop floor, with functions such as purchasing, stock and sales in the retail outlets linked electronically to the factory floor. Already pilot schemes connecting home shoppers via the internet to superstores and they in turn to suppliers, are up and running in Britain. The real problem is its complexity and the complexity flows from the anarchy of the market, i.e. the rivalry in profit making, the business secrecy that this necessitates, etc. If sales could be predicted and planned in advance, then CIM would be practicable. Its full execution requires the end of the business cycle – an impossibility under capitalism.

Despite the fact that companies spend millions in marketing efforts to discover consumer wants and to improve the usability of their products, the real problem is not what consumers want, but what they can afford to buy, and it is this element that is the most unpredictable of all and lies behind the operation of the business cycle. The more these changes in the labour process develop, the more their efficient and further development requires the overcoming of the contradiction between private consumption and socialised production.

The structures of the planning apparatus work on the principle of elective representative democracy

Planning structures

Objections to planning arise from different starting points: some have argued that without competition innovation and efficiency are impossible. Others insist that without markets it is impossible to collate the necessary information about consumer preferences since the centralisation inherent in state ownership and direction deters the flow of information and creates a distinct layer of functionaries with separate interests that disrupt the operation of any plan.

This is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the state in the transition. This state is a semi-state. The semi-state retains certain features common to all states: a centralised armed power to defend the revolution from internal enemies and from outside threats. So long as scarcity and inequalities exist some form of body regulating the sphere of distribution will be necessary.

But this state is no longer "out of the control" of the masses, the weapon of an exploiting class, raised above and against the people. It is now a state that is rooted in civil society and does not stand opposed to it. For example, the state functionaries themselves are not a permanent caste of officials, but are made up of individuals who are trained for this task among others and are subject to rotation.[12] Moreover, they are accountable and recallable by the general population that acts as a check upon the development of any special interests that collide with the mass of consumers and producers.

In short, the process of political and economic negotiation between society and state, between politics and economics is fluid. Even the market socialists cannot devise a state that is as "democratic" as this. All market socialists advocate parliamentary democracy and a sphere of "politics", which is separate from economic management. It is they who thereby advocate the need for a bureaucracy to mediate between state and civil society.

The structures of the planning apparatus work on the principle of elective representative democracy. Members of workers' management committees from places of work together with representatives of consumer associations meet at every level from local, regional to national. The national planning commissions are responsible for devising broad parameters of aggregate investment and consumption, including the allocation of production into one of several sectors (transport, production, services for example). These will be passed down for discussion and disaggregation at both a sectoral level and regional/local level. Management committees of factories, farms and offices will discuss the implications of broad planning targets for them. At regional and local level, organisations will devise targets for specific industries; including suggestions on product mix for final consumption. This will then be fed back up the system and the implications



Socialism will relieve humans of much menial work

drawn out for the targets of semi-finished products and raw materials.

The plan should be as decentralised as possible; that is, binding decisions should be taken as low down the planning scale as possible. For example, the same amount of prepared timber could have multifarious uses for the consumer; factories receiving it have machinery capable of making numerous end products out of it; the final form of the product, representing a quantity of social labour, should be decided by the ultimate consumer as far as possible. Clearly, however, final choices have implications for resources back up the line of planning. Transport, storage and packaging requirements may differ according to the final choice of end use and these will have to be negotiated with the relevant suppliers before final decisions are taken.

The rationale for decentralisation is that the centre is not omniscient and that the necessary information required to make decisions about resource allocation cannot in principle be known by the centre given the nature of the information or the speed with which it must be acted upon. Even the best of plans carried out with as much free flow of information as possible, free from bureaucratic self-interest and with the best computers in the world, remain rough approximations, provisional hypotheses. They need constant adjustment and checking. At the end of the day, the transitional economy is demand driven, that is, accumulation is guided by the democratic wishes of the mass of workers themselves as consumers of their own products. The consumer must be judge of the results of the plan.

There are many ways that the plan can be "verified and corrected", in Trotsky's words. Some products will be capable of being adjusted in whole or in part with little technical difficulty in the short run by quality control feedback even on a day to day basis; CIM technology and inventory controls can be used to bring production into line with current demand, even if not in full accord with the original plan projections.

But the market (i.e. exchange of consumer goods with wages) too, will have its place. This is for two reasons. First, the consumer makes a range of choices only on a day to day basis (e.g. many foods). This choice from a range of possible alternatives must continue. But it will only be possible to plan in broad terms (based on market research and watchful of past trends) in anticipation of some consumer needs. In essence, the worker has the right to change some demand preferences daily.

In addition, given the time lag between plan formulation and production in the case of some consumer durables, it is likely that consumer preferences may change in the interim. Moreover, inventory controls and just-in-time techniques for certain products could not alter production in line with demand in anything but the long or medium run. Given that the plan has predetermined aggregate demand and production schedules there could only be a shift in the structure of demand. Prices would have to be raised or lowered above or below cost price in order to clear the market.

The results of this process can then be taken into consideration in drawing up revised planning schedules. These market prices must be market clearing prices; they must not – as for the market socialists – lead to automatic increases in production based on the increased profitability to the enterprise raising output; if allowed, this would have considerable disruptive effects on planning schedules up the chain of resource allocation. Rather, use-value and social labour considerations will have to be taken together in the next round of planning.

The triumph of socialism

The triumph of socialism – the lower stage of communism – is impossible to achieve in one country and will be attained as a global system or not at all. It assumes that the satisfaction of an agreed basic level of economic and cultural needs by the world's population has been reached by the methods outlined earlier.

Under communism, political economy gives way to the administration of things, or social engineering. There is no need for a separate sphere of politics – democracy itself comes to an end. Use-values are in such abundance with such minimum application of labour that humans are free to develop their personalities in other forms of creative endeavour.

It has become common on the left to ridicule the Marxist concept of abundance with regard to material goods under communism. The old argument that human desires and wishes are in principle unlimited and, therefore, can never be fully satisfied is cited as an argument against the notion of communist abundance.

This argument wrongly assumes that socialist society will simply perpetuate capitalist patterns of consumption. Firstly, labour productivity will be raised to such a high level as to satisfy the basic needs of the entire world population and to provide sufficient reserves to satisfy a reasonable proportion of non-essential desires for everybody. This will allow human relations to be deepened, new forms of cultural expression to emerge, and the development of the human personality in general to be given more weight in society.

Secondly, the long term changes in social structure will generate a quite different psychology among people under communism. The end of commodity fetishism, widespread rivalry and the current need for goods as compensation for alienation will relativise the importance attached to material products.

Finally, the conscious regulation of society that is possible under communism allows a long term balance to be struck between humankind and the rest of nature. It will be obvious to all that for ecological reasons we will have to set some limit to the expansion of industry, at least as it is understood today. These three elements, taken together, create a situation where material welfare, even if it is not absolutely abundant, reaches a level where economic accumulation ceases to be the motor force of society. At last, human development will gain an essentially social, cultural and psychological direction rather than an economic one.■

Footnotes

1 See "Against Market Socialism", in *Trotskyist International* no 20, June-September 1996, for a critique of the main contemporary exponents of "market socialism".

2 In "Plan versus Market", in *Trotskyist Bulletin* no 9, September 1996, we also develop the case for democratic decentralised planning out of a critique of bureaucratic command planning based on the insights of Leon Trotsky and the theoretical work of the Russian Left Opposition in the 1920s and 1930s.

3 See "From boom to bust" in *Trotskyist International* no. 23 for a contemporary account of this process.

4 F Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, London, 1970, p374/75

5 Ibid p375

6 L Trotsky, "The New Course", in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* Vol. 1, p114

7 ibid p115

8 L Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1972, p67

9 Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", *Selected Works*, Vol.3, Moscow 1977, p17/18

10 For the sake of consistency we use Marx's term, no doubt this will actually take the form of some kind of a electronic "credit card".

11 His arguments on income differentials are to be found in *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, London 1983, p.215

12 Even here it could be noted that capitalism is increasingly moving towards a system of interchange between government bureaucrats and various sectors of the "real economy", in order to homogenise perceptions and understanding.

Trotsky and the Fourth International

Turn to th

In the second in our series on the building of Trotsky's Fourth International, **Dave Stockton** surveys the years 1934-36, marked by a powerful revival of class struggle which necessitated a turn to mass work for the newly independent Trotskyist organisations.

THE FINAL split with the Communist International (Comintern) brought home a brutal fact: the International Left Opposition (ILO) was tiny. In no country did the Trotskyists number more than a few hundred members – with the exception of the Soviet Union. And there, whilst the ILO had several thousands courageous adherents, they were already in prison camps or could work only in the deepest illegality. Even in western Europe and North America the Trotskyists were the target of ferocious slander, and sometimes physical attacks, from the Communist Parties of which they regarded themselves as expelled left factions.

The ILO consisted not of vanguard parties but of isolated and persecuted propaganda groups. The previous five years had given them little opportunity to involve themselves in mass struggle. The young cadres witnessed a series of defeats for the working class and the seemingly relentless decline of the Communist Parties of which they were working as "expelled factions".

But times were changing. The workers' defeats in Germany, Austria and Spain in 1933-34 finally produced a massive working class response to fascism. The spontaneous determination of millions of workers to defend their unions, parties, and cultural organisations produced substantial upheavals in the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties and in the unions.

Many parties of the Second International moved left, ousting right-wing factions and developing left-centrist ones. The Comintern was forced to abandon its sectarian opposition to the united front. But it now swung rightwards, first proposing "organic unity" with the socialist parties and then developing the alliance, the popular front, with open bourgeois parties. For two years, 1934-36, the mass labour movement was in political ferment. The social democratic parties took on a centrist colouration while the "communists" evolved rightwards from bureaucratic centrism to social patriotism.

This presented a window of opportunity for the ILO, now renamed the International Communist League (ICL). To take advantage of this situation it had to transform itself. It was confronted with the question that confronts the left today: how to grow from small nuclei to vanguard parties capable of playing a decisive part in events.

Trotsky and his closest co-thinkers made it clear that a major reorientation was necessary and, as with all turns, this inevitably led to internal struggles, polemics, and even splits. The ICL faced the problem of how to break out of isolation without politically adapting to the powerful currents of left reformism and centrism: of how to combine tactical flexibility towards the masses seeking the road to revolution whilst avoiding a centrist corruption of the programme.

The lessons of this period remain rich ones for revolutionaries today. On what basis can small groups of revolutionaries unite into a common organisation? What should be the attitude of revolutionaries to centrist organisations moving leftwards? How could small revolutionary organisations use united front tactics with mass reformist parties? Faced with reformist governments and reformist participation in cross class governments, how can revolutionaries aid the workers to learn from this experience to break with reformism? How can a collection of small propaganda groups build an International of workers parties?

The Trotskyists of the 1930s often failed the test – sometimes heroically, sometimes disgracefully. But their failures and, in particular, Trotsky's responses to them can help us to avoid similar mistakes.

e masses!

Centrism and the FI

The early 1930s had seen the growth of small centrist groupings – the result of splits and expulsions from the CPs, and from the Social Democratic and Labour parties. Trotsky turned to parties such as the Sozialistische Arbeiter Partei (SAP) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The ICL called on them to work together to draft a programme and build an international organisation to fight for a new International.[1] The German SAP and two Dutch parties, the OSP and RSP, responded to this appeal. Forming the so-called Bloc of Four with the ICL, they issued a common declaration calling for a Fourth International.

However one of the signatories abandoned this struggle almost before the ink on the declaration was dry. Instead of joining with the ICL to build a revolutionary international, the SAP clung to the collection of left reformist and right centrist parties assembled in the IAG (the London Bureau).

What was the cause of this backsliding? The catastrophe of 1933, caused by the chronic right wing legalism of the German Social Democracy (SPD) and ultra left sectarianism of the German Communist Party (KPD) had galvanised the left centrists into pledging themselves to build new parties and a new international. But by 1934 the Comintern was moving rightwards and the Socialist Parties moving left. This, when added to the powerful desire for unity amongst the masses, had a profoundly sobering effect on the centrist leaders.

Surely, the centrists reasoned, the Comintern and the Second International were, after all, capable of self-reform? Surely now was not the right time for "new parties and a new international". This could only mean "more splits" and the working class wanted unity. Eventually they would be needed but one had to wait until the masses would respond to the call. To do so now would be sectarian and self-proclamatory. Surely, one had to await a more favourable moment in the historic process or the signal of some great mass action? Surely, it was necessary to build up strong national sections first?

Trotsky rejected this whole approach. Of course he had not proposed that a few propaganda groups should "proclaim" that they were already the Fourth International. Founding and proclaiming were secondary questions. They were questions of concrete organisation. But what was necessary was to tell the working class honestly and openly what was necessary. If the working class could not defeat fascism and seize power using the Socialist and Communist parties then it was necessary to set out to build new ones. Trotsky insisted that revolutionaries could not and should not hide their goals from the masses because of the latter's current consciousness or moods.

"It would be an unlawful pretence, to say nothing of adventurism, to proclaim that the new International has already been established today...We are erecting only the foundation and preparing the timber. But over this timber, we, at this very moment, unfurl the banner of the Fourth International so that all shall know what sort of structure is being erected," wrote Trotsky.

For Trotsky, the ICL had to play a vanguard role and win leftward moving centrist forces to this project. These forces were to be found both in the small centrist parties and within the much larger Socialist and Communist parties. In addition the ICL had to win to its ranks an upcoming generation of young fighters who were not yet dyed-in-the-wool Stalinists or Social Democrats.

For Trotsky the idea of the Fourth International was not an empty "name" or "number" but a programme – the only programme which could meet the needs of the present crisis. All other questions were subordinate to winning serious forces to this programme – not least the question of splits or fusions in the mass organisations. Trotsky distinguished between unity in action, the united front, for which he and the ILO had been the best fighters during the whole "Third Period" and the false idea that new parties or a new international could be formed on the basis of the lowest common denominator. In short he rejected the current mania for unity at any price.

"Our thesis is that the unity of the working class can be realised only on a revolution ary basis. This basis is our own programme "

Leon Trotsky

"Unity and split are two methods subordinated to program and political tasks...Our thesis is that the unity of the working class can be realised only on a revolutionary basis. This basis is our own programme."[2]

Likewise Trotsky excoriated the idea – popular then as now – that strong national parties could be built at once but that an international had to wait till these "roots in the working class" had been won in a number of countries. This was to treat the International as a roof that could only be put on after the national "walls" had been built. In fact the International should be the planning and guiding agency that ensured the entire construction process from the foundations upward. In his view the same principles applied to building national as to international organisations:

"Some wise men who understand nothing of the character of our epoch, and learned nothing from the victories and defeats of the proletariat, try to reason as follows: first we will build a national party and then, on a solid and safe foundation, we shall erect the International. This argument sounds very serious, circumspect, solid but in reality it demonstrates philistine short-sightedness...It is clear that under the influence of the very same common causes, advanced proletarian elements in all countries must seek a way out in the same direction. Can they, in this case refuse the establishment of international connections, elaboration of programmatic and

strategical questions, exchange of political experience and, finally, mutual practical support, already at the first steps of their work?" [3]

Trotsky emphasised the indissoluble linkage of international organisation to involvement in the 'national' class struggle.

"When deep-thinking people say; 'Do not hurry; now is not the time for the Fourth International', they could with equal success say: 'Do not hurry; now is not the time for the class struggle'. It is a question not of the formal 'proclamation' of the new International but of the building of a new party, not as an isolated national entity but as a part of the International."[4]

It soon became clear that the struggle for the new International would involve from the outset a serious struggle with centrist backsliding and obstruction as well as against Stalinism and Social Democracy. Moreover, this struggle would involve not only polemics with centrist organisations but a struggle within the ICL. It required a fight against both a capitulation to the powerful centrist moods of the masses in this period and the obverse side of this, a passive propagandist, sectarian veering away from the test of mass action.

From 1934 onwards the trend to the development of independent centrist organisations that had prompted the Bloc of Four tactic was increasingly overshadowed by another: the growth of powerful left centrist wings within the Social Democratic parties and the transformation of some of these into centrist organisations – in particular the SFIO in France and the PSOE in Spain. In these years the struggle against centrism focused on what tactics to apply to the radicalised socialist parties. Within the ICL both passive abstentionist currents and ones with an appetite for unprincipled fusions or blocs manifested themselves.

Another Turning Point

As a result of the German workers crushing defeat, Trotsky thought that "the revolutionary key to the situation in Europe and in the entire world is now, above all, in France". In January 1934 a wave of mass action broke out. The world economic crisis was generating the same social forces that propelled Hitler to power in Germany. There was as yet no united French fascist organisation, but several "Leagues" existed which had a mass base and were growing very rapidly.[5]

On 6 February 1934 the fascist Leagues called a demonstration on the Place de la Concorde, across the bridge from the French Parliament, to protest against the sacking of the right-wing Paris police chief by the newly formed Radical government of Eduard Daladier. So too did the French Communist Party, which was still characterising the French Socialist Party, the SFIO, as social fascists and also downplaying the danger of fascism. A left-wing had developed in the SFIO around the paper *Bataille Socialiste*,[6] calling for a united front with the communists. Its leaders Jean Zyromski and Marceau Pivert proposed a united counter-demonstration.

The CP central committee rejected this call outright. L'Humanité headlined its 5 February issue "No Panic!" observing that to choose between the SFIO and the fascist Leagues was like "choosing between plague and cholera". Instead of a united workers' demonstration against the fascists, the CP chose to demonstrate against Daladier alongside the fascists, who were trying to bring down the Radical government in order to install a right-wing regime. One hundred thousand demonstrators, many carrying small arms and razors, tried to storm the bridge leading to the parliament. The police were fired on, and returned fire. One policeman and 14 demonstrators were killed. Some 2-3,000 communists joined in the fighting against the police, with only minor skirmishes against the fascist. It seemed that the fascist plague was less dangerous than the social democratic cholera.

The next day, despite commanding a strong majority in parliament Daladier resigned, "to avoid further bloodshed". A conservative dominated government of national unity was formed under a retired former president Gaston Doumergue, with only the socialists and communists excluded: the Radicals joined this cabinet too.

The fascists had won their first battle. Trotsky characterised this regime as a "the first step of the passage from parliamentarism to Bonapartism"[7], one similar to the governments of Brunning, Von Papen and Schleicher, which had preceded the rise to power of Hitler. Its task was to appear to "rise above" the evenly balanced classes of society, to arbitrate between them and impose order through the state bureaucracy, the police and the army. But Trotsky did not expect that events would mechanically follow the German pattern, ending the seizure of power by the fascists. Everything depended on the French workers and what they did.

Precisely because of the German example, these events dramatically increased the alarm of rank and file workers and the calls for unity between the workers' parties and their two union confederations, the CGT and the CGTU. The CP, deeply embarrassed by its embroilment in what most workers saw correctly as an attempted fascist coup, called a demonstration against both the fascists and "the killer Daladier". It was banned by the police, but the CP went ahead and this led to violent street and barricade fighting. The costs for the communist workers were heavy: six dead and hundreds wounded.

The reformist union federation, the CGT, called a general strike for 12 February 1934 and the SFIO called for a massive anti-fascist demonstration on the same day. Socialist demonstrations on the intervening days were joined by communist workers and local party organisations began to break discipline and co-operate with plans for 12 February. Anti-fascist committees began to spring up across France. CP leaders were forced, unwillingly and fearfully, to participate. The united general strike paralysed Paris and severely affected the provinces. 150,000 demonstrators filled the streets of Paris.

The CP and SFIO leaders tried to keep their demonstrations as distinct as possible. However, they met at the Place de la Nation: the leaders and the marshals tried to "maintain order" but



French fascists display the trophies they captured from the left

it was useless. The rank and file swept them aside, fusing in a tumultuous mass. Daniel Guerin recalls the scene:

"The communist column turned round the central island in one direction, the socialist column in the opposite direction. Then when they met, their waves joined, melted into one another, to the cry 'Unity! Unity!' Their mass now advanced, in serried ranks across the whole width of the Cours de Vincennes, singing the Internationale".[8]

Immediately after this turning point in France, however, catastrophe struck the Austrian workers' movement. The troops of the bonapartist regime of Engelbert Dollfuss moved to seize the hidden arms caches of the already banned militia of the Austrian Social Democracy, the Schutzbund. Deserted by their party leadership, the local units of the Schutzbund fought for five days before succumbing to the heavy artillery of the army and police. 118 workers were killed and 279 injured. An attempted general strike failed.

The Austrian Social Democratic Party, a party of 660,000 members – which had in its own words created an "anticipatory socialism" in Vienna, building huge apartment blocks, nurseries and kindergartens, clinics, libraries, parks, swimming pools – was smashed to pieces, just as the SPD and the KPD had been in Germany. This time the blame could not be placed on the division of the Austrian proletariat; the Austrian CP was insignificant. And Dollfuss was nowhere near as strong, militarily, as Hitler's Nazis had been in 1933.

The Austrian experience showed that to defeat fascism needed more than simply the passive unity of organisation between the workers' parties. It showed that more than an armed militia was needed. Many Labourite historians have praised Trotsky's warnings about the danger of Hitler, distorting them into a criticism solely of the Stalinists' sectarian obstruction of the united front and presenting his advocacy of the latter as based on a self-limiting "defence of democracy". In the Austrian case Social Democracy could not shift the responsibility onto the Stalinist splitters. The Austrian workers had all the unity they needed. The question was what to do with it?

Trotsky drew the political conclusions from this great defeat as he had after that of the German workers a year previously. Decades of electoral and municipal cretinism, of pandering to democratic illusions and legalism are not the way to prepare the workers' movement for decisive action.

"What is necessary . . . is a systematic revolutionary education of the vanguard and winning the trust of the majority of the proletariat in the practical intelligence and daring of the proletarian general staff. Without this precondition, victory is completely impossible. For years the Austrian Social Democracy threatened to answer force with force, when their democratic rights were impinged upon. It turned revolutionary action into a legalistic-literary threat that it did not take seriously itself. Only a leadership that recognises in advance that the revolution is unavoidable, that makes this the fundamental principle guiding its actions, and draws all the practical conclusions flowing from this, measures up to the situation at the critical hour."[9]



12 February 1934, Cours de Vincennes: The left was united at last

The road to the Popular Front

The French workers, at least for one day, were able to force their unwilling leaders into a united front. However, this spontaneous militancy was not sufficient to overcome the resistance of the two bureaucracies which, once the masses were demobilised, returned to their old tricks. Nevertheless in spring 1934 a major change of line took place in the Comintern.

On 23 May in Moscow, Pravda carried two articles: one was anonymous and entitled "For the United Front Against Discord"; the other was signed by Maurice Thorez and called "The French Communist Party in the Struggle for the United Front". Both said that Communists had the duty to offer the united front of struggle against fascism to the socialist leaders.

What had forced Stalin's hand? Certainly the pressure of the French CP workers threatened the CP with disintegration if it continued its refusal to unite, but the self-same criminal policy had destroyed the KPD a year before without turning a hair of Stalin's head. During this year, while Hitler crushed the German labour movement, Stalin wined and dined with the fascist diplomats – seeking a continuation of the German-Russian accords.

On 14 April 1934, however, the German ambassador finally notified Russian foreign minister Litvinov that no deal was possible. Stalin turned abruptly from an alliance with German imperialism to one with the French. Meetings with French diplomats began and, by 2 May, a Franco-Soviet pact was announced by the French foreign minister Pierre Laval.

The turn to the "united front" now became a necessity for Stalin. The French communists had a new role to play: they had to allay the French capitalists' fears of revolution; it would not happen as long as France was in alliance with Russia! The turn came just in time to save the French CP. The sectarian "Third Period" had taken a disastrous toll on its membership, while at the same time it mightily strengthened the SFIO. By 1932 the CP had (officially) 30,000 members; many sources say the real figure was nearer 12,000. The SFIO at the same time had 137,000 members.

"Only a leadership that recognises in advance that the revolution is unavoidable, that makes this the fundamental principle guiding its actions, and draws all the practical conclusions flowing from this, measures up to the situation at the critical hour."

On 27 July the CP and the SFIO signed a unity pact. The SFIO leaders demanded the cessation of all communist criticism of themselves as its price. Thorez who in April was still calling for a "constant and pitiless attack on the Socialist Party" was, by June, writing that "neither from the mouth of any of our propagandists, nor from the pen of any of our writers, in L'Humanité or even in the Cahiers du Bolshevisme [theoretical journal of the PCF], as in our entire press, will there be the slightest attack against the organisations or against the leaders of the Socialist Party."[10]

Not only was the united front to exclude all freedom of criticism, but Thorez was soon to go further. On 12 October 1934 L'Humanité carried an article by Thorez called "At all costs, Defeat Fascism; For a Wide Anti-Fascist Popular Front". This was the first use of the slogan. The middle-classes, Thorez claimed, were open to a "common front" and he argued for local sections of the Radical Party to be admitted into Popular Front committees. He called for these committees to be elected across France. Meanwhile secret overtures were opened between the CP and the Radical leaders Herriot and Daladier.

The Radical Party was at this time part of a Doumergue's government, engaged in imposing vicious deflationary measures. These alienated and radicalised the white collar state employees who formed an important part of the Radical Party's base. Yet the formal proposal of a bloc with the largest party of the imperialist bourgeoisie had to await events in Moscow.

The full import of what the Franco Soviet pact meant for working class strategy was soon revealed to the French workers. Stalin, on the prompting of Laval, made the observation in the official communiqué that he had "complete understanding and approval of the national defence policy pursued by France with the object of maintaining its armed forces at a level consistent with its security requirements".

Even the editor of L'Humanité described Stalin's statement as a "clap of thunder". Yet L'Humanité loyally jumped to attention with the headline "Stalin is right!" With scarcely a blink out went the Leninist policy of revolutionary defeatism in an imperialist country – a policy on which the party had been founded. Within a week the CP unceremoniously dropped its campaign against the two year conscription. Likewise its calls for independence for the colonies were replaced by calls for "colonial reform". The oppressed masses were told that "while they had the right to secede they should not do so". Today the main danger was fascism, not "democratic" colonialism, the CP said. In response to this, Leon Blum, the leader of the SFIO, triumphantly announced that revolutionary defeatism was dead.

At the end of May 1935 the Popular Front which until then had been posed primarily as an alliance with the petty bourgeois base of the Radical Party and prominent anti-fascist individuals was now given the content of a cross-class government to be supported in parliament by the votes of the Communist, Socialist and Radical parties.



French Foreign Minister, Pierre Lavalle, announces his pact with Stalin

The CP plunged into a wild orgy of patriotism, giving it a "revolutionary" colouration by constant references to the Great Revolution of 1789 and Jacobinism. There was a huge joint demonstration on 14 July 1935, Bastille Day, in which Thorez, wearing a tricolor sash stood beaming with joy, alongside Daladier and Blum. The communists joined in singing the Marseillaise, "with exaltation" in Blum's words. The communist municipalities were instructed on no account to fly the red flag. For the next three years Thorez was hardly to be seen in public without his tricolor sash.

Trotsky characterised Stalin's and the French CP's support of Laval's rearmament programme as a critical moment in post war working class history: "Stalin has signed the death certificate of the Third International. For the first time Stalin has openly said what is: i.e. in full view of the entire world, he has repudiated revolutionary internationalism and passed over to the platform of social patriotism."[11]

Trotsky showed how this not only meant the abandonment of the class independence of the workers in the face of an approaching imperialist war but the abandonment of revolution in the face of an approaching revolutionary situation. This marked the passage of Stalinism into the camp of counter-revolution. Trotsky said – a prediction to be brutally confirmed in France and Spain in the years 1936-39.

"Today Stalin and co. have lost all faith in the revolutionary forces. They resort to pure diplomacy, that is to say to the filthiest sort. They refuse to see anything except combinations with this or that imperialism against some other. They are above all, afraid lest the French workers compromise their combinations. Thorez and co. subscribe to this disgraceful attitude. They also deem the revolutionary movement to be an obstacle to the safety of the USSR. They accept the offer to hamstring and penalise the revolution."[12]

In August 1935 the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern endorsed and generalised the "broad anti-fascist Popular Front". Few of the delegates suspected it, but this was to be the last Congress. Dimitrov delivered the main report and lavished praise on Thorez and the French communists. He urged the party to develop the Popular Front into a mass movement through the creation of local committees. A year was yet to pass before the government of the Popular Front under Blum was installed, but in essence the period from spring 1934

to summer 1935 saw the transition from the sectarianism of the Third Period to the cross class strategy of the Popular Front: from bureaucratic ultra-left adventurism to bureaucratic social-patriotism. In this momentous and difficult period the tiny forces of French Trotskyism had to orient themselves.

Trotsky and the French Section

By June 1934 the 100 members of the Communist League (CL), the French section of the ICL, had begun to play a recognised role in working class politics. Their weekly paper *La Verité* and their review *La Lutte de Classes* had enabled them to be the clearest and most consistent protagonists of the united front, with a unparalleled record of having warned for years of the fascist danger in Germany. During the 6-12 February period they had managed to bring out three issues of their paper, each with a circulation of 3,000. They had built a small youth group around a paper *Octobre Rouge*. They had become widely known, though as yet they had extremely weak roots in the working class.

Given the central role that the ICL's perspective accorded to France it was fortunate that Trotsky was actually resident in France from July 1933 to June 1935. In the first six months, he was able to meet the leaders of the French, other European and North American sections of the ICL– and of other left parties. He was able to attend leadership meetings of the CL in Paris. He was able to contribute, albeit anonymously, to the press of the French section. But in 1934, after the 6 February riots, the Doumergue government took fright and sought to expel Trotsky from the country. In mid-April he was deprived of his right to residence though, since no other state was willing to receive him, it proved impossible to enforce the expulsion for over a year.

One serious problem was that the leadership of the Communist League was divided into two near permanent groups: the first was led by Pierre Naville and Gérard Rosenthal and the second by Raymond Molinier and Pierre Frank. The former tended to a literary propagandist approach, seeing little need or possibility to undertake the tactical and organisational methods needed to transcend the propaganda circle stage of party building. Molinier on the other hand was willing enough to take bold measures to get the League involved with mass struggle.

For these reasons Trotsky supported Molinier and was sharply critical of Naville. But Molinier had a tendency to adventurism: the pursuit of short cuts to success which trampled on principles. This manifested itself first in organisational and financial matters and later in a wholesale accommodation to centrism in order to achieve mass influence.

Nevertheless, Trotsky was very critical of the section, particularly of its clique – and faction-ridden internal life. In a very sharp letter, aptly entitled "It is time to stop", he stigmatised the fact that:

". . . almost from the very beginning of the existence of the French League its inner life represented a series of crises that never reached the level of principles, but distinguished themselves by extreme bitterness and poisoned the atmosphere of the organisation, repelling serious workers despite their sympathy for the ideas of the opposition."[13]

He thought its leadership was out of touch with the membership, tolerated the disruption of anti-Leninist elements and organised the work very badly. He saw that there were in the French section "lifeless sectarian elements . . . whose whole psychology is adapted to the atmosphere of closed circles."[14]

Trotsky thought this had to stop. But this could not be accomplished solely by discipline or purges. A new sort of activity was needed. He saw the new orientation to the Fourth International and towards mass struggles as posing the question: "forward to a wide arena of the Fourth International or backward to small circles stewing in their own juice."[15]

As soon as the new line of the Comintern on the united front became clear Trotsky rapidly came to the view that the Communist League must find its place within the united front – and that meant within one of the mass parties that formed it. The Stalinists could be expected to work in every way to exclude the Trotskyists; the very size of a propaganda group would exclude it from party-to-party negotiations and – if the CL was not careful – actions. It was no longer a matter of making propaganda and agitation for the united front but of what in practical terms the united front should do. Writing at a time of a temporary breakdown in negotiations between the SFIO and CP, Trotsky strongly urged the French Trotskyists to enter the SFIO:

"The rhythm of events is now extraordinarily accelerated in comparison with the preceding period. We must not forget that in any case. How to make use of this respite? Concentrate our main forces inside the Socialist Party, and establish therein a firm nucleus and a fraction of sympathisers. In the event of a new favourable opportunity this fraction can address itself to the League with an open appeal to enter the Socialist Party for a common struggle on behalf of a revolutionary Marxist policy".[16]

Trotsky realised that to make an effective impact in a mass organisation, practical slogans were required, ones which would link the immediate needs of the masses to the strategic objectives which alone would secure them. Thus he set out to arm the League for this new tactical turn. This he did in a series of pamphlets, most of which were published in the name of the Communist League: *An Action Programme for France* (June 1934); *Whither France?* (October 1934) and *Once Again, Whither France?* (March 1935).

Action Programme for France

Trotsky produced a detailed draft of an action programme. The final version was published in June 1934 in La Verité. The programme addressed the immediate struggles facing the proletariat of France – especially the defence of its democratic rights – and put these in the context of the need for the masses to find the road to power.

It therefore dealt with both immediate economic issues and democratic and anti-fascist slogans. Faced with mass unemployment and the deflationary austerity programmes of the government, public sector wage reductions and demands for sacrifice, it counterposed a whole series of demands to completely "deflate the privileges and profits" of the exploiters: a forty hour week and substantial wage increases, unemployment insurance; a paid one month vacation; a living retirement pension for all those over 50; equal pay and rights for women and young people; grants for study and apprenticeships; paid maternity leave; abolition of all legislation aimed at foreign and colonial workers.

Trotsky raised the slogan of the abolition of business secrecy, the opening of the books, of workers' and peasants' control; of control of the banks, finance and industry. The programme showed how all these essential measures posed the need to totally reorganise the economy, to create a "workers' and peasants' government" based on "real revolutionary efforts".

The only government worthy of being called a workers' government would be one "issuing directly from the working people", one which would liberate the small peasants from their crushing debts, expropriate the wealth of the exploiters not compensate them, nationalise the banks, large landed property, the key industries and the railways. In the sphere of agriculture, the small farms would be socialised "only with the consent of the peasants themselves".

All these measures required the installation and protection of a workers' government by an armed workers' militia. The militia was made doubly necessary by the threat of fascism. The programme poured scorn on the calls then being advanced by the Communist Party, for the state to disarm and dissolve the fascist Leagues.

"Our slogan is not the disarming of finance capital's gangs by finance capi-

tal's police. We refuse to spread the criminal illusion that a capitalist government can actually proceed to the disarming of the capitalist bands. The exploited must defend themselves against the capitalists. Arming of the proletariat! Arming of the poor peasants! People's antifascist militia!"[17]

The action programme unambiguously stated the need for a revolution to smash the capitalist state:

"The task is to replace the capitalist state which functions for the profit of the big exploiters, by the workers' and peasants' proletarian state."

The programme called for committees of the workers' parties and unions, and in the countryside for peasant committees, recognising that these will be embryonic soviets."

The programme seriously addressed the problem of how to overcome the democratic illusions and reformist prejudices of great majority of the working class. It made a pledge to the reformist workers similar to that made by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the soviets in mid-1917. The programme recognised that "as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie."

But it linked this pledge to an appeal to the reformist workers and a challenge to their parties. Will you defend these bourgeois-democratic rights in a revolutionary manner? Will you fight against all the undemocratic institutions in the present state machinery which threaten the working class? It calls for the abolition of the Senate, the Presidency, a "hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction", and consequently for a single assembly combining all legislative and executive power, elected on a two-yearly basis by universal suffrage. Its deputies should be elected on the basis of local assemblies and their mandates be revocable by their constituents. They should receive the salary of a skilled worker.

These demands could not, and should not, for one moment be confused with socialism, but the fight for them would "facilitate the struggle for workers' power" by exposing both the real extra-parliamentary concentrations of the bourgeoisie's strength and the reformist leaders cowardice and incapacity even to defend democracy. In addition Trotsky made it clear that, in this struggle, revolutionaries must be willing to defend a reformist government against an assault by reactionary forces.

"If, during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of 'democratic' socialism (SFIO), from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie".[18]

Thus Trotsky armed the League with a transitional action programme. His method was to relate strategic goals to current tasks in order to open up a bridge to working class power. It was in no sense a "halfway house" between reform and revolution. None of the essentials of the revolutionary programme were hidden from view. But in the forefront stood demands which could be fought for by both reformist and revolutionary workers. Moreover in their presentation and language they were meant to be as comprehensible as possible to workers who were not yet revolutionaries. The revolutionary dynamic of this programme lay in the fact that its demands were linked to one another by the iron necessity of the class struggle, and that their consistent and militant pursuit led inescapably to revolutionary conclusions.

Thus whilst the *Action Programme* for France starts from the context of the united front needed to defend French workers against fascism and from the key battles – economic, social and political – facing the working class, it focuses on the need to take power and property away from the bourgeoisie and to create a new state power based on workers' councils.

Thus we can see that when Trotsky advised the League to enter the SFIO there was no tailoring of the revolutionary content of its programme. From the experience of this entry we will likewise see that, for Trotsky, it was neither a question of fusion with existing centrist currents, acting as a midwife to them, or mimicking their politics. In sharp contrast with the entrism for which post-war "Trotskyism" became famous and to which the names of Michel Pablo, Gerry Healy and Ted Grant are attached, there was no question of such methods. However, the temptation to do all of these things did arise in the 1930s and indeed a whole current in the French section developed just such a practice. Trotsky's merciless fight against them is thus a critique, in advance, of the theory and practice of his epigones.

The "French Turn"

Trotsky drew up a perspectives document which outlined the internal and external conditions which necessitated a sharp turn – "The State of the League and its Tasks" (29 June 1934). In it Trotsky pointed to the fact that because of the length and severity of the economic crisis the workers have "not been able to resist effectively on the economic field because of the state of their organisations. But on the political plane their ferment is clear".[19] In particular unity had become a mass sentiment so strong that the bureaucratic leaderships had been forced to take it into account. Both sets of trade union and party bureaucrats and MPs feared having to face a dual challenge: a break to the left by the masses or a fascist coup that would destroy the bureaucratic apparatus altogether. Consequently as Trotsky stressed:



French CP leader Maurice Thorez with his tricolor sash displays his patriotism

"The lessons of Germany have struck home. The bureaucracies are seeking a foothold among the masses, the masses are seeking a solution in action. This convergence of the manoeuvres made by the apparatus will have the effect of pushing forward the masses who are already seething. The political consciousness of important sections of militants will rapidly become transformed in the course of action, the conservative resistance of the bureaucracies will be weakened by action and so will their defensive arsenal."[20]

Trotsky showed here the importance of taking into account the leftward manoeuvres of the bureaucracy as well as their rightward ones. It is false radicalism to see the bureaucracy as always carrying out the same right-wing tactics; equally false as the idea that the bureaucracy can be pressured into pursuing a roughly revolutionary policy. A leftward turn by the bureaucracy represents an opportunity for revolutionaries to use the united front to break the reformist leaders' stranglehold over the mass organisations.

Trotsky's balance sheet of the Communist League went on to look at its strengths and weaknesses. In the positive column was the fact of "our existence on an international scale, our political homogeneity, the training of our cadre, such as they are". Crucially important was the fact that "our ideas are victorious at the present moment". As a result "there are no workers' districts where we do not have a receptive audience".

But the negative column also had to be accounted for with an unsparing objectivity:

"The League has been marking time for more than a year...our permanent ties with the working class are almost nil... [there is] no nationally coordinated fraction in the SFIO...no fraction in CGT"

Trotsky observed that "our organic weakness arose as an obstacle at every stage as did our social composition". Finally, looking at the turn by the Stalinists he asked: "What chance will the League have now that the lever of the united front has been wrested from our hands?"

He pointed to the fact that the SFIO had "preserved throughout this whole period an actively intense life" and observed that an analogous situation preceded the Tours Congress in 1921 when the CP was born from a majority "split" in the SFIO. He continued:

"Its internal situation permits the possibility of our entering [the SFIO] with our banner. The environment suits the aims we have for ourselves. What is necessary now is to act in such a manner that our declaration will not in any way strengthen the leading bourgeois wing but rather will support the progressive proletarian wing, that its text and distribution will allow us to hold our heads high in case of acceptance as well as in case of dilatory manoeuvres or rejection. There is no question of dissolving ourselves. We enter as the Bolshevik-Leninist faction, our organisational ties remain the same, our press continues to exist just as the Bataille Socialiste and others".[21]

Trotsky's perspective and tactic would, he said, require two things for its success: party cohesion and prompt implementation!

Trotsky's perspective and tactic would, he said, require two things for its success: "organisational cohesion (through the steadfastness of each member) and promptness of implementation". Without that the opportunity for maximum success would be lost.

However, this tactic came up against fierce resistance within the League: instead of the few weeks Trotsky had hoped for, two months' internal discussion and a special conference were required to implement the entry tactic – and even then it led to a serious split.

Trotsky entered the fray with a series of polemics. He saw the objections as indicative of an overall trend – indeed an historically inevitable one in view of the League's isolation – to resist the tasks of the new period in favour of remaining at the stage of a propaganda circle. From this he drew lessons of general application to any organisation, forced to maintain a circle existence for long years but which is finally confronted with a sharp change of period and urgent new tasks. Thus in "The League Faced with a Turn" (July 1934) he wrote:

"It is the task of the revolutionary party to weld together the correct ideas with the mass labour movement. Only in this manner can an idea become a driving force. A revolutionary organisation does not mean a paper and its readers ... One can give the labour organisations good advice from the sidelines. That is something. But that still does not make a revolutionary organisation ... The League like other sections was forced to develop as an isolated propaganda group. This determined both its positive sides (an honest and serious attitude to the principles) and its negative sides (observing the labour movement from the outside). In the course of the elaboration of the principles and methods of the Left Opposition, the positive sides of the League carried the day. At present, when it becomes necessary to circulate the accumulated capital, the negative sides are threatening to get the upper hand."[22]

Trotsky thus insisted on the radical change needed in the League's whole outlook. Drawing on the lessons of the attempt by the British Trotskyists to enter the Independent Labour Party in 1933 – which had also led to delays and splits[23] – Trotsky concluded:

"Irreconcilableness of principle has nothing in common with sectarian ossification, which heedlessly passes over the changes in the situation and the mood of the masses. From the thesis that the proletarian party must be independent at all costs our English comrades concluded that it would be impermissible to go into the ILP. They only forgot that they were far from being a party, but were only a propaganda circle, that a party does not fall from heaven, that the propaganda circle must pass through a period of embryonic existence before it can become a party."[24]

In France Trotsky had to face serious opposition to the new turn. It was led by Pierre Naville, at 30 years old one of the CL's principal leaders and a member of the International Secretariat of the ICL. Trotsky polemicised fiercely against his whole approach:

"It is particularly now that we must put up a pitiless fight against abstract, passive propagandism, against a policy of waiting."[25]

At a conference on 29 August the majority of the Communist League decided to enter. Inside the SFIO, the majority of the French section formed the Bolshevik-Leninist Fraction. The minority, led by Naville, refused and split away, taking the journal *Lutte de Classe*. Nevertheless by the end of September they too had entered the SFIO. Trotsky and the international leadership, in the person of James P Cannon who was in France for a plenum of the ICL, tried to bring about a fusion between the Naville group and the Bolshevik-Leninists, to the fury of Molinier. But Naville refused to accept a common discipline and maintained the independence of *Lutte de Classes*. In practice however the two groups worked quite closely together.

Opposition to the turn erupted in a number of the ICL's sections or sympathising groups. In Paris an enlarged international plenum was held to debate the problems connected with the French turn and the possibility of applying it in other countries.

For this meeting (14-16 October) Trotsky drafted a further perspective – "The Present Situation in the Labour Movement and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninists; from a Propagandist Group to Mass Work." This emphasised that the ICL "does not...possess sufficiently important forces to become a centre of attraction for the masses, who under the Damocles sword of fascism and war, fear to cut themselves off from the big organisations. The ICL cannot act as an independent party of the proletariat, it is only the instrument for the creation of independent parties. This instrument must be employed in accordance with the situation in each country."[26]

"By means of propagandistic literature, if it is good, one can educate the first cadres, but one cannot rally the proletarian vanguard which lives neither in a circle nor in a schoolroom but in class society, in a factory, in the organisation of the masses, a vanguard to whom one must know how to speak in the language of its experiences." The best prepared propagandist cadres

must disintegrate if they do not find contact with the daily struggle of the masses.

Significant leaders of the ICL, such as Eugene Bauer of the German section, Henk Sneevliet (Netherlands), Georges Vereecken (Belgium) and Pietro Tresso (Italy), were strongly opposed to the "French Turn". Hugo Oehler in the US section also violently attacked the turn, accusing the Bolshevik-Leninists of capitulation. Shortly after the plenum Bauer quit the ICL and quickly gravitated towards the SAP. Trotsky pointed out the link between an aloof, haughty attitude to the millions of reformist workers and a programmatic softness on the tiny centrist sects. He also clarified the difference between fusion on the basis of a full programme and entry into a centrist or reformist party which is a particular application of the policy of the united front – i.e. limited unity in action:

"The SFIO is a mass organisation not a homogenous propaganda group. The state of this organisation is such that the possibility is open to us to enter it as a homogeneous propaganda group The SAP is not a mass organisation. It is itself a propaganda group. This being the case, fusion is impermissible in the absence of a common program and method. Our attempt a year ago to find this common ground failed; the leaders of the SAP did not want to accept our principles...To condemn the entry of our French section into a small propaganda group which Bauer himself characterised as centrist just a short time ago – isn't this an abominable mockery of the ABC of Marxism?"[27]

Trotsky again stresses the dialectical link (unity of opposites) between sectarians and opportunists: "Members who insist upon formal independence are always inclined to capitulate before reality when it treads upon their toes."[28]

Perhaps the most tragic example of such capitulation was that of Andres Nin and Juan Andrade, leaders of the Spanish section of the ICL. The Spanish section , with 800 or so members, was one of the largest sections of the ICL. Nin resisted stubbornly any attempt to orient to the PSOE and its youth section despite receiving overtures from the party itself in 1934. Instead, on 29 September 1935 he fused with the 4,000 strong "right-oppositionist" Workers and Peasants Bloc of Joaquin Maurin to found the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). The POUM rapidly showed its centrist character by signing the programme of the Spanish Popular Front in January 1936. This led to a split with the ICL. It also left the Spanish working class bereft of a consistent revolutionary leadership during the most protracted and bitter class battle of the 1930s.[29]



Action committee banner on Popular Front march

Many of those who opposed the "French Turn" were to develop in the next years into apologists for the POUM and opposed any move towards the foundation of the Fourth International. Other sections, including the Belgians, the British and the Americans, went on to apply the "French Turn" to their own particular circumstances during the next two years.

The entry tactic in practice

At the time of the Bolshevik-Leninist entry the SFIO was a party in turmoil. Its membership was some 120,000 and the CGT, which it influenced, had over a million members. After a right-wing split by the "Neo-Socialists" in late 1933, the left forces had gained in strength. At the SFIO's Toulouse Congress in 1934 left groups that had split or been expelled were invited to return. Even Leon Blum, the party's leader, came out with radical phrases. As Trotsky pointed out, reformism was disguising itself as centrism, both to keep abreast of its radicalised base and verbally to threaten a bourgeoisie that was not only denying it reforms but asking for them back in threatening terms.

The Bolshevik Leninist Group (GBL) – as the French Trotskyists now called themselves – while jealously guarding its political independence, closely cooperated in practical activity with the Bataille Socialiste tendency and in particular with Marceau Pivert. He was in friendly contact with the Trotskyists, enthusiastically welcomed them into the party and took up many of their most telling criticisms of the Stalinist and Social Democratic leaders. When the party leadership began to threaten the Bolshevik-Leninists with expulsion, he stated: "the struggle against Trotskyism, at present, is the sign of a reactionary state of mind inside the workers' movement".

The first nine months of the entry into the SFIO were carried out on a clear revolutionary basis. The GBL, through its newspaper *La Verité*, fought for the key elements of the *Action Programme for France*. They advocated an active, democratic mass base for the united front. They mercilessly exposed the social-patriotic Blum leadership and the class collaborationist policies of the Stalinists.

Pivert adopted many of the slogans and arguments of the Trotskyists, arguing for arming the workers'

defence squads, for example, but he cast his proposals in the future and not the present tense: "If this situation does not change soon, we will have to launch a massive subscription with a view to arming the proletariat."

The GBL sharply criticised Pivert in *La Verité*, declaring: "If . . . if . . . if the bourgeoisie does not change its nature then we will start getting angry!"

The Bolshevik-Leninists did for a period have remarkable successes. They were particularly successful in the Paris youth organisation of the SFIO, the Jeunesses Socialistes, winning a majority to support for the positions of the Bolshevik-Leninists. Membership of the GBL went up to 300 by the summer of 1935. They also began making gains in the industrial north of the country and in the south-east. Along with the Pivertists, they set up an SFIO physical defence guard – the TPPS or "Always Ready to Serve". In June 1935 at the congress of the SFIO's Seine region they received 1,037 votes for their resolution compared with 1,570 for the supporters of Blum and 2,370 for those of Bataille Socialiste.

They were able to do more work in the unions than ever before. As SFIO members they were even able to establish greater contact with the CP workers. They also pushed Pivert to the left. They did this not by exaggerating his revolutionary credentials or covering up his weaknesses. Daniel Guérin – at the time a Pivert supporter – wrote that the Trotskyists "permanently blew hot and cold, applauding the steps he made towards Trotskyism only to call him to order when he fell back into centrism."[30]

The "exit tactic"

The SFIO's 32nd national conference took place at Mulhouse on 9-12 June 1935. The leadership was already committed to the Popular Front with the CP and the Radicals and had two thirds of the conference behind them. But the Bolshevik-Leninists attacked the new social patriotic project. Molinier vehemently denounced Stalinism from the tribune too. Blum, who was chairing the session, interrupted him:

"'Comrade Molinier, I will tell you, without any kind of evasion or oratorical threat, that if organic unity could be established between the Communists and ourselves, and if that unity excluded the small group you figure in, I would play my part in it with ease.' 'Out! Out Out!!' shouted a number of delegates."[31]

The Bolshevik-Leninists and the Naville Group raised the question of the Fourth International. This frightened off the Pivertists, as Guérin again remembered:

"To patiently and tactfully prepare minds for this future regroupment was one thing. It was quite another to openly make publicity from the tribune of the congress in favour of a Fourth International, to bluffingly proclaim it already in existence; this had a knack of exasperating the social democratic bigwigs."[32]

The Bolshevik-Leninists succeeded in winning a small but significant backing for such outspoken revolutionary positions. On the main political resolution the voting was: for Blum's 2,025, for Zyromski-Pivert's 777, for the Bolshevik-Leninists 105. At Mulhouse the Bolshevik-Leninists' secretary, Jean Rous, was elected to the SFIO's National Administrative Committee. Justifiably proud of their showing at Mulhouse, the GBL saw nothing ahead but making more and more gains in the SFIO.

However, events beyond the control of the Bolshevik-Leninists would determine otherwise. The SFIO and the CP leaders were already deep in negotiations, even discussing the possibility of fusing the two parties. In these negotiations the Stalinists repeatedly raised the issue of the Trotskyists and the need for the SFIO to expel them. At the same time Trotsky was assessing the new phase opened by the formation of the Popular Front. He came to the conclusion that the entry tactic had served its purpose. Visiting Paris on 10 June, en route to a new place of exile in Norway, Trotsky wrote another letter on tactics: "A New Turn is Necessary". Exaggerating somewhat, he wrote that, "Our section, thanks to the entry, has changed from a propaganda group into a revolutionary factor of the first order". In reality it had increased in size from about one hundred to three hundred – plus it had won the adherence of the youth around the paper Révolution. This was, in itself, no mean achievement.

Stressing the importance of the greatest clarity and vigour in denouncing the Popular Front and the Stalinists, and the need to raise the call for the Fourth International as clearly as possible, Trotsky argued for a new course:

"The Bolshevik-Leninist Group must know how to effect a new turn, which is the logical development of the previous stage. Without of course making the slightest concessions, it is necessary to concentrate nine tenths of the efforts upon the denunciation of the Stalinist betrayal . . . The condition for success is a ruthless struggle against the slightest concession to the theory of national defence. The inevitable regroupment in the different working class organisations (Communist Party, Trade Unions, etc.) must open for us an outlet to the working class masses. It is necessary to orient ourselves in this direction with all the required independence. This regroupment can result in the creation of a revolutionary party within a set and quite close period of time."[33]

Reformism was disguising itself as centrism, both to keep abreast of its radicalised base and verbally to threaten a bourgeoisie that was not only denying it reforms but asking for them back in threatening terms

A month later on 14 July, Bastille Day, not only the mass following of the Popular Front became plain but also the grossness of its social patriotism. The CP called on all who "defended peace and liberty" to rally "under the tricolor". The communist leaders heaped fulsome praise on the Radical Party as "the worthiest Party of France". Some 250,000 to 300,000 demonstrators rallied at the Place de la Bastille to observe Thorez, sporting his tricolor sash, bawling the national anthem with Blum and Daladier.

The bitter fruits of this craven class collaboration were soon manifest in the class struggle.

The Laval government, still kept in office by "the worthiest party in France", passed savage new measures reducing the wages of public sector workers. In Brest, a strike in the naval shipyards broke out. On 8 August there was a solidarity strike by workers in the arsenals in Toulon. The repression of the pickets turned it into a near uprising in the city, with communist workers playing a prominent role. That evening, there were five dead and hundreds wounded. In the fighting the workers had torn down the tricolor from the Brest police headquarters and burned it. On 10 August *L'Humanité* published a solemn central committee statement denouncing those who had "insulted the tricolor" and blaming not the police but "provocateurs" amongst the strikers for the fighting.

Trotsky characterised the situation in France as "objectively revolutionary" and considered it was of burning importance to address revolutionary politics directly to workers such as those of Brest and Toulon, including the CP militants disavowed by their own party when they took militant action. It was vital to denounce openly not only the new class collaboration but its ultimate aim: a new 'Sacred Union' (class peace) in the world war which Trotsky predicted could only be a few years away. He also now emphasised the social composition of the SFIO – whose active membership was composed of teachers, employees and professionals rather than industrial workers.

If, as Trotsky predicted, major class confrontation was approaching, then the Bolshevik-Leninists had to reach out to the workers in the factories. They had to influence the still revolutionary elements amongst the CP and CGTU rank and file – many of whom only saw the Popular Front as a manoeuvre, rather than a strategic betrayal. Experience would prove the Trotskyists right, but they had to be visible and accessible to these workers, many of whom still retained remnants of Third Period attitudes. This confirmed that to prolong the entry into the SFIO artificially would be a mistake.

In the aftermath of the Mulhouse

Congress, and then the Lille congress of the Jeunesses Socialistes, the expulsions of the GBL began; first with eleven leaders of Révolution led by Fred Zeller and then with the leaders of the Bolshevik-Leninist Group. Faced with Blum's purge of the Trotskyists, Pivert revealed his ingrained centrism. He wrote to Molinier: "At any price, therefore it is necessary to remain in the party, to abandon this impossible attitude of an affiliation to two internationals at the same time...I think that it is necessary to abandon *La Verité*."[34] He was willing to defend the Trotskyists against the Stalinists but would not pass from words to deeds if this risked a split with Blum.

Pierre Frank responded, in the June internal bulletin of the GBL: "It would in my opinion be criminal to think of leaving the SP . . . We will not allow ourselves to be isolated"[35]. Such a stance is self-defeating when you are being expelled by the reformist bureaucracy – as a generation of centrists inside the British Labour Party proved in the 1980s. Frank and Raymond Molinier emphasised exclusively the illegality of the SFIO leadership's measures and resorted to pathetic appeals for unity. Trotsky was extremely critical of this sudden loss of nerve by the people who had so recently stood up to Blum at Mulhouse. He urged: "attack the expellers not as 'splitters' (that's the small talk of Pivert) but primarily as the valets of French imperialism."

To suddenly stop all criticism of Pivert was to disorient the most revolutionary elements among his supporters. Instead of receiving a practical demonstration of the difference between left centrism and Bolshevism, they saw the GBL minimising or ignoring Pivert's capitulation to Blum

But the wavering continued. The leadership, both the Molinier and Naville factions which had fused, refused for over a month to print Trotsky's "Open Letter for the Fourth International" and then published only an abridged version.

Criticism of Pivert ceased. Instead, he was fulsomely praised for his purely verbal protest at the witch-hunt of the Trotskyists. In *La Verité* (no.24: 22 August 1935) we find an article entitled "Marceau Pivert solidarises with the expelled." This was in the form of two letters, written by Pivert, opposing the Lille expulsions. Here he stated that "to be anti-Trotskyist at this time is the sign of a reactionary state of mind in the workers' movement." However, he also argued that the GBL had helped the expellers by talking about a Fourth International, by using the name Bolshevik-Leninists etc. Their problem was that they had not been tactful and sensitive enough to the traditions of the SFIO, they had suffered because of the undemocratic record of Leninism etc.

Not one member of the GBL leadership wanted to write a reply. Eventually Trotsky himself had to take on the job in an article entitled "Labels and Numbers":

"The task of the revolutionist – even if the march of events obliges him to work in the same organisation with the reformists, those political exploiters of the proletariat – consists not in taking the attitude of a disciple and pretending to maintain friendship with the agents of the bourgeoisie, but of opposing as clearly, as harshly, as unremittingly as possible the opportunists, the patriots, the absolutely bourgeois 'Socialists' before the reformist masses . . . The misfortune of Pivert is that until now he has not cut the umbilical cord which binds him to the small world of the Blums and the Zyromskys. On every occasion he looks at his 'friends' and feels their pulse with anxiety. It is this policy, false, illusory, unrealistic – which he offers to the Bolshevik Leninists"[36]

Trotsky also dealt with Pivert's attack on the use of provocative names ("communist") and numbers ("the Fourth International"). Trotsky insisted that: "in politics the 'name' is the 'banner'. Those who renounce today a revolutionary name for the benefit of Blum and co. will tomorrow just as easily renounce the red flag for the tricolor".

The name "Fourth International" signifies, Trotsky wrote, that it is neither possible to raise the two old International from the dead nor to create a new one by mechanically combining them (organic unity).

"'With or without changing the number"? This phrase is devoid of meaning. It is not by accident that the three old Internationals were thus numbered. Every 'number' signified a distinct epoch, programme and method of action. The new International must not be the sum of the two corpses, as the old social patriot Zyromsky dreams...but the living 'negation' of these corpses and at the same time the 'continuation' of the historic work accomplished by the preceding Internationals. In other words it is a question of the Fourth International. The number here signifies a perspective and a distinct programme, that is, a banner. Let the philistines wax ironic on the above. We will not imitate them."[37]

The National Committee of the SFIO did not bother to thank the GBL for its restraint. On 28 August it outlawed *La Verité*, threatening to expel any member who sold it. The reaction by the GBL was not to publish their paper for a month. When it did appear, it was devoted primarily to the agrarian question!

The GBL leaders were now clearly adapting to Pivert's centrism. They were tempted to do so by the fact that many of the followers of Pivert, especially the youth in the Paris region, were sincerely and enthusiastically seeking the road to revolutionary communism. Pivert as their leader was obliged to adopt (and adapt) many political positions and slogans from the Trotskyists. This development convinced Molinier, Frank and Naville that the process of evolution could only be accelerated and brought to a successful conclusion by avoiding a conflict with Pivert, by staying in the SFIO and melding as far as possible into the Gauche Revolutionnaire thus helping its evolution from within.

In adopting this position they ignored the fact that left centrism derives the direction of its evolution from the major class forces which operate on it, not from the clever tactics or diplomacy of "revolutionaries". Its leftward evolution is not guaranteed by any law of history but by the strength of pressure from the reformist or revolutionary poles. The criticism of centrism from the fundamental class standpoint of the working class is the conscious expression of proletarian pressure. Thus for the revolutionaries to decrease it will only mean that the centrists give in to the pressure coming from the opposite pole, from the bourgeois agents in the workers movement.

To suddenly stop all criticism of Pivert was to disorient the most revolutionary elements among his supporters. Instead of receiving a practical demonstration of the difference between left centrism and Bolshevism, they saw the GBL minimising or ignoring Pivert's capitulation to Blum. Naturally it made them more likely to accept Pivert's argument that the Trotskyists were partly to blame for their own expulsion.

On 9 September at the Central Committee (CC) of the GBL Molinier, under threat of expulsion for selling La Verité, proposed the abandonment of the paper. The CC advised him to sign a declaration of loyalty to the SFIO. Moreover the paper then failed to appear for three weeks. This did not placate the bureaucracy who proceeded to expel 13 militants of the GBL, amongst them Molinier. Trotsky was incredulous at the proposal to suspend publication of *La Verité*: "Marceau Pivert asks us to abandon La Verité, as if this measure would satisfy the gods who are thirsty [illegible] *Lutte de Classe*? And *Ré[illegible]*

And the leaflets? . . . Before strangling you they are trying to rob you of your means of self-defence. To consent to this would be political suicide."[38]

Pivert dealt the GBL another disorienting blow when, at the end of September, he split from Zyromsky because of the latter's more and more open Stalinism, setting up his own faction around the paper *Gauche Révolutionnaire* (GR). This action considerably limited the number likely to leave the SFIO alongside the Trotskyists. Molinier immediately suggested that the GBL militants should stay in the SFIO and join Pivert's faction and contribute to its paper. Révolution, the youth paper even carried the headline "Vive La Gauche Révolutionnaire!"

In October, though Naville proposed a resolution at the CC characterising the GR as centrist and calling on militants to join the GBL, nothing was said publicly about this in the papers. A debate was initiated for "fusion with the GR". Worse, during the congress of the Seine federation at the beginning of November the resolution proposed by GBL members and written by Naville avoided all mention of a new International, or a new party, talked of the need to "replace the bourgeois power", called for a "Popular Front of struggle" and for "organic unity".[39]

Trotsky had to intervene once more: "Your attitude to the Revolutionary Left to me seems incomprehensible and absolutely opposed to our principles and traditions. What is the Revolutionary Left? It is a French SAP . If you flirt with these people you are going to push them to the right and lose ground to them. You must denounce them without mercy. *La Verité* is silent about the Revolutionary Left. This is unbelievable. Permit me to use the right word: this is scandalous!"[40]

Trotsky continued: "There may exist cases where you act together – against the expulsions, against the fascists, etc. But even then you must spell out your point of view. Do not confuse principles, organisations, and banners. March separately, strike together – please, do both!"[41]

The youth of the GBL and the ex-SFIO youth around Révolution had been clearly working towards the formation of an independent revolutionary party, whereas a majority of the GBL's adult members, led by Molinier and Frank, were desperately manoeuvring to stay in the SFIO by forming an unprincipled bloc with Pivert's supporters.

Trotsky observed that "what is most important is the youth. While the adults have been marking time since July and have been wasting their energy and time in order to court a few miserable Pivertists, the youth were carrying out effective and promising work." Remembering the way that thousands of young Komsomol members rallied to the Russian Left Opposition, he stressed: "Opportunists are always in conflict with the youth."[42]



Left to right Pierre Naville, Trotsky, Gerard Rosenthal and Denise Naville

In December Trotsky summed up critically the entire lessons of the French Turn:

". .. it is necessary to know not only how to enter but also how to leave. When you continue to hang onto an organisation that can no longer tolerate proletarian revolutionaries in its midst, you become of necessity the wretched tool of reformism, patriotism, and capitalism."[43]

He summed up the lessons of the work associated with the "French Turn" in the article Lessons of the SFIO Entry:

"1. Entry into a reformist or centrist party in itself does not include a long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode.

2. The crisis and the threat of war have a double effect. First they create the conditions in which the entry itself becomes possible in a general way. But on the other hand, they force the ruling apparatus to resort to expelling the revolutionary elements.

3. To recognise in time the bureaucracy's decisive attack against the left wing, and defend ourselves from it, not by making concessions, adapting or playing hide and seek, but by a revolutionary offensive.

4. What has been said above does not at all exclude the task of "adapting" to workers who are in the reformist parties by teaching them new ideas in the language they understand. On the contrary this art must be learned as quickly as possible. But one must not, under the pretext of leading the ranks, make principled concessions to the top centrists and left centrists.

5. Devote the most attention to the youth.

6. Firm ideological cohesion and perspicacity towards our entire international experience."

Frank went on to develop a view of mass work which was a repetition of the mistakes of the Russian Economists

The Mass Paper

The French section had been discussing the project of turning *La Verité* into a mass paper for some months. The idea had been put forward by Raymond Molinier as early as April 1935. His motivation, laudable in itself, was for a breakthrough, for "rapid success" in turning revolutionary ideas into "active nuclei" in the working class.

However, there was a fundamental political flaw in his whole approach. Pierre Frank theorised this for Molinier: "A mass newspaper, a weekly of popular struggle, ought to be launched within a few weeks. This should not be a Bolshevik-Leninist paper, but a paper bringing together, for example, those who are (1) against national defence (2) for the militia against fascism."[44]

Frank went on to develop a view of mass work which was, whether he realised it or not, a repetition of the mistakes of the Russian Economists whom Lenin had polemicised against in *What is to be Done?* He insisted that the masses' political consciousness was low but nevertheless they were spontaneously militant. Therefore the GBL's "whole programme" would be much too difficult for them at the moment. Moreover to call on these masses to join a tiny and insignificant organisation like the GBL was hopeless. The answer to these linked problems was to launch "agitation" around a few limited slogans via a "mass paper". This would attract the masses who should then be organised into special "action groups". To do all this financial resources had to be found, inventive means of promotion used and so on.

Trotsky was not opposed to the GBL making a real and dramatic turn to the masses. Nor was he opposed to the paper of the GBL becoming much less

literary and more oriented to workers in struggle. This was indeed the whole basis of advocating a turn away from the SFIO and the centrist milieu. But his response, when he heard of the serious discussion of these ideas, was straightforward and indeed prophetic:

"To create a mass paper apart from *La Verité* would be a criminal adventure; you will quickly compromise both papers and end up at the same time with two factions. You must try to turn *La Verité* into a mass paper without depriving it of its character as the paper of a tendency. That is the only solution."[45]

Within the GBL three tendencies developed on this question: the two traditional ones (Molinier-Frank and Naville) and another around Jean Rous. Rous, 24 years old, had joined the Communist League in 1932. He was national secretary of the GBL, until his expulsion as a member of the leading body of the SFIO, and a member of the International Secretariat of the ICL. In the latter capacity he was in regular correspondence with Trotsky.

Initially all three tendencies were for the creation of a mass paper on a limited (i.e. centrist) basis. The dispute was whether to transform *La Verité* or *Révolution* (the paper of the Seine Youth, under GBL control) into such a paper or to create a new one altogether. None of the tendencies argued that this paper should defend the whole revolutionary programme. Pierre Naville, for example, argued that *La Verité* "should have its polemical content reduced considerably and its theoretical content cut."[46] Naville demonstrated what he meant by this when he later became editor of *Révolution*. No articles appeared in defence of the persecuted Bolshevik-Leninists in Russia and there was nothing on the ICL's general programme.

On 1 August the CC finally agreed to launch a mass paper as an organ of regroupment. It stated: "Whatever the conceptions of revolutionary tendencies are, or their differences over the modus operandi for re-organising the proletarian movement, they must regroup!"[47]

The whole upshot of this approach was to minimise the differences between revolutionaries and centrists. This resolution was debated at the GBL's conference in September, but this was appallingly organised, the debate centring not on the programme of the mass paper but . . . its name.

Trotsky was to clarify the issue at the end of November:

"What is a mass newspaper?...It is the elementary duty of a revolutionary organisation to make its political newspaper as accessible as possible to the masses. This task cannot be effectively accomplished except as a function of the growth of the organisation and its cadres, who must pave the way to the masses for the newspaper – since it is not enough, of course, to call a publication a "mass paper" for the masses to really accept it. But quite often revolutionary impatience – which becomes transformed easily into opportunist impatience – leads to this conclusion: the masses are not coming to us because our ideas are too complicated and our slogans too advanced. It is therefore necessary to simplify our programme, water down our slogans – in short to throw out some ballast. Basically this means: our slogans must correspond not to the objective situation, not to the relation of classes, analysed by the Marxist method, but to subjective assessments (extremely superficial and inadequate ones) of what the 'masses' can or cannot accept . . . "[48]

A majority of the GBL leadership (Naville, Rous – albeit in a rather weak and indecisive manner) opposed the project. But Molinier and Frank decided to present the organisation with a fait accompli. On 23 November, at a Central Committee meeting, they announced that the first issue of *La Commune* would come out the next Monday. They proudly showed the astonished CC members a poster, brochures and a list of supporters. Molinier had even hired the services of a private advertising agency to do the flyposting. The Naville and Rous factions opposed the *La Commune* project but were unable to pass a resolution taking any action on it. A conciliation committee was set up but Molinier proceeded with the launch of his paper. Trotsky and the International Secretariat had to intervene.

The split in the French section

On 4 December the IS gave Molinier 24 hours to submit to discipline and renounce publication of *La Commune*. On 6 December *La Commune* went on sale. But now the Naville -Rous leadership made a serious mistake. They expelled Molinier and his supporters, thus allowing them to criticise the GBL leaders as bureaucrats who could not answer Molinier politically.

Once more Trotsky had to step into the fray. He exposed the attempts to draw the Gauche Revolutionnaire into the new "mass newspaper" as an attempt to make a bloc for common propaganda with centrists on the centrists' own terms. Likewise he opposed the setting up of "Revolutionary Action Groups", the supposed base units of *La Commune* supporters which Molinier had already started to set up.

"'But it is only a united front' they will reply. But the united front is an alliance of the forces of the mass organisations with a view to concrete action. In the case of *La Commune* there are neither forces nor action. It is a "united front" for the publication of a newspaper. Now that is the exact opposite of a united front as it is conceived and interpreted by Marxism. The fundamental rule of the united front, in the meaning of the Bolshevik-Leninists, was and remains: march separately, strike together. Now the Revolutionary Action Group is a deliberately ambiguous institution for marching together and for striking . . . the Bolshevik-Leninists."[49]

Fear of isolation and opportunist impatience led Molinier and Frank to throw out the Marxist programme and replace it with a few slogans and a "mass paper". Needless to say, the masses did not come

Despite all Molinier and Frank's efforts Pivert, the principal object of their adventurist manoeuvres, would have nothing to do with *La Commune*. He snubbed the whole project from the start and saw it as unwelcome competition in his own centrist market. Did not Gauche Revolutionnaire already cater for those who wanted abstract propaganda for a four point programme of workers' militia, opposition to national defence, the general strike and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

Moreover Pivert already had several thousand supporters within the SFIO and maintained good relations with his "friend" Blum. Aside from the Pivertists there were only tiny groups (the Social Front, a petit bourgeois group, and the Spartacists – a group close to the SAP). Where was the mass support it aimed at? Clearly Molinier hoped that a "popularly written" paper, plus the publicity and razzmatazz could magic it out of nowhere.

Pierre Frank revealed his desperation for a short cut to the creation of a mass party by saying of *La Commune*: "We can at last get out of the world of small groups we have been debating in for years. Not to do what we are doing would be to condemn ourselves like our German section three years ago, it would be to let events pass us by like our Spanish comrades. We do not have the choice."

Fear of isolation and opportunist impatience led Molinier and Frank to throw out the Marxist programme and replace it with a few slogans and a "mass paper". Needless to say, the masses did not come.

Trotsky attacked the programmatic poverty of *La Commune*, revealed in its changing programme. Programmatically, *La Commune* never went further than Pivert. Even the call for the revolutionary party – posed in an abstract manner – was acceptable in principle by Pivert. The only difference was that Pivert thought such a party could arise only out of the SFIO whereas *La Commune* saw the Revolutionary Action Groups (RAGS) as the basis for the new party.

This first "Trotskyist" attempt at a pseudo "mass paper" was a miserable failure. It succeeded only in misguiding the left centrist elements who

could have been won to a revolutionary party. Confronted with disaster, Molinier and Frank performed another somersault. Deserted by their allies, even by the Social Frontists, they represented the split as a deliberate turn towards the Fourth International.

After the split in the GBL, it rapidly became all too plain that the RAGs were not organs representing the mass organisations, parties and trade unions, i.e. that they were incapable of action. Molinier claimed that they were the basis of a new revolutionary party! In *La Commune* No. 8 (24 January 1936), Frank, Molinier and friends announced the establishment of the "Committee for the Fourth International (Bolshevik-Leninists)" (CFI). This also carried an advert for a "theoretical magazine" to be called "Fourth International". It never appeared. One week later it was announced that *La Commune* was no longer the organ of "various groups" but of the CFI.

Thus the first "Trotskyist" experiment of conducting joint propaganda with centrists on a specially tailored "minimum programmatic basis" came to an inglorious end. In reality *La Commune* was, like many of its post war imitations, not so much a bloc with real centrists or reformists but an aping of centrism by people who thought that they were revolutionaries but that revolutionary politics was "too much" for the masses as yet, that a preparatory stage of centrist propaganda and agitation was necessary. The result of this political adventurism was, in the end, the splitting and eventually near destruction of the revolutionary forces. It squandered nearly all the gains so courageously won during the entry into the SFIO. This did not, of course, invalidate the entry tactic itself because to sit and "stew in their own juice" was simply not an option for real revolutionaries as opposed to armchair sectarians.

Reunification and split

Meanwhile the GBL and the Jeunesses Socialistes Révolutionnaire (JSR), the organisation formed after the expulsion of Fred Zeller and his supporters in the Seine SFIO youth, announced that they would shortly be holding a joint conference to launch a new party on 12 April. Molinier jumped in ahead of them and founded the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI) on 7 March. The GBL and the JSR did not found their party but waited. Given the PCI and *La Commune*'s re-orientation, and the numbers of members involved, Trotsky and the IS suggested an attempt at reunification. Both organisations ran rival candidates in the parliamentary election which brought Blum and the Popular Front to power. Then on 31 May they fused to form the Parti Ouvrier Internationalist. Molinier, who had been expelled from the ICL, was only admitted as a provisional member.

Trotsky, while he favoured the reunification, was not at all in favour of letting bygones be bygones. Together with his secretary, Erwin Wolf (Nicolle Braun), he worked on a pamphlet The Mass Paper which drew heavily on his correspondence with the section and mercilessly lashed the adventurism and opportunism of Molinier and Frank. In fact the fusion did not work. Molinier rapidly proved that he was totally incapable of disciplined work and again, with Trotsky's prompting, he was expelled. By October 1936 there were two "Trotskyist" parties, the POI (the official section of the ICL, which itself had been renamed the Movement for the Fourth International) and the PCI, which rapidly drifted towards the constellation of Trotsky's sectarian and opportunist critics.

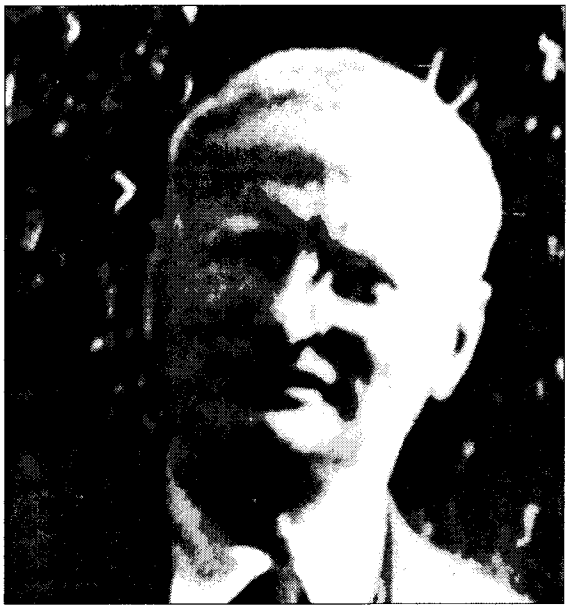
Thus during the greatest upheaval in the history of the French working class since 1871 the forces of Trotskyism found themselves bitterly split. The police, who in June warned Blum that the POI had the potential to become a formidable force, in September reported that "because of internal struggles and the sectarianism of its militants...it can be affirmed today that this group for the moment is incapable of provoking or leading any kind of social movement".[50]

Conclusion

The experiences of Trotskyists in the years 1934-36 were important for all revolutionaries. If the final balance sheet of the work of the French Bolshevik-Leninists was negative, or rather if their achievements fell far short of what was both possible and necessary, then Trotsky's advice to them is invaluable – a remarkable gain. Recognising that his co-thinkers in France constituted a propaganda group and not a party he set out to help them develop both a programmatic basis and concrete tactics to transform them into one.

There was no choice in the matter as far as Trotsky was concerned. A revolutionary crisis was approaching and the solution to it would either be revolution or counterrevolution. The race against time was to create a revolutionary vanguard party which would defeat the two bureaucratic parties and internationals which would surely lead the working class to defeat as they had in Germany. The tiny size of the Trotskyist nucleus did not make this a hopeless task from the outset.

If the Third Period isolated the Trotskyists from the subjective revolutionary vanguard in the Communist International, the situation was changed radically by the triumph of Hitler, the militant response of the French and Spanish workers and the US workers'



Trotsky in disguise, May 1934

recovery from the slump. The crisis within the parties of the Second and Third International, which lasted from early 1933 until the establishment of the Spanish and French Popular Fronts, opened up the real possibility of building vanguard parties.

The question was, would they and could they seize the opportunities presented to them? The beginning of wisdom was to hold fast to the programmatic conquests which they inherited from the days of Lenin and had added to as the Left Opposition. But it was not sufficient to treat this heritage as holy scripture to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be taken away. If they had done this they would have fallen to the level of sectarian pedants who haughtily but passively wait for the working class to raise themselves to a revolutionary consciousness.

The combination of an economic slump and new forms of struggle against mass unemployment required the extension and development of the programme. So too did the discrediting of bourgeois democracy, and the rise of a new and deadly form of the counterrevolution (fascism). But this shaking of the whole foundations of the capitalist order saw at the same time a crisis of working class leadership. The rapid bureaucratic degeneration of the Comintern gave new life to the Second International. Now they were clutching at each other in desperation. Stalinism was providing new alibis for social patriotism on the eve of another great war – anti-fascism and the defence of the Soviet Union.

By 1936-7 the Popular Fronts and the frenzied show trials in Moscow had returned the Trotskyists in Europe to an isolation as bad or worse than that of the Third Period. The leading nucleus of cadres at the centre of the Movement for the Fourth International was subjected to the murderous attentions of the Stalinist secret police.

FRANCE 1934-6

The period from the French Turn to the great strike wave which inaugurated the Popular Front government was one of great opportunities. Largely thanks to Trotsky a series of tactics, a method, was developed to break out of a sect-like existence.

This started from the creation and preservation under all conditions of a disciplined nucleus of cadres armed with a programme and tactical principles – on an international as well as a national level.

This could never be dissolved or hybridised with centrist or reformist currents or succumb to national conditions. It was impermissible to conduct common propaganda with centrists because this could only be centrist and not revolutionary propaganda.

However, given the recognition that a propaganda group was only an embryo of a new party it had to find its way into the heart of the masses and their organisations in order to win the vanguard militants to its programme.

This required various methods of the united front under conditions of great numerical disadvantage for the revolutionary forces. One of these forms was total entry into one specific reformist or centrist party, as a revolutionary faction (officially recognised or secret).

Another was the conduction of fraction work by an independent organisation in one or several such parties as well as in the trade unions. Yet another was for an independent organisation to build a united front with its rank and file to put demands on the leaders of a mass reformist party.

Trotsky, unlike some of his contemporary followers and all of post-war centrism, did not fetish any one of these forms. Certainly he advocated neither organisational independence as a principle nor strategic entryism in reformist or centrist parties.

What was essential through all these tactics was the defence of a revolutionary programme and international discipline. Only on this basis was it possible to develop combinations of vital immediate and transitional demands and win the still reformist workers to them. Wherever possible this could be done by taking up the schemes and promises of the reformist leaders and their programmes. By this method the tiny revolutionary nuclei could break out of isolation from the masses.

It was impermissible to conduct common propaganda with centrists because this could only be centrist and not revolutionary propaganda

In short Trotsky developed, out of the rich heritage of Bolshevism and the Comintern – but also out of new analyses of the new conditions of the 1930s – the method that was to find its highest expression in the Transitional Programme.

In France the cadres of the Communist League were unable to make the decisive breakthrough in time. They were condemned to disintegration. ■

Footnotes

1 See "The Fight for the Fourth International" *Trotskyist International* no 20, June-September 1996
2 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York 1971 p89
3 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34* New York 1972 p228
4 ibid.
5 The largest organisation Solidarité Française' led by François Coty had 180,000 members, the Croix de Feux led by Colonel Casimir de la Roque had 100,000, the Jeunesses Patriotes with 90,000 and the Action Française led by Charles Maurras numbered some 60,000 with a militant street-fighting group the Camelots du Roi.
6 Particularly strong in Paris. it was Led by Jean Zyromsky, its founder, and the 39 year old Marceau Pivert, a schoolteacher– and in the SFIO tradition – a freemason. They produced a paper *Bataille Socialiste.* Whilst Zyromsky became increasingly an advocate of CP-SFIO fusion ("organic unity") and pro-Stalinist, Pivert moved leftwards.
7 Leon Trotsky *On France* New York 1979 p31
8 Daniel Guérin *Front Populaire Revolution* Manquée Maspero Paris 1976 pp72-3
9 *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement* (1934-40) New York, p 460
10 *The New Jacobins* Daniel R Brower New York 1969 p60
11 "Stalin Has signed the Death Certificate of the Third International", May 25 1935 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p291
12 Ibid p299
13 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34* New York p88
14 ibid p89
15 ibid p89
16 "Concentrate Inside the Socialist Party" June 1934, *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement* (1934-40) New York p487
17 *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1934-35) New York p32.
18 ibid p31
19 *Writings of Leon Trotsky : Supplement; 1933-40* New York p489
20 ibid p489
21 ibid p494
22 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p 433
23 See *Against the Stream A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain* 1924-38 by Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, London 1986
24 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p 42
25 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p 60
26 *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years 1933-40* New York 1973 p62
27 *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement 1934-40* New York p 553
28 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p 60
29 See series of articles in *Workers Power,* June, July, August, 1986
30 Daniel Guerin, op cit p96
31 ibid p97
32 ibid p97
33 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* New York p 60
34 Cited in "Leon Trotsky and l'Affaire de 'La Commune'" *Pouvoir Ouvrier no 23* Printemps 1993 p19
35 *The Crisis in the French Section 1935-6,* Leon Trotsky New York 1977 p182
36 ibid, p44
37 ibid p 46-7
38 *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935-36* New York 1977 p93
39 *La Verité,* 8 Nov. 1935. Cited in "Leon Trotsky and l'Affaire de '*La Commune*'" *Pouvoir Ouvrier no 23* Spring1993 p21
40 *Writings of Leon Trotsky* 1935-36 New York 1977 p93
41 *The Crisis in the French Section 1935-6,* op cit,p78
42 ibid p96
43 ibid pp125-26
44 *The Crisis in the French Section 1935-6* op cit p231
45 ibid p233
46 Cited in "Leon Trotsky and l'Affaire de '*La Commune*'" *Pouvoir Ouvrier no 23* Spring, 1993 p21
47 ibid p22
48 *The Crisis in the French Section 1935-6* op cit, p234
49 ibid p117
50 ibid p165

Debate

Race, class and nation in Black America

In a continuing debate over the black question in the USA **GR McColl** argues that the comrades of the Trotskyist Fraction remain wedded ahistorically to Trotsky's slogans of the 1930s rather than developing a concrete analysis of today's situation.

DURING DISCUSSIONS between the Trotskyist Fraction (TF) and the LRCI over the last two and a half years, one point of difference that has emerged has been the assessment of the struggle of blacks against oppression in the United States and the revolutionary programme for the struggle against racism.[1] The TF criticises the LRCI for holding an economistic position because we maintain that the slogan for "the right of national self-determination" is not a key or central part of the programme for black liberation[2] in the United States today.

They refuse to accept that, since the 1930s, historical developments have altered the terrain of struggle against racial oppression in the USA. The comrades follow Trotsky in seeing racial oppression as basically an underdeveloped form of national oppression. They ignore the manifest, real daily "self-determination" of US blacks to fight racism where they experience it, in the inner city ghettos across the entire continent. Lastly, the comrades misunderstand what "separatism" and "black nationalism" mean in the US today and make unnecessary concessions to them.

First, let us state our common ground with the comrades of the TF. The everyday reality of racial oppression in the USA is an undeniable fact. The fightback against it must be a central axis for revolutionary strategy in the world's mightiest economic and military power. Deeply ingrained racist ideology, directed most violently and consistently against African-Americans, is still the major obstacle to working class unity. Along with other forms of racism and ethnic chauvinism it is a vital component of the US ruling class' way of maintaining its rule.

In no way do we believe, like real economists, that working class unity must be bought at the price of blacks shutting up about their oppression so as to achieve unity with privileged white workers. Quite the reverse; white workers must take up the struggle against each and every case of black oppression as a central part of becoming a working class for itself. Ignoring black oppression, indeed acting as "stupid tools" of this oppression, is the source of the political backwardness of the US proletariat – resonant of Marx's view of the relationship between British and Irish workers in mid-nineteenth century Britain.

The discrimination and structural inequality suffered by black Americans can be expressed in figures: the median income of black households is less than 60% that of whites; there are more than 600,000 African-Americans in US jails, including 40% of the 3,200 prisoners on death row. Nearly one-quarter of black males aged 18 to 29 find themselves dragged into, and mangled by, the machinery of the criminal "justice" system.

In black inner-city neighbourhoods of Washington, DC, infant mortality rates can be found which are higher than those in Kingston, Jamaica. Recent cuts in affirmative action programmes at US colleges have seen a dramatic decline in the enrolment of African-American students in a wide range of courses.

As some of the important gains of the great Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s have come under vicious attack, the historic leaders have passed from the scene. The most visible figure to fill the void in recent years has been Louis Farrakhan of the separatist Nation of Islam, rather than the liberal integrationist Jesse Jackson. It is this fact, plus the Million Man March, which convinces the TF comrades that defence of the right to separation is a central issue today. We disagree. We do not think that the black population of the USA is now set on a course for separation, that is, towards the formation of a separate national state for themselves.

There can be no doubt that Farrakhan's stinging attacks on the racism of white society strike a chord with millions of black Americans. This resonance was given expression in the Million Man March. The hysterical attacks on him by the establishment only confirm black Americans in their impression that, in him, they possess a powerful tribune, capable of frightening this elite.

But it would be a serious mistake to conflate popularity won in this way with support for his specific policies, let alone to take it as proof of the impending triumph of the Nation of Islam. It is doubtful that most of those who took part in the March really know about or support the Nation of Islam's reactionary programme with its naked anti-semitism, its tacit support for attacks on Korean shopkeepers and its moralistic attacks on welfare programmes.

As Farrakhan has become a more mainstream, "respectable" leader, he has precisely abandoned the nationalist objective of constructing a distinct black nation state within the borders of the existing USA.[3]

Many ethnic immigrants in the USA have integrated into all the major classes of US society within two or three generations. But the historic discrimination and social oppression which keep black Americans at the bottom of the pile are a direct consequence of the fact that black people did not come to the USA as political or economic refugees. They came as slaves and remained so for over a hundred and fifty years. With the exception of a few years immediately after the abolition of slavery, near total denial of civil rights continued in the former states of the Confederacy. "Jim Crow" – a type of apartheid – continued until the great movements of the 1960s.

But as early as the First World War a massive shift of the black population from the southern states to the cities of the North began. Though initially sparked by the economic opportunities associated with employment in war-related industries, the massive northward push by blacks from the rural South continued until long after



Farrakhan speaking to the Million Man March in Washington in 1995

the end of the Second World War.

Between 1940 and 1950, the number of black people living outside the 11 former Confederate states rose from 2.4 million to 6.4 million. Most of the industrial cities of the midwest witnessed an increase in their black populations at a rate 500 to 1,000% higher than that recorded for their white residents during the same decade.[4] By the mid-1960s, for the first time ever, the majority of the African-American population lived in the North and West, outside of the former Confederate states.

This great migration altered the objective social class structure of black America, consolidating the growth of an industrial proletariat, which was increasingly organised in the trade unions. Even in the southern states, there were some 450,000 black members of affiliates of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) by 1946, while in the component unions of the less conservative Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) hundreds of thousands of black workers were becoming active trade unionists.

Some 95,000 African-Americans belonged to the Steelworkers of America, while in a single branch of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the Detroit area there were an estimated 100,000 black members by mid-1945.[5] The growth of black membership in multi-racial unions would have been higher but for the persistent colour bar to union membership and skilled employment, practised especially by labour aristocratic craft unions until the 1970s at least.

But the abysmal treatment of black members by union bureaucrats and many racist white workers was not the whole story in the midwestern locals of the UAW. The Civil Rights Movement focused on the Jim Crow states of the South and operated under a clerical and professional middle class leadership. But much of the financial as well as moral support for the fight to achieve desegregation and formal equality under bourgeois law came from unions such as the UAW.

Militant black caucuses eventually emerged in a number of UAW locals by the late 1960s, forming the basis for the Ford and Dodge Revolutionary Union Movements, which in turn were the backbone of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. While these organisations suffered from serious political defects and squandered opportunities to relate to white UAW members, their ideology was not that of nationalism. In no recognisable sense was their goal the creation of a separate African-American state.

The reason for emphasising the existence and the struggles of the black proletariat is not to ignore the existence of a large stratum of urban poor. Rather, it is to emphasise that today there is an organised black working class which revolutionary communists have to put at the centre of their strategy for both black liberation and socialist revolution.

The migrants to the northern and western cities encountered racial oppression in the form of low-paid jobs, no jobs, and the poorest housing. This – as well as the subjective racism – led to the creation of ghettos in the inner city. It is this socially imposed "separation" within urban America, now replicated right across the continent, that gave rise to "separatism" or even "black nationalism". That, and the miserable failure of the project of reformist integration to substantively change this. Thus voting rights within an incredibly corrupt, millionaires' democracy, and "affirmative action" programmes on a declining tax budget, have not reversed the trend except for a privileged elite .

Small as this stratum is compared with other "ethnic groups" we should not ignore the influence of the black petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia – the main beneficiaries of civil rights and affirmative action. Even though the black population's poverty and oppression has made it difficult for a strong middle and upper bourgeoisie to emerge, the black "middle class" is far from a negligible quantity when it comes to providing (mis)leadership through the churches and the political parties.

These classes are clearly divided over whether to pursue an integrationist or a separatist strategy. But what is separatism and what is nationalism? Separatism, as a term, does not necessarily mean seeking a separate state. Indeed, its widest use today is to signify voluntary economic, social, cultural and political-organisational separation from the non-African-American population.

Nationalism is a term which encompasses many meanings. It can express the aspirations of what turn-of-the-century Marxists used to call "nationalities"; that is, those who do not seek separate statehood as well as those of "nations" who do. However, it is far from the LRCI's method to turn any of these terms into bureaucratic-juridical categories and then claim that the right of self-determination applies to one but not to the other.

We unconditionally recognise the right to self-determination of oppressed races or nationalities. This fully applies to the black population in the USA. In no sense are we, as the Trotskyist Fraction comrades claim, some sort of Luxemburgists.

But for an ethnic group, a 'race', a people, a nationality, to establish a separate nation state does require a territorial basis. This was Lenin's position on the national question and Trotsky completely supported it. Without it the material basis for national separation does not exist; and without the ability to secede, self-determination is a fraud perpetrated on the oppressed.

But some people do misuse "self-determination" and "separation" to mean something else altogether. They use it to mean the self-maintenance of a people in a caste-like existence within a state, similar to that advocated by the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer and the Russian Jewish-Bund, though they called this "cultural-national autonomy". This split the workers' movement along national lines and handed over each fragment of the proletariat to its own, national bourgeoisie. Lenin objected to this because a unified bourgeois state requires a unified workers' movement to fight it.

Our argument is that whilst we would support the US Afro-Americans' decision to secede if they expressed it – despite all the material obstacles – we believe that the overwhelming majority of US blacks do not dream of such a solution. And this is not because they are afraid to express their views or because their movement is weak and underdeveloped.

Of course, it is not impossible that this could change in the future. If, for example, a far-right racist or even fascist movement were to appear and threaten to seize power, this would clearly mean the loss of all the [illegible]

rights of black people, never mind the possibility of achieving equality within the USA.

The first three decades of the twentieth century did indeed see a number of movements which combined elements of separatism and nationalism, and, indeed "returnism". The call for a "return" to Africa became the central slogan of the movement founded by the Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, which came to command substantial support among African-Americans in the 1920s, particularly among the first generation in the northern ghettos.

Trotsky rightly saw the social import of this movement not in its reactionary-utopian, back-to-Africa project but in its affirmation of the self-worth and ambitions for political liberation by the blacks in the USA.

The original Nation of Islam was again a movement which also gained its most substantial following in the northern cities, especially among the marginalised sections of the petit-bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat. Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammed, it disdained any involvement with the Martin Luther King-led, integrationist Civil Rights Movement.

The Black Panthers of the late 1960s often appealed to a similar social base as the Nation. They emerged as a direct response to the failure of the Civil Rights Movement to address such realities as poverty and police harassment in the northern ghettos. In contrast to earlier manifestations of separatism, however, the Panthers explicitly drew their ideological inspiration from Maoism which could not distinguish unemployed and even lumpenised ghetto dwellers from the black proletariat. Indeed, it regarded the former not the latter as the real revolutionary vanguard. Nevertheless, despite the reactionary and utopian sides of all these movements' ideologies, Marxists recognise in them a progressive element of self-reliance and of resistance to racism.

These universally accepted facts have sparked sharp debates between and within avowed Marxist currents. These hinge, not on the question of whether US blacks should or should not have the right to form a separate state, but whether US blacks must develop a separate party, movement and trade unions and what the class character of such separatist organisations should be. Revolutionaries have to orient themselves both within the realities of black oppression, of ongoing black struggles and within the political currents and conflicts which have arisen.

The TF comrades want to stretch the slogan of self-determination into one of primary significance, as their key to answering the "black question" in the late 1990s. For them "it is necessary to raise a policy that defends the right of blacks to choose the forms of organisation that they themselves want to build: autonomous rights or separation".[6]

The TF comrades think they have found a ready-made answer to what they characterise as the "emergence of the black question" in the USA. This is drawn from conversations and correspondence between Trotsky and the West Indian-born revolutionary CLR James, as well as other leading figures in the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) of the 1930s. Their other authoritative source is the Third International's "Thesis on the Black Question", developed in the late 1920s.

Trotsky's remarks are very important for their stress on the need to fight the racism of the white workers, on the importance of being very attentive to the aspirations of the black population and resolutely defending their right to decide their own future ("self-determination"). But Trotsky was far more tentative about whether to advocate a separate state. He himself inclined to the view that the US blacks were developing, or would develop, into a nation and that this movement would be an important part of the revolution in the USA.

But by his own admission, "he had never studied the question".[7] Indeed this is revealed in the fact that Trotsky thought the blacks "speak their own Negro language ... (which) they naturally fear to speak (...) but when they are free their Negro language will come alive again".

Yet, however sketchy Trotsky's knowledge of the condition of US blacks was, it is clear from the minuted discussions that when he advanced the slogan of self-determination he was using it in the Leninist fashion; namely, as the right to secede and form a distinct governmental-territorial entity – a state.

Respect and attention to Trotsky's teachings is essential but, at the same time, the method of historical materialism requires Marxists to make a concrete analysis of changing historical conditions and ideological changes which flow from them. In a real sense the TF comrades are bad disciples of Trotsky since their analysis takes no account of the most substantial peace time migration in the history of an imperialist country. Nor do they ponder the significance of the absence of any serious forces calling for a separate state for over half a century – years not of black passivity but of quite remarkable struggles!

Nor can one put this down to the subdued and defensive political aspirations of the black masses as the TF comrades do, doctrinairely following Trotsky's argument in the 1930s. From the 1960s to the 1990s, no one can seriously ignore the evidence that black people have been fighting, and will continue to fight, against their exclusion from the democracy and prosperity that the US is supposed to offer all its citizens (the "American Dream").

Against this background, the LRCI maintains that the overarching strategy for African-American liberation must start from the existing integration of black workers as part of the US proletariat. It must go on to seek a much greater unity on the basis of a revolutionary struggle against racism and exploitation. In particular, it means drawing into common action the unemployed or semi-employed of the ghettos.

This is not an accommodation to the racism still widespread within the white working class, but the only serious challenge that can be made to it. The strategy of "revolutionary integration" allows a wide scope for caucuses of black workers within the unions, for black organisations of the unemployed as well as for armed, disciplined self-defence organisations among African-Americans. It also allows for a united front with separatist and black nationalist forces whenever they take up a progressive cause and really fight racism rather than running away from it.

In contrast to this, an abstract call for self-determination does nothing to relate to the very real and immediate crisis of political leadership in the African-American population as a whole and its working class in particular. This crisis is a key, inseparable component of the unresolved crisis of proletarian leadership among the whole of the working class in the world's most powerful imperialism. ■

Footnotes

1 See *Estrategia Internacional* No. 6, (Winter 1996) for the polemic against the LRCI's position on the "black question" in the United States. This position can be found in "The US left and Black Liberation: part 2" *Trotskyist International* no.18. (October-December 1995). A translation of the TF polemic and a letter on the same question from the International Secretariat of the LRCI can all be obtained from the LRCI.

2 For the purposes of this article the term "black" refers to the African-American population in the US, which accounts for approximately 12% of a national total approaching 300 million. The term African-American has come into widespread usage only in the past decade and has not really outstripped the word "black" in everyday speech.

3 See Farrakhan's interview with *The Guardian* in Britain, 23 September 1995.

4 M Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: the second reconstruction in Black America*, 1945 82, Macmillan 1984, pp.40-41)

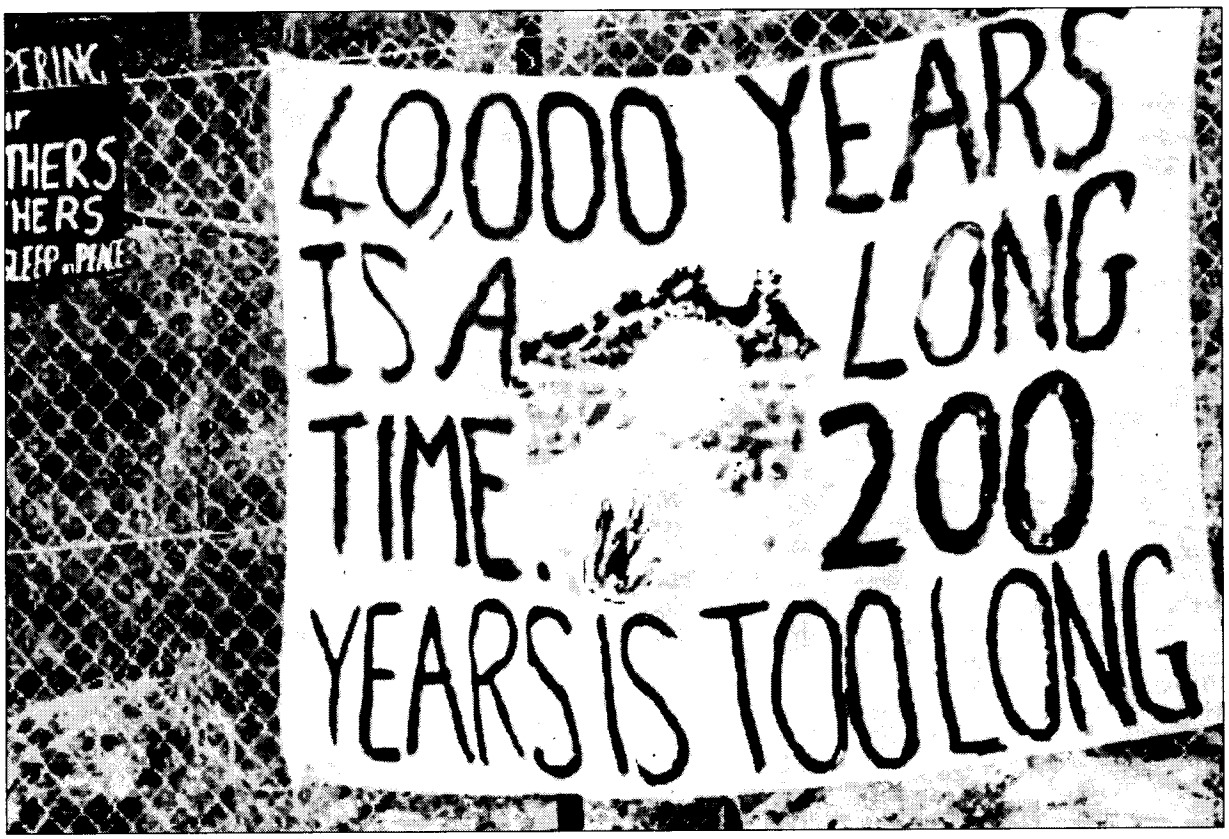
5 C Robinson, *Black Movements in America*, Routledge 1997

6 *Rebelion de los Trabajadores* no.85, November 1995).

7 CLR James, undated 1945 "Letter to Constance Webb" in *The CLR James Reader*, ed. A Grimshaw, Blackwell 1992)

Australian Aborigines fight racist attack

Unbroken



A new land law proposes that Aboriginal people must demonstrate an "unbroken physical connection" with the land to be able to claim title to it. As **Lloyd Cox** shows the recent racist hysteria about native title is in "unbroken physical connection" with two centuries of attempted genocide of the Aboriginal people and their resistance to it.

THE COMING Federal election in Australia has been dubbed by many observers as a "race election". Prime Minister John Howard wants to renew his mandate to pass anti-Aboriginal measures that have been blocked by the Senate. The election occurs against a backdrop of shameless racist scare-mongering.

The key issue is indigenous land rights. In the first part of this article we discuss what is at stake in the furore around land rights for both the ruling Coalition and the Australian Labor Party (ALP). In the second part we examine the position socialists should take on the question of land rights and Aboriginal self-determination.

We conclude that the struggle for land rights expresses an Aboriginal national consciousness that has been growing since the late 1960s, and that socialists should support the right to Aboriginal self-determination, up to and including the formation of their own state, if that is what Aboriginal people want.

In March this year, the Federal Senate blocked the Coalition's Native Title Amendment Bill for a second time. This gave Howard the constitutional trigger he needed to call an early election in both the upper and lower houses of parliament. The contentious issue in parliamentary debates around the legislation was not whose rights should prevail on leased land – those of pastoralists (white European ranchers and sheepfarmers) or Aboriginal people – but over how best to secure the interests of the former while maintaining the illusion of "fair" treatment for the latter.

The new legislation was first debated

n land rights

resistance

in parliament in the final months of 1997. It had been developed by the Coalition in the wake of a High Court decision in December 1996 which ruled that pastoral leases and the land rights of the Wik people of Northern Queensland could co-exist. In response to the outcry from the mining and agribusiness lobbies, who claimed that the ruling set a precedent that would undermine prosperity in the rural sector and threaten the national interest, John Howard drew up a plan to extinguish indigenous land rights in all but name.

This plan became the basis of the Native Title Amendment Bill. This guarantees extinguishment of native title on existing freehold land, while limiting Aboriginal access to leased land to "traditional purposes", like fishing, foraging and conducting religious rites. To be granted even this limited access, the Bill insists that Aborigines should be able to prove an "unbroken physical connection" with the land. This will be impossible for most indigenous people because their physical connection with the land has been destroyed by an unbroken 210 year effort to drive them off it.

The Bill also states that, in situations where the land rights of pastoralists and Aborigines clash, the rights of the former take precedence. In other words, the Bill enshrines the principle that indigenous rights are subordinate to the rights of non-indigenous people.

In addition, the Bill allows the government to extinguish proven native title rights "without negotiation". In the event of such "extinguishment", any compensation to Aboriginal people will be paid for by ordinary tax payers, rather than by the pastoralists and mining companies. Working class people will pay for the theft of Aboriginal land to profit corporate Australia. Finally, the Bill contains a "sunset" clause which restricts the lodging of new native title claims to within two years of the legislation being enacted.

If the Bill does become law, it will be a tremendous consolidation and extension of the rights of pastoralists and miners at the expense of Australia's indigenous people. In New South Wales alone, the new law would extinguish native title claims on 4,700 pastoral leases covering an area of 37 million hectares. When it is considered that 42% of Australia is covered by pastoral and mining leases, it is clear that the Bill is a plan for a massive rip-off of indigenous rights and land – a rip-off with an "unbroken physical connection" going back to 1788.

The *de jure* or *de facto* extinguishment of indigenous land rights will guarantee the continuation of the unfettered exploitation of Australia's natural resources that white farmers and mine owners already enjoy

All this makes a mockery of Howard's claims of impartiality. In reality he is firmly in the camp of the fewer than 20,000 people who lease 42 percent of the country's land from the government. This tiny, privileged group includes not only billionaires such as media mogul Kerry Packer and the Sultan of Brunei, but also no less than 20 members of Howard's own government.

The first obstacle the Bill hit was in the Australian upper house, the Senate. The main sticking points blocking the passage of the Bill through the Senate were the sunset clause and provisions enabling the government to extinguish native title claims without negotiation. The ALP, the Democrats, the Greens and conservative independent Senator Brian Harradine all moved amendments deleting these clauses from the Bill.

Yet none of them rejected the Government's proposed laws outright. On the contrary, they all accepted the Government's argument that the primary objective in the drafting of legislation to deal with the consequences of the Wik ruling was to ensure "certainty" in the rural business sector. The "certainty" referred to is the certainty that property rights of pastoralists and mine companies will be guaranteed in the face of claims by Aborigines.

Where the amenders of the Bill differed from the Government was over how to best achieve this certainty, while staying within the legal parameters of existing racial discrimination laws, and maintaining the perception of being "fair and equitable". Clearly, maintaining such a perception is difficult when you state at the outset that one group's claims can be extinguished by another group without negotiation, and can be extinguished if a certain arbitrary time period lapses.

It was for these reasons of political and legal expedience, rather than a principled stand in defence of the rights of indigenous people, that the Senate opposition refused to yield to the Government on the issue of the sunset clause and the right to negotiate.

The Government, however, was intractable in the pursuit of its full racist agenda. Besides their own racist predispositions, there were and are important political considerations driving the Government's dogmatic defence of pastoralists' and miners' land rights against those of indigenous peoples.

A key consideration for Howard and his ministers has been to keep the powerful rural business lobby happy. The reactionary coterie of interest groups that make up this lobby, led by the mining corporations and the fiercely conservative National Farmers Federation (NFF), have been most vociferous in denouncing the Wik ruling and demanding that the Government change the laws governing native title claims.

Together with conservative state politicians, the NFF and the mining corporations have waged a concerted campaign to convince Australian voters that their homes and backyards are under threat from the claims of Aboriginal people. They have spent millions of dollars on public relations exercises and advertising, designed to whip up the kind of racist hysteria that will make the extinguishment of native title more sellable.

The reasons for the NFF and mining companies pouring so many resources into the campaign to extinguish indigenous land rights could not be plainer: naked self-interest. The *de jure* or *de facto* extinguishment of indigenous land rights will guarantee the continuation of the unfettered exploitation of Australia's natural resources that

white farmers and mine owners already enjoy. Furthermore, it will clear one of the remaining obstacles to transforming leasehold land into freehold land – private property in the fullest sense of the word.

Given that the Coalition Government shares most of the aims and objectives of the rural business lobby, and given that a significant part of the Coalition's funding comes from this quarter, it is no surprise that there is a convergence between the two.

However, there is another reason why the Government is bending over backwards to satisfy the maximum programme of the rural business lobby: the pressure being brought to bear on the Coalition by the defection of rural supporters to Pauline Hanson's far right, populist One Nation party.

Since its formation in April 1997, Hanson's party has had mixed fortunes. After an initial spurt of growth around the time of its formation, the party largely dropped from public view. The loss of media attention was reflected in a slump in the opinion polls. From a high point of around 20% the party now polls between 3% and 5%.

Despite this national decline in support, One Nation has maintained a real presence in some rural areas, particularly in Queensland where it has polled up to 27% support in some rural seats. The bulk of its support has come from disaffected National Party supporters, which has created tensions within the National Party and between it and its Liberal Party Coalition partners.

The reasons for the disillusionment of former National supporters is not difficult to identify. Many people in rural communities have been through hard times in recent years. Small farmers and traders in regional towns, those who make up the bulk of National's traditional support base, have been badly affected by falling commodity prices, stagnating markets, and droughts.

The inability of the Coalition Government to address the problems faced by rural communities has pushed many in the direction of Hanson and her simple-minded populist answers and solutions. Aboriginal "land grabbers" and "welfare bludgers", and Asian immigrants "swamping Australia", are easy scapegoats with which to explain away the problems of the bush. Unfortunately, many disillusioned people in the bush, and more than a few in the cities, accept such facile explanations and the racist solutions that they suggest.

The racism of One Nation, although providing some cover for the Coalition's own racism, has created a dilemma for the government: how to maintain the support of dissatisfied rural voters while keeping sufficient distance between the government and One Nation so as to convince Asian politicians, investors and global markets that the Australian government is not racist?

The contradictory requirements of fulfilling these tasks have caused friction within the Coalition. Many conservative politicians, particularly within the state branches of the National Party, have argued that the Coalition needs to emulate the policies of One Nation in order to shore up shaky support in rural areas. They argue that the Coalition should swap voter preferences with One Nation in the coming election, and pass laws that fully extinguish all vestiges of Aboriginal land rights.

Other Coalition politicians – such as the would-be leader of the Coalition, Treasurer Peter Costello, and the Liberal premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett – have been outspoken against deals with Hanson, including deals which would see the Coalition putting One Nation ahead of the ALP on their "how to vote" cards at the election.[1] They argue that a positive orientation towards Hanson would damage the Government's credibility with Asian trading partners, and alienate important ethnic communities.

Hence, Prime Minister John Howard stands astride a contradiction. A tough stance on the Wik issue, and the winning of an election on this basis, would allow him to keep his balance and ensure the unity of the ruling Coalition.

The final reason for Howard's obdurate stand on native title is that it has provided him with the pretext for calling an early election. An early election will benefit the Coalition because it will fall before the worst effects of the Asian crisis are felt in Australia, and because it would enable Howard to push other contentious Coalition legislation through a joint sitting of both Parliamentary Houses should the Coalition win. But that is by no means assured. Thus, the Coalition is staking a great deal on its Wik strategy and the timing of the election to defeat the ALP.

Support for the Aboriginal right to self-determination and secession is only the starting point of revolutionary anti-racism. Our revolutionary integrationism means fighting to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people into the working class

The Labor Party

The ALP has loudly denounced the divisiveness of the Coalition's Bill, without committing itself to rejecting it outright. When the Bill was first tabled last year, Labor Minister Gareth Evans said his party would not "countenance the legislative extinguishment, direct or de facto, of native title rights now existing on pastoral leases". Since then, however, Labor's opposition to the Bill has been confined to some insipid amendments which belie their claims to stand for Aboriginal self-determination.

Labor's hesitancy on the issue of native title comes as no surprise. After all, it was the ALP who, 15 years ago, reneged on its promise to introduce land rights, under pressure from the farming and mining lobby. It was only in the wake of the 1992 Mabo court decision, which effectively expunged the legal fiction of *terra nullius* (a land without people), that the ALP changed its position on land rights. However, Labor's 1993 Native Title Act had more to do with restricting the consequences of the High Court's ruling than fulfilling its promise of land rights for indigenous people.

Numerous obstacles were placed in the way of indigenous people successfully securing comprehensive rights to their land, including some obstacles that bear a striking resemblance to ones found in the Coalition's new Bill.

Hence, there is a massive discrepancy between Labor's claim to support Aboriginal self-determination and the reality of their practice, both past and present. Gareth Evans' promises have to be seen as shameless hypocrisy. In contrast to the spineless opposition and pseudo self-determination advocated by reformists like Evans, socialists support the right of indigenous people to self-determination up to and including the formation of their own state.

Like Labor, most on the far left in Australia have denounced the Coalition's Bill for its racism and cynicism. All the centrist groups, from the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) to the International Socialists, claim that they are the staunchest defenders of indigenous land rights. If asked, most would say that they support Aboriginal self-determination. Yet they do not specify what they mean by self-determination, or address the issue of whether or not socialists support the right of Aboriginal people to their own state.

Rather, the left typically sidesteps the issue by invoking a commitment to "no struggle but the class struggle". Some, like the DSP, uncritically endorse everything that Aboriginal activists do and say, while the fine print of their own political programme denies that Aboriginal people have a right to their own state.

In the coming election, and in the years to follow, the question of Aboriginal self-determination will become more pressing. As capitalist crises in the region engender pressures to find scapegoats, the rights and material conditions of indigenous people are bound to come under more intense attack from the ruling class and its governments. Socialists must address this long ignored question of Aboriginal self-determination now.

Socialists and self-determination

The necessary starting point for addressing the question of Aboriginal self-determination is two-fold. In the

first place an examination of the history of Aboriginal struggles and consciousness, its present forms and future directions is necessary.

Secondly, a Marxist understanding of the principle of national self-determination and its relationship to the class struggle, most clearly elaborated in Lenin's pamphlet on the subject is needed.

Our reason for emphasising Lenin's contribution is not that we have an attitude of uncritical deference to everything that Lenin wrote, but because his writing still provides the most balanced treatment of the question, and because the practice that flowed from this treatment has been shown to work.

Following the line of Marx's famous remark that "any nation that oppresses another nation cannot itself be free", Lenin argued that socialists should support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. Socialists support this right not because they are soft on nationalism, but because the nationalism of the oppressed has a democratic content defined by a common resistance to a common oppressor. Lenin argued that supporting the struggle of the nationally oppressed, including recognising the right to their own state, would actually help, rather than hinder, the formation of socialist consciousness. There are three reasons why.

First, it demonstrates in practice to the nationally oppressed that socialists are the staunchest advocates of and fighters for the rights of the oppressed. This helps remove any suspicion that socialists support the national oppressors.

Second, socialist support for national self-determination helps blunt the effectiveness of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalism and other ideologies of resistance that are hostile to class politics.

Third, the achievement of national independence by the oppressed nation can help remove the main material base for their nationalism, and thus help expose and discredit the cross-class national alliances in which this is often expressed. Put differently, national self-determination can give a great boost to the clarification of "class" politics.

To have these effects, however, Lenin rightly argued that the support of national self-determination means nothing less than the support of the right of the oppressed nation to secede and form their own state, if that is what they desire. Any limitations on this right imposed by socialists will only be interpreted by the oppressed as socialist support for the national oppressors. This will undermine the tactical effectiveness of supporting the right to self-determination, and strengthen the hold of nationalism over the oppressed rather than weakening it.

Finally, it should be pointed out that although Lenin insisted on socialist support for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, he was also clear that this did not mean that socialists should necessarily *advocate* secession. So, how do these considerations apply to the question of Aboriginal self-determination?

For over 200 years, indigenous people on the Australian continent have been subject to brutal oppression and dispossession. Massacres, land theft and forced assimilation have ravaged indigenous communities, causing the massive disadvantages that they face today.

However, indigenous people have not been passive victims, as they are often portrayed in history text books. Aboriginal resistance to the genocidal activities of generations of settlers, farmers, miners and state officials, has been varied and heroic. From the period of military struggle in the early nineteenth century, including lengthy guerrilla campaigns in Tasmania and Queensland which forced concessions from the white invaders, through to the struggles for land rights, citizenship rights and self-determination in recent decades, indigenous peoples have fought against oppression by both the state and private interests.

From at least the late 1960s, these struggles have expressed elements of an emerging Aboriginal nationalism. Although the fight for land rights and social equality still dominated the agenda of most indigenous groups during this period, signs of a growing national consciousness could also be identified.

Along with events like the Wave Hill occupation, the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra in 1972 and the nationalistic undertones of much of the land rights movement, the most striking manifestation of this nationalism was the adoption of the Aboriginal flag – the unifying symbol of a claimed nation. Yet are symbols on their own enough to establish the existence of a nation?

It is customary for Marxists to define a nation as a relatively stable community of people sharing a contiguous territory and a common language, culture and economic life. For example, Joseph Stalin, in a formulation that became the accepted definition in most Marxist circles, defined the nation as:

"... a historically formed stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."

While these criteria are certainly important bases for the formation of nations, it would be wrong to think of them as a check-list that must be conformed to if a people are to be recognised as a nation. This was Stalin's mistake when he added the mechanical qualifying clause to his definition: "It is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation. It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation."

This normative, "check-list" approach to the nation would later give Stalin a theoretical basis for excluding certain peoples from being recognised as nations, and for ruthlessly suppressing their national rights. By contrast, both Lenin and Trotsky, while accepting the basic definition of a nation given above, did not subscribe to Stalin's normative method of insisting on every element being present before recognising the existence of a nation. They argued that nations are historically constituted and changing, rather than primordial and static, and they emphasised the importance of classes, struggle and a national consciousness in their formation.

They also maintained that a concrete analysis had to be made of each situation where a national question is posed. It is this method that must be employed in approaching the question of Aboriginal self-determination in Australia.

At the time of the first white invasion of Australia, there was nothing even approximating an Aboriginal nation. Aboriginal peoples were dispersed over an entire continent and shared neither a common language and culture nor economy. Group identification was at the level of the clan or tribe, with an awareness of a common "Aboriginality" wholly absent. Culturally and ideologically, this reflected the development of the productive forces within Aboriginal society. National consciousness is a product of emerging bourgeois social relations and is neither necessary nor functional to hunter-gatherer existence, in no matter how advanced a form.

These "tribal" units of Aboriginal society could not be considered nations in the Marxist sense of the word. They developed no national consciousness and the possibilities of a "national state" could not be conceived in a situation where the material basis for the formation of classes and states did not exist.

However, in the two centuries after white invasion there were significant changes that laid the foundations for the formation of, if not a fully-fledged Aboriginal nation, then an Aboriginal national consciousness.

Most important among these changes were the shared experiences of indigenous people throughout Australia of oppression at the hands of a common oppressor.

It was this common oppression that led geographically diverse indigenous peoples to identify with each other against their common enemy. The racial categorising of all indigenous people under the homogenous label of "Aborigine" contributed to this. Although indigenous people sought to

preserve regional identities, they also began to embrace the pan-regional identity imposed upon them by their oppressors, in order better to struggle against that oppressor.

This tendency was greatly facilitated by two developments that accelerated in the twentieth century. The first was the increased mobility of indigenous people. This resulted both from the forced movement of Aboriginal people by the state, and from their insertion into the workforce under capitalist social relations – sometimes without pay – which often meant shifting location. The second development which greatly contributed to the tendency towards a pan-regional identity was the adoption of a common language, namely English. This enabled common experiences to be communicated, as well as laying a basis for co-operation and organisation between Aboriginal groups whose indigenous languages were incompatible.

Technological developments in the second half of the twentieth century further accelerated the possibilities of indigenous people conceiving of themselves as part of a common Aboriginal national community. The proliferation of radios, televisions, telecommunications and jet travel all greatly reduced the distances separating Aboriginal communities. The speed of communication compressed space so that indigenous people gained an increasing awareness of their common plight.

Even after indigenous people were recognised as humans and citizens in the 1967 referendum, Australia continued to bear remarkable similarities to the Apartheid regime in South Africa

A national consciousness began to emerge, expressing itself in the various groups and activities emulating the tactics, strategies and forms of organisation of black people in the USA, including the more militant and separatist tendencies such as the Black Power and Black Panther movements.

Yet it would be mistaken to conclude that technology was at the root of a growing Aboriginal nationalism. Technology was a medium rather than a cause. The real cause of a fledgling Aboriginal nationalism was the continued economic and political marginalisation and social exclusion of Aboriginal people from mainstream Australia.

Even after indigenous people were recognised as humans and citizens in the 1967 referendum, Australia continued to bear remarkable similarities to the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Aboriginal people were all but excluded from participation in the political and economic life of the wider community. They were discriminated against in the job market and the education sector; they remained by far the most disadvantaged people in Australia as measured by income, employment, housing, infant mortality and life expectancy. All of this remains as true today as it was 30 years ago.

This is why some Aboriginal groups and activists have arrived at the conclusion that the only way forward is to form their own sovereign state. The Aboriginal Provisional Government (APG) for example, "stands for the right of Aboriginal people to have the ultimate say over their destiny...a nation exercising total jurisdiction over its communities to the exclusion of all others". [2]

Under the heading "The Objective of an Aboriginal State", the APG says that the test of which land in Australia this state would be built on "would be the land needed by Aboriginal communities to survive on...the remaining land would be kept by the whites and their governments as a basis for them to continue their nation".[3] Only then, the APG argues, would Aboriginal people be truly self-determining.

The evidence above, although showing a growing national consciousness, does not make it clear whether the Aboriginal people have crystallised into a nation seeking complete state independence. Many Aboriginal communities and groups are still geographically and politically fragmented from one another, and many Aborigines would not accept that they are part of an Aboriginal nation. Hence a "nation in formation" might be a more appropriate description.

However, the evidence does highlight the growth of an Aboriginal national consciousness and nationalism since at least the late 1960s. Powerful material and political forces which continue to marginalise Aboriginal people will continue to nourish this national consciousness.

Whether or not these tendencies consolidate into a clearly identifiable Aboriginal nation will be decided by history: not least by whether or not white racism and oppression continues to grow, or gives way to solidarity from the organised working class which would counter the trend towards independence. This may not satisfy schematists, but it does allow us to say unreservedly that we support the right to Aboriginal self-determination.

The fact that a majority of Aborigines are not yet calling for their own state does not preclude socialists from saying now that we support their right to their own state, if that is what Aborigines decide they need. This principle was elaborated by Trotsky in relation to the struggles of black people in the USA in the 1930s.[4]

In contrast to the majority in the American SWP in the 1930s, Trotsky argued that socialists should support the right of black Americans to form their own state, even though this was not a demand being raised by the oppressed masses themselves. The reason they did not yet raise the demand for self-determination, Trotsky said, was a result of their oppression:

"If the Negroes [Trotsky here uses the term black people used to define themselves at the time] do not yet 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 got it into their heads that they dare carve out a piece of the great and mighty states for themselves."[5]

Trotsky argued that given the circumstances at the time, the struggle for black self-determination would be a tremendous political step forward for the oppressed black masses in the USA. He suggested that if the SWP raised the slogan in the appropriate way they had little to lose and much to gain:

"What can we lose in this question when we go further with our demands than the Negroes themselves do at present? We do not compel them to separate from the state, but they have the full right to self-determination when they so desire and we will support and defend them with all the means at our disposal in the winning of this right the same as we defend all oppressed peoples".[6]

The question of a separate state for blacks in the USA has long since been decided by history. The massive migrations of black people to the industrial North and mid-West after the second world war and their partial integration into the wider working class have rendered the question of whether or not socialists support the right of black people to their own state all but obsolete.

However, Trotsky's arguments from the period still have much relevance for the Australian situation today, where indigenous people are not significantly integrated into the working class, and are largely excluded from the social and political life of the wider community, which reinforces nationalist consciousness.

Given these considerations, socialists in Australia should support the right to Aboriginal self-determination not only because we are the staunchest defenders of the oppressed, but because failure to do so would be tantamount to siding with the national oppressor – the racist Australian capitalist state.

White Australian workers need to understand that they are not the guardians of this state, and indeed they have no interest in defending its current form at the cost of denying Aboriginal people their rights. Workers

must be won to the fight against this state, including the fight to defend the right of Aboriginal people to secede from it if they wish to do so.

At the same time as recognising the right to secede, however, we do not *advocate* the *exercise* of that right in the form of a separate Aboriginal state. In fact, we argue firmly against a separate capitalist Aboriginal state. We think that such a state would work against the long term interests of Aboriginal people. It would reproduce inequalities on a class basis; it would be a barrier to the development of the productive forces; it would impede integration between black and white workers in the fight for socialism.

Instead, we are for the revolutionary integration of Aboriginal people into the organised working class and into the fight for socialism – which alone can further the interests of all exploited peoples.

What does revolutionary integration mean in the Australian context? First, we have to define the Marxist meaning of the terms integration and assimilation, given their usage to justify various "liberal" racist projects. In the twentieth century, assimilation – voluntary or forced – has been the cultural solution advocated by sections of the bourgeoisie and the reformist workers' leadership to overcome racism. Because the assimilationist view sees cultural difference as the cause of racism, it sees the eventual subsuming of immigrant culture into the host culture as the only answer: in the British Labour Party the assimilationist project was linked explicitly with the need for tight immigration controls.

In Australia, however, assimilationism took a different form. On the same premise – the inevitability of a racist response when white society is confronted with an "alien" culture – it adopted a radical biological assimilationist project, whereby the destruction of the remnants of the Aboriginal people would take the form of the genetic assimilation into the white population of some, and the extinction of the rest. This eugenic assimilationism failed, but not without inflicting barbaric miseries on the children of Aborigines who were abducted into the white care system from the 1930s to the 1950s. No serious forces today advocate assimilationism, in any form, as the answer to the Aboriginal "problem".

Bourgeois integrationism has been the other main reformist project for combating racism. Known also as "multi-culturalism", the project evolved out of the failure of simple demands for immigrant communities in Europe to assimilate. Essentially, it defines the racially oppressed as a different cultural group whose culture must be respected and legally protected instead of the objective being to erode it.

Bourgeois integrationism essentially sees racism as a combination of an anachronistic racist culture (fear of the unknown) which is amenable to breakdown under the impact of education and (in its Laborite form) simple class solidarity, with limited legal protection for black people. Thus, its programme amounts to equality under bourgeois law and progressive cultural and educational policies. This bourgeois integrationism forms the basis of much of the centre-left Australian establishment's "anti-racism". But it has proved woefully inadequate, for two reasons.

At the same time as recognising the right to secede, however, we do not *advocate* the *exercise* of that right in the form of a separate Aboriginal state

First, because bourgeois integrationism in general is flawed. It cannot recognise that the material roots of racism go deeper than culture, to the social relations of modern capitalism, where the nation state must always be ethnically defined (or redefined) and where inter-imperialist rivalry fuels hostility to foreign and alien cultures. Thus, bourgeois integrationism and multiculturalism cannot cope with the capitalist crisis, which inevitably turns up the racist heat when competition for jobs and resources intensify.

Many Jews in western Europe were thoroughly "integrated" in the early twentieth century but capitalism provoked fascism and war; integration did not save them from genocide. Neither can its focus on law deal with the fact that racism pervades the legal and economic practice of modern capitalism: no law can stop the systematic brutalisation of black minorities by white police forces, from London to Los Angeles to Brisbane.

The second problem for bourgeois integrationism is the specific historical and economic terrain on which the Aboriginal struggle is fought in Australia. Australian capitalism tried genocide, reservations, apartheid and eugenic assimilation to "solve" the Aboriginal problem: what it never managed to do was to integrate the Aboriginal people into the Australian workforce and society.

Thus, the multiculturalism of former Prime Minister Paul Keating never consisted of more than a superficial respect for, and preservation of, Aboriginal culture, the removal of anomalies in personal legal rights, and the promotion, where possible, of an Aboriginal middle class. But he never sought the real integration of Aboriginal people – not even the would be middle class – even to the degree achieved in the USA under Johnson in the late 1960s. Into this half-hearted integrationist project has dropped the land rights question, an unexploded bomb that has put economic flesh on the bones of white racism in Australia.

Although existing legislation is very weak, as the Wik judgement showed, it does constitute a certain limitation on the rights of the pastoralists and mining corporations. The option to re-occupy leased land, in particular, stands in the way of the full privatisation of land and the industries dependent on it. That is why a section of the Australian bourgeoisie is preparing to fight an election on a platform to deny the basic democratic rights of Aboriginal people.

And it has only just begun. As the Asian crisis unfolds, the Australian workers' movement will be faced with the vital task of combating growing racism and xenophobia: the self-congratulatory culture of middle class reformism, which sees the racism of the bush as precisely a redneck anachronism, anathema to young, urban Australia is due for a shock. Mass unemployment will blow apart the "multiculturalist compromise" promoted in the Keating years and pose the need for a different answer.

Support for the Aboriginal right to self-determination and secession is only the starting point of revolutionary anti-racism. Our revolutionary integrationism means fighting to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people into the working class – if necessary by the affiliation of nationally based groups into the Labor and trade union movement. It means fighting to make clear the real links between struggles like the MUA wharfies' fight and the Aboriginal resistance to racist land laws and racist policing.

It means fighting to build a socialist Australia that can offer Aboriginal people any non-exploitative economic future they choose: whether it be to return to a form of pre-colonial economic life, with state support, or to find a place within an industrialised urban and rural economy that is planned to meet both material and cultural needs, and to protect Australia's natural environment. ■

Footnotes

1 The electoral system uses a transferable vote under proportional representation
2 *APG papers* Vol 1 1992, p8
3 ibid p14
4 See *Trotskyist International* No 18, p17-18
5 L Trotsky *On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* 1967 p29.
6 ibid p26

Vietnam after the war
Losing the peace

VIETNAM WAS engulfed in war from 1945 to 1975. France and later the USA waged a brutal struggle to subordinate the country to their will. In 1954, following the defeat of the French, the country was split in two. For twenty years the South was ruled by corrupt regimes kept afloat by thousands upon thousands of US soldiers and every weapon the Pentagon could devise.

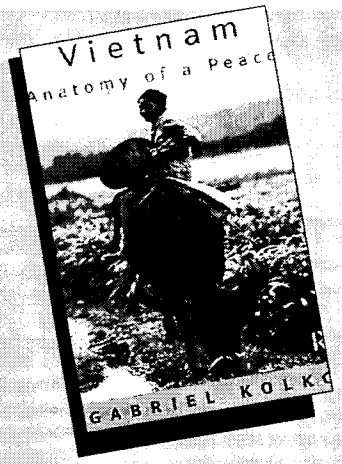
Atrocities against the Vietnamese people and the blanket bombing of their villages and towns, and those of neighbouring countries like Cambodia, were condoned by Washington as part of the fight to contain "the spread of communism".

The billions of dollars and the thousands of lives that this war cost the USA did not deliver victory. On 30 April 1975, the last US troops and personnel fled by helicopter from the southern capital, Saigon. The combined forces of the South's National Liberation Front and the North's Democratic Republic of Vietnam triumphantly entered the city. Against all odds, a poorly equipped army and resourceful peasant guerrillas humbled the American colossus.

The struggle of the Vietnamese inspired anti-imperialist movements across the globe. An entire generation was radicalised and turned into activists by the example of the workers and peasants who proved resistance was fruitful. The thirty year war ended with a magnificent victory over imperialism, one which still haunts the rulers of the USA, making them fearful to this day of committing the ground troops to enforce their role as the number one gendarme of the imperialist world system.

In his earlier book, *Anatomy of a War*, Gabriel Kolko, a staunch opponent of the war against Vietnam, paid tribute to the heroism, courage, self-sacrifice and ingenuity of the Vietnamese masses. He also examined the way in which the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), under Ho Chi Minh, acted as a unifying force for victory through enjoining the enormous longing of the Vietnamese masses for national liberation to their preparedness to fight on until this longing was satisfied.

Kolko was not an uncritical or dewy-eyed supporter of the VCP. His open opposition to their compromises with imperialism during the 1973 Paris peace negotiations and his criticism of the tendency to promote technocrats to high positions from the early 1970s onwards, were examples of his willingness to speak the truth in pursuit of his own views about how the US could be defeated. As a publicist of the Vietnamese



Mark Harrison reviews
Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace
by Gabriel Kolko
London 1997, £10.99

cause, with friends inside the party's leading committees, his views even carried some weight within the VCP at the time. Nevertheless, the earlier book's account of the tremendous victory in Vietnam made a compelling case for an idea which was very popular during the war, especially with the supposedly Trotskyist United Secretariat of the Fourth International; namely, that the VCP, unlike its counterparts in Russia and Eastern Europe, was not a Stalinist party.

Kolko's strength as a political commentator is his fearless independence. His own political conclusions may not always be right, but his relentless quest for objective truth means that the right conclusions can be found in his work. His latest book demonstrates that the politics of the VCP are, in essence, indistinguishable from those of their Stalinist counterparts elsewhere.

It is an excoriating exposure of how those politics have destroyed the legacy of the military victory over imperialism and handed the USA a belated triumph. What napalm and bombs failed to deliver, the IMF and World Bank hit men have achieved - the subordination of Vietnam to the dictates of world imperialism. And Kolko has no hesitation in laying the blame for this at the door of the VCP:

"For the irony of Vietnam today is that those who gave and suffered the most, and were promised the greatest benefits, are gaining the least. Their rulers are abandoning them to the inherently precarious future of an economy which increasingly resembles the system the United States supported during the war. For the majority of Vietnam's peasants, veterans and genuine idealists, their struggle is becoming a vain sacrifice." (p7)

The economy Kolko describes is based on "market socialism", or "Doi Moi" as the VCP call their post 1986 strategy. It has destroyed the co-operative system on the land in the North, rendered centralised planning inoperative as a mechanism for regulating the economy and turned the nationalised sector of industry into a breeding ground for a new class of exploiters emerging within the VCP bureaucracy itself. At the same time, it has resurrected the careers and profits of the southern capitalists - primarily the Chinese merchants - who were forcibly dispossessed in 1978 during the transformation of the South into a degenerate workers' state on the model of the bureaucratised USSR. Last, but not least, it has opened a door through which imperialist capital can, when the time is right, re-enter the country, erasing the memory of April 1975.

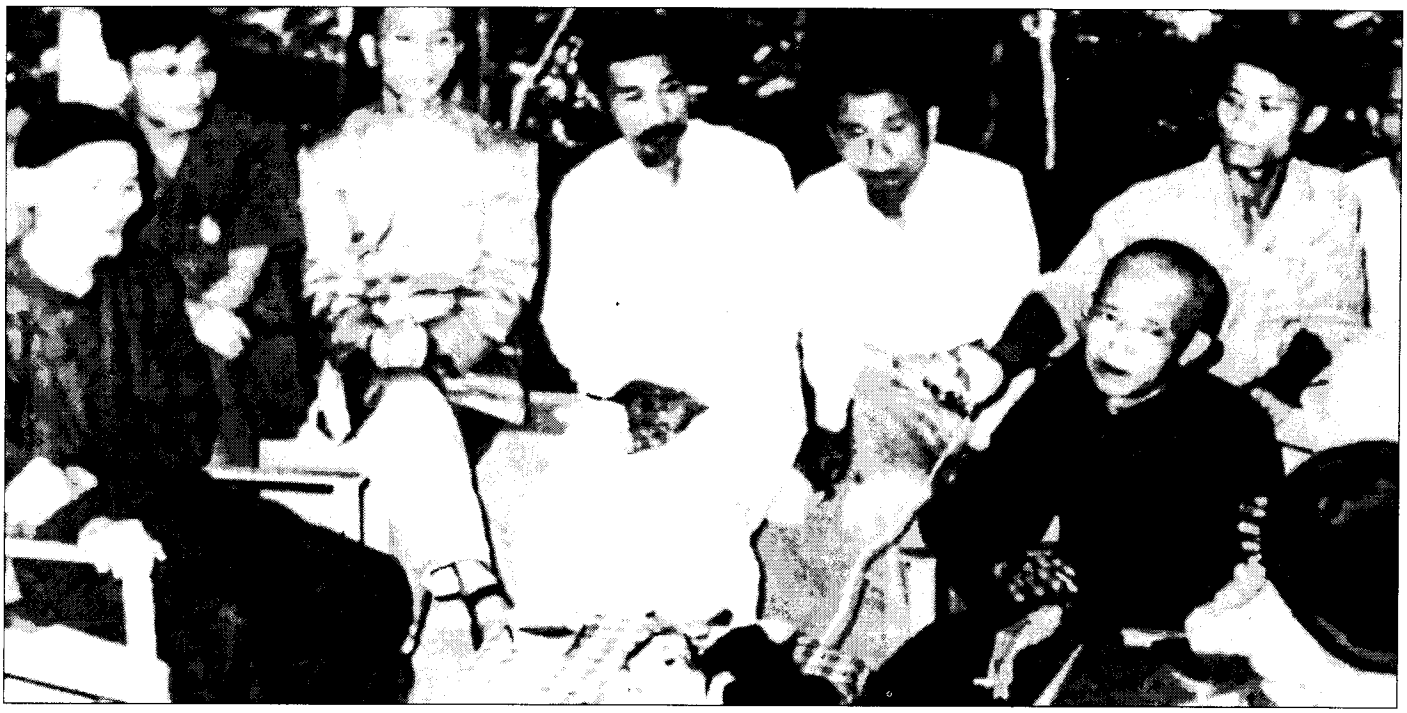
It is certainly true that the Vietnamese economy in 1975 was badly dislocated by years of war. Rapid moves towards socialism, even under a revolutionary leadership, would have been impossible.

Reconstruction was a priority and compromises would have been necessary. That such compromises were delayed in the first post-war period, 1975-86, was largely due to the political crises that engulfed the region in the aftermath of imperialism's defeat. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 and its war with China in 1979, were both products of the VCP's goal of hegemonising Indo-China.

On the issue of Cambodia, Vietnam found itself internationally isolated as a vengeful USA led the United Nations in defending the legitimacy of the genocidal Pol Pot regime. Against China, Vietnam was forced, at enormous cost, to maintain a massive army on its northern border.

Isolation only ended when Vietnam pulled out of Cambodia in the late 1980s. By then, the VCP was dominated by a pro-market faction led by prime minister Vo Van Kiet. Reconstruction was carried through under the banner of "market socialism". Although it is true that there was a period of economic growth, as Kolko points out, this owed less to the dynamism of market socialism than to the fact that the burden of military expenditure had been massively reduced:

"Indeed, it was certain that once real peace came then significant growth would occur



South Vietnamese leadership of the NLF during the war; now several of these figures are handing the country over to US MNCs

also, whatever the policy. Politics, not a plan, was the principal constraint on the economy as well as impetus to its economic growth after 1988." (p23)

The bureaucracy's refusal to recognise this strengthened its marketising wing. Indeed, the party began to justify the erosion of the gains of the Vietnamese revolution in the mumbo jumbo "Marxist-Leninism" so typical of Stalinism. When the party accepted IMF and World Bank demands for cutbacks in social spending, the imposition of fees for hospital treatment and schools, privatisation and the curbing of soft credit to the nationalised sector, the policy was explained as a necessary stepping stone towards socialism.

Throughout the late 1980s, VCP policy was to develop a "multisectoral economy and give various economic components and business establishments more headway to develop quickly . . . the state will regulate and lead the market economy to develop further in accordance with . . . socialist orientations."

Loss making state enterprises would become "state capitalist enterprises" offered for sale to "private collectives" (pp37/38). Such doublespeak could not disguise the facts – Vietnam was on the road to capitalist restoration, guided by an unholy alliance of the IMF and the Politburo. The IMF concluded in 1994 that Vietnam had made, "remarkable progress in the transition to a market based economy." (p34)

This progress, however, did not sustain growth and Kolko charts the decline of the economy under the reforms. Within that decline, he also shows how elements of a new capitalist class society were forged. Party bureaucrats took control of profitable state enterprises and accumulated profits for themselves. The state sector's share of the GDP actually grew under market socialism from 32.5% in 1990 to 40.2% in 1994. But the cost of this growth was borne by the worker – 800,000 were sacked from state enterprises in this period and, under "socialist business accounting", real wages were slashed.

At the same time, corruption and asset stripping grew. The "socialist sector" became a gigantic fraud, overseen by corporations modelled on the South Korean chaebols. The result was increasing conflict within the bureaucracy between managers of enterprises who wanted to retain control for their own gain and other bureaucrats who stood to gain through their "privatisation":

"The very first privatisation implemented actually transferred the company to the ministry officials in charge of the sale!" (p63)

Although there is a growing private sector in Vietnam, it is the fight between sections of the bureaucracy that is most likely to determine the course of capitalist restoration. As the bureaucracy fragments under the impact of market socialism, a fragmentation that has occurred in every other instance of restoration, the Communist Party's restorationist wing will become the nucleus of the new capitalist class. In that sense, Vietnam is more like China than Poland. In Poland, the fragmentation of the Communist Party bureaucracy cleared the way for the emergence of capitalists from outside its ranks. In Vietnam, like China, the party will be the womb within which the new capitalist class will take shape.

Of course, it is possible that a wing of the bureaucracy will ally with the developing capitalist class in the private sector. This is 60% controlled by the Chinese minority who dominate Vietnam's lucrative rice export business, making both a killing on the world market and a mockery of the supposed state monopoly of foreign trade.

However, unlike China, Vietnam's growth levels are unspectacular and more than once it has only been saved from collapse by its oil and rice exports and loans. Vietnam is heavily indebted to the IMF, World Bank and Japanese banks, to the tune of 161% of its GNP. The foreign investment that the IMF "reformers" promised has not amounted to much beyond some tourist developments. The few Special Economic Zones that exist in Vietnam are still largely irrelevant to the economy as a whole.

This makes Vietnam a much poorer bet for private capitalists. They simply don't stand to gain a great deal by sponsoring a private road to restoration. The party, or rather a wing of it around Vo, is far more likely to sponsor a state capitalist road to restoration. The most important question is, what prospects are there for a political revolution that can halt Vietnam's transition back to capitalism and at the same time rid it of the Stalinist regime which has taken it far along the restorationist road?

Kolko's book is invaluable in providing information that can help answer this question. While it can never be certain that a political revolution of the working class and poor peasants will occur, there are grounds for hope.

Kolko demonstrates the way in which Doi Moi has created a new desperately poor and frequently landless peasantry. The party's decision to export rice to raise foreign currency spelt disaster for most peasants. It created a minority who produced for the world market and a poor majority with little credit, poor equipment and unproductive land. With this, they were plunged into debt, frequently forced to become labourers for richer peasants, and found themselves under the yoke of the very system on the land that they had fought the French and the Americans to destroy. This great peasant mass is a potent force for revolution in Vietnam and it is no surprise to find that the wing of the bureaucracy closest to the peasantry, the military, is starting to take a lead in the campaign against restoration and marketisation.

At the same time, the "party of the proletariat" finds itself increasing the general misery of the masses. Kolko points out that under Doi Moi in 1993:

"The poorest fifth received 7.8% of the income, less than in India and far less than

even in Britain under Margaret Thatcher! Whatever its earlier problems Vietnam had always been a relatively highly equitable country. By 1993 the logic of the market had produced what was objectively a class society. This inequality has probably increased since then." (p103)

This is particularly acute in the cities where the influx of landless peasants has added to a growing number of impoverished and often jobless workers. Undeterred, the Stalinists urged:

" . . . the worker class must support and encourage the business owners to become more confident in investing and expanding their production and business . . . to create more jobs, enrich themselves and the fatherland." (p113)

The working class has responded with strikes and independent unionisation, including a 1993 wildcat strike by over 600 workers against a joint Korean-Vietnam venture. As always, the official Stalinist unions (which do not organise in foreign-owned enterprises) enforce the bureaucracy's will in the workplaces.

Unofficial strikes are forbidden, official strikes can only be called by the highest level of a union's bureaucracy. It is the classic no-win situation for the rank and file worker. But the rank and file worker has given the classic response – the party was forced to admit that from 1994 the number of strikes increased dramatically as workers fought against the impact of market socialism.

Worker and peasant resistance to market socialism is not likely to produce the pro-western democracy mass movement that was so typical of Eastern Europe. This is not because Vietnam is a democratic paradise (though there probably is greater freedom of the press and toleration of open criticism of the party than in other Stalinist states). It is because western-style democracy is a recent memory for the masses – in the imperialist dominated South Vietnam that they fought to liberate.

The west's systematic rape of the country from the nineteenth century on was met by fierce and fearless resistance by the masses. True, many veterans of the fight against the USA are now older and a younger generation is growing up under the shadow of the IMF rather than B-52 bombers. But the legacy of Vietnamese resistance to imperialism lives on in the countless peasant households who lost family members, in the cities kept in check by the French and American troops and even in sections of the party itself, especially its lower ranks, and the military. Such a legacy makes a pro-western democracy movement the least likely outcome of the crisis in Vietnam.

More likely is that a wing of the party, increasingly centred around the military and the Interior ministry, will seek to place themselves at the head of mass discontent. They will challenge the open restorationists and appeal to the legacy of Vietnam's long and heroic struggles to legitimise their move. But they will do this in order to preserve their own control, their own privileges and their own parasitic existence.

They will not do it to open the road to the real liberation that Vietnam's masses so richly deserve and so urgently desire. Neither the Stalinist restorationists nor the Stalinist "traditionalists" offer the masses any hope of socialism. Both offer variants of oppression.

Kolko himself, in charting the rise of the restorationists, concludes that the party is finished. He sums up its attitude to its original, albeit nominal, socialist goals by quoting the youngest member of the Politburo who described the party's socialism in the following terms:

The most important question is, what prospects are there for a political revolution that can halt Vietnam's transition back to capitalism and at the same time rid it of the Stalinist regime which has taken it far along the restorationist road?

"In Vietnam we say 'let those who have favourable conditions enrich themselves first, and then let those less fortunate enrich themselves later thanks to the support of those who have already become rich'." (p120)

This Thatcherite language indicates how even nominal socialist goals have been abandoned. But Kolko points out that the forces ranged against this pro-market wing have no coherent economic alternative to the market and offer no way out for the masses. Their lack of an alternative condemns them to be largely passive critics of the dynamic pro-capitalist "achievers" in the party. Kolko argues:

"... the indecisive struggle will continue for better or worse, with the increasingly powerful state administration extending its organisational role and in the process socialism's lingering residues are most likely to be eroded even further. Time favours all those who would abolish it: the cynical bureaucrats and corruptionists who run the government, those who are amassing their fortunes, and the IMF and the World Bank. Vietnam will then go the way of the other Communist nations." (p148)

Against this fatalist perspective, Kolko does point to the renewed potential of mass revolt. Indeed, his final chapter is an eloquent and defiant justification of the necessity of resistance to injustice and oppression and the book as a whole is, in some ways, an emotive polemic against the betrayal by the Stalinist VCP of the Vietnamese people's past struggles.

But his central political weakness is his equation of the Stalinist VCP with Leninism. For him it was Leninism – which he repeatedly characterises as necessarily elitist and counterposed to democratic accountability – that led to this betrayal; rather, it was Stalinism, the antithesis of genuine Leninism.

In Vietnam, Stalinism was personified by Ho Chi Minh who, after the 1945 August revolution, liquidated the workers' councils and murdered the Trotskyists, who alone stood for taking the revolution forward to national liberation and socialism. It was the same Ho who did the first of many deals with imperialism that needlessly prolonged Vietnam's agony. Today's VCP marketeers are not a departure from his tradition. They are a product of it.

Equally, they are a product of Stalinism's most recent betrayal of Leninism. In the struggle against them, a new, Trotskyist leadership must emerge, accountable to and truly worthy of a people who have given so much in the struggle against world imperialism. ■

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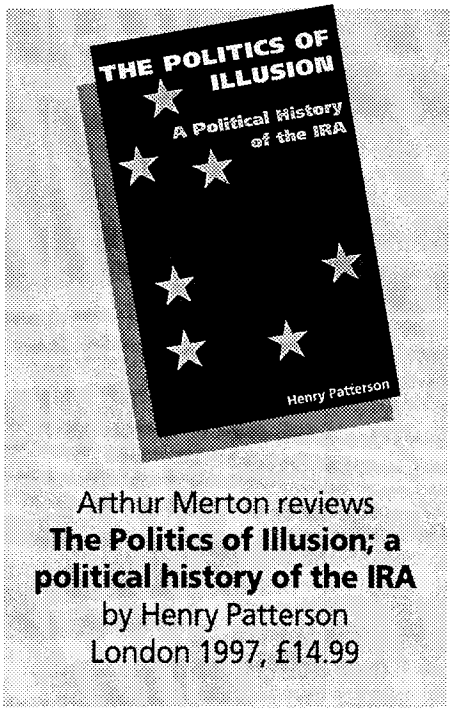


Arthur Merton reviews
The Politics of Illusion; a political history of the IRA
by Henry Patterson
London 1997, £14.99

THERE is a treasure trove of information in Henry Patterson's recently republished book. It is a valuable addition to the literature on the Irish Republican Army (IRA), especially on the debates that have raged within the IRA and Sinn Fein on the issue of socialism and class politics.

But a caveat is necessary. Patterson is an apologist for Unionism and denies the legitimacy of the Irish national question altogether. He regards the "structural" fact of one million Unionists in the Six Counties as sufficient proof that a united Ireland has been removed from the agenda of history. For him the War of Independence (1918-21) failed to unite Ireland not because of the betrayal of Michael Collins and the "pro-Treatyites" who backed partition, but because the internal dynamics of Unionism were, and remain, a structural block to Irish unity. A united Ireland is, according to Patterson, the illusion at the heart of republicanism, condemning it to repeated failure, whatever strategy it adopts.

But the value of this book is its exposure of the IRA's real illusion - that the national question could be resolved by an all-class alliance against Britain, a military struggle divorced from the mass struggle, and the conscious subordination of working class interests to those of middle class and bourgeois "allies" in the anti-imperialist struggle. The book demonstrates, unintentionally from the author's point of view, the validity of the Marxist class assessment of republicanism as an essentially petit bourgeois movement, and that, under given circumstances, it would switch from revolutionary struggle to thoroughly reformist methods.

The debates surveyed by Patterson, from the War of Independence through to the present, are full of examples of the way in which petit bourgeois nationalism, even at its most radical, was incapable of transcending either the prejudices or the methods of its class.

At the height of the War of Independence, workers engaged in direct mass actions, including strikes, the establishment of workers' councils and the formation of red guards. The illegal Irish Parliament, that most venerated body in the republican tradition, expressed its attitude to such action in 1920:

"The present time when the Irish people are locked in a life and death struggle with their traditional enemy, is ill chosen for the stirring up of strife among our fellow countrymen." (p21)

This was Sinn Fein's way of telling the working class to put its specific interests to one side and to support the struggle of "the nation". But the Irish nation – like every nation in history – was and is composed of antagonistic classes. The appeal to the nation meant compromise with the very people – big cattle ranchers, developing bourgeoisie and middle class farmers - who were instrumental in accepting the Partition in 1921 and thereby betraying the democratic rights of the "nation". Yet Sinn Fein was desperate to retain their support .The party's principal base was among the better off farmers; the poorer rural regions were considerably less active in the war. Sinn Fein insisted that "Labour must wait". Working class action, unless it was controlled by the republicans, was seen as anti-national.

The acceptance of partition by the Collins leadership of the IRA split the movement and sparked the brief but important civil war. During the conflict one anti-Treaty leader, Liam Mellows, wrote his famous "Jail Notes". This short statement of "social republican" aims presented the pro-Treatyites as betraying the national struggle in favour of the capitalist ranchers and better-off farmers.

Less plausibly, it claimed that their aim was to import "foreign" capitalism. Actually, the pro-Treatyites hoped the settlement would encourage the development of domestic capitalism. Nevertheless, the cleavage created in republicanism by the civil war prompted Mellows to argue:

"the commercial interest, so called, money and gombeen men are on the side of the Treaty. We are back to Tone . . . relying on the 'men of no property'. The 'stake in the country' people were never with the Republic ... We should recognise that definitely now and base our appeals upon the understanding and needs of those who have always borne Ireland's fight." (p25)

Patterson rightly points out that Tone's appeal to the "men of no property" was not an example of his "socialism", but "a bourgeois revolutionary's acknowledgement that in certain circumstances it may be necessary to make an instrumental and risky appeal to the 'lower orders'." (p28)

Mellows, a petit bourgeois revolutionary operating in the epoch of a modern working class and influenced by the Communist movement, was, essentially, making a similar appeal. His call to the men of no property was not to seize the property of the big landowners (the IRA physically prevented land seizures during the War of Independence) but to rally behind those prepared to continue to fight for the nation. This has been a hallmark of petit bourgeois nationalism in Ireland from Mellows through to Gerry Adams.

In post-Treaty Ireland, the republican movement split still further between those favouring participation in the institutions of the Free State and those opposing such participation as a betrayal of the fight for a Republic. This second split gave rise to Fianna Fail, under De Valera. This was a populist, nationalist party, which promised to press forward to the republic through the transformation of the Free State. In 1932, Fianna Fail won its first general election, promising a protectionist economic policy to develop Irish industry and agriculture, create jobs and start the process of "resurrecting the nation".

The IRA, meanwhile, was rapidly becoming a rump organisation. In a bid to revive its fortunes one of its leaders, Peadar O'Donnell, turned once again to "social republicanism", campaigning against the payment of land annuities owed to Britain by poor peasants under the terms of the Treaty, particularly in the west. Inside the organisation O'Donnell, who had a trade union background, pushed for a left wing, working class orientation, using his editorship of *An Phoblacht* to agitate for his line.

O'Donnell's efforts to transform the IRA had a twofold effect. On the one hand, it brought down the wrath of the church and the state. The church condemned the IRA, which was mainly Catholic in composition, as a communist organisation. The state banned it for its continued (and by now utterly futile and counter-productive) military actions against Free State institutions

On the other hand, O'Donnell's lurch to the left also prompted the Catholic traditionalist and small farmer core of the IRA to revolt against him. In 1934, he split from the IRA to set up the Republican Congress, a shortlived republican socialist group that split at its first conference.

Despite his contact with the Stalinist Communist International, O'Donnell never transcended petit bourgeois nationalism. Patterson points out that during his reign *An Phoblacht* rarely covered labour movement issues, paid scant regard to the struggles of the working class and elevated the small farmer to the role of eternal vanguard of the national revolution. O'Donnell wrote:

"In my opinion the relationship between the social rights of the toilers and the fight for national independence has been more persistently maintained by the small farmer population, even than by the industrial workers in the south." (p69)

This not only minimised the role of the southern working class in the national struggle, it also exposed republicanism's other core weakness – its lack of a strategy for breaking the Protestant workers of the north from Unionism.

The IRA did grow under O'Donnell's leadership, not least because of its role in the physical struggle against the Blueshirts (Irish fascists), but he was unable to develop a political programme that could fuse the struggle for national liberation with the struggle for economic and social emancipation. For him, the peasantry were the vanguard and working class struggle never had anything more than an auxiliary role. As a result, the military struggle in pursuit of the republic remained the only strategy. Increasingly, his attempts at a political strategy merely meant using the IRA to pressurise Fianna Fail into a more republican direction. This strengthened the traditionalists who at least held out the prospect of their organisation being the only true keepers of the republican flame.

This may have been comforting for the diehards but it was hardly appealing for the masses, as became clear after the failed border war of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Here republican traditionalists, without any concern for social issues, sent their flying columns into the north to attack police stations and barracks. The war, Operation Harvest, was badly planned and executed. There was no shortage of bravery but there were shortages of such essential things as local guides who knew the area! Moreover, the aim of creating liberated areas in the border counties was crazy, especially as nothing had been done to mobilise potential supporters in the region.

Interestingly, Patterson reveals that before the war was launched there was a debate on what sort of approach was needed. A group of army council men had suggested as an alternative to the flying columns, "a longer term strategy: first sabotage of transport and communications to bring everyday life to a standstill and, second, preparation of the nationalist population for a civil disobedience campaign. The latter, it was calculated, would provoke repression from the police and the B Special constabulary (which was particularly unpopular among Catholics) and provide space for the IRA to emerge as a 'people's' defence force." (p90)

The abject failure of the border war created an altogether different kind of space in which O'Donnell's descendant, Cathal Goulding, fell under the influence of Stalinism and began an attempt to revive social republicanism within the IRA on a new basis. Goulding's success was revealed when an IRA convention in August 1967 and a Sinn Fein Ard Fheis the same year amended the republican movement's constitution, "to define its aim as the establishment of a Socialist Republic." (p113)

The IRA's commitment to militarism marked it out as a revolutionary nationalist movement. But throughout it has remained a pan-class movement based on the politics of petit bourgeois nationalism. The repeated teeterings towards reformism and lurches towards social republicanism and back to traditionalism and armed struggle, mark the IRA out as an unstable, petit bourgeois force

Some Trotskyists (and Patterson reveals that the USFI's Gerry Foley was foremost among them) uncritically welcomed this development and enlisted themselves as advisers of the "new" movement. However, closer inspection of Goulding's politics, and his absolute failure to turn the IRA into a "people's defence force" in anything but name, reveal that the change was actually for the worse.

Goulding believed that an end to abstentionism would enable Sinn Fein to expand its influence in the south. At the same time, he thought that a purely peaceful civil rights campaign in the north would, in and of itself, break the Protestant workers from Unionism and open the way to national unity. While he was right to want to end the self-defeating policy of abstentionism (a sacred cow in the republican movement until 1986 when Adams finally got rid of it), his strategy was essentially reformist, north and south. It was predicated on a peaceful evolution resulting from a combination of parliamentary pressure and carefully controlled mass mobilisation. It was republicanism hybridised with a variant of Stalinism to give it an "anti-imperialist" veneer.

The actual civil rights movement blew Goulding's strategy apart. Far from revealing that the Protestants had nothing to fear from Catholic equality, it inflamed the privileged Protestant working class, led by their Orange overlords, into a mass reactionary struggle against the anti-unionist population of the Six Counties. In 1968, civil rights marches were smashed up by the B Specials. In 1969, Orange mobs launched pogroms on the nationalist ghettos of Derry and Belfast. The modern Irish war began and Goulding didn't know what to do. His illusions in the reformability of the Orange state had left the IRA ill-prepared to defend the nationalist communities.

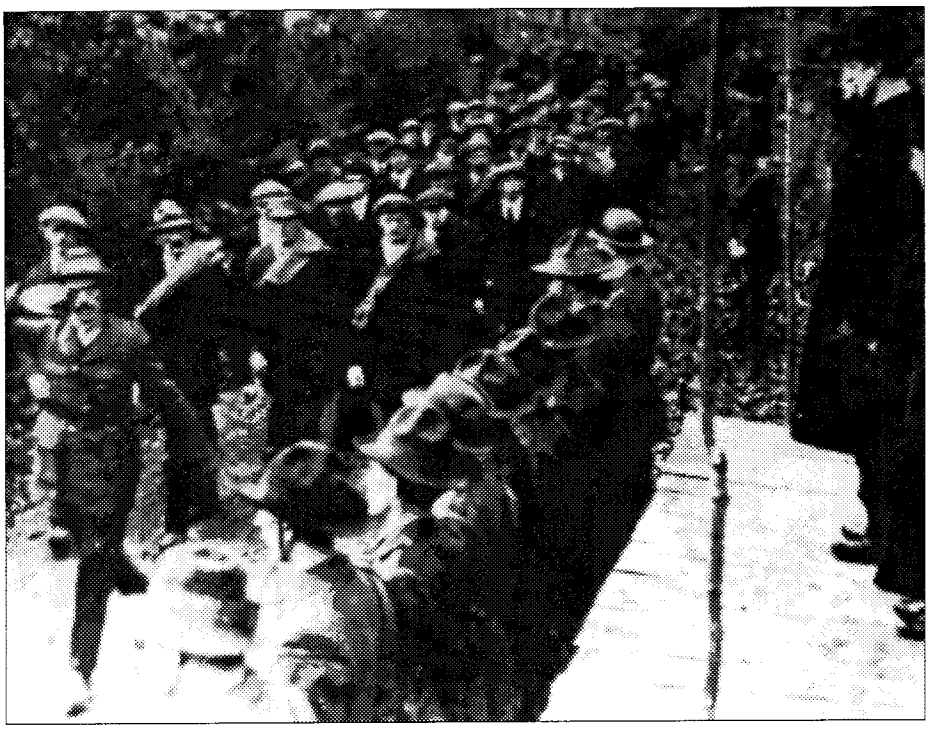
In the midst of this turmoil his pursuit of the goal of ending abstentionism led to the split in the IRA/Sinn Fein that gave birth, in late 1969 and early 1970 to the Provisional IRA and Provisional Sinn Fein.

The latter third of Patterson's book deals with the evolution of the Provos. Implicit in his analysis is that the new variant of "social republicanism", manifested in the person and politics of Gerry Adams, has become a form of "republican revisionism" taking the movement back to both Goulding and De Valera and their de facto acceptance of partition. Adams has been obliged to resolve the conflict between the IRA's illusion of national unity and the reality of Unionist obstruction by effectively accepting the Union, at least for the time being.

Patterson's main concern is whether Adams can continue to direct the movement along these lines without going the way of other "social republicans" – splitting the movement and laying the basis for a resurrection of violence by a new "traditionalist" IRA.

In reality, this will be determined both by the course of struggle in the aftermath of a peace deal and by objective developments affecting the economy of Northern Ireland. What is clear is that Adams, so far, has achieved much more than previous reformers in transforming Sinn Fein and the IRA. The essential reason for this is the exhaustion of the mass insurgency of late 1960s and early 1970s and the subsequent war weariness that emerged as a result of the long stalemate between the British and the IRA. Adams has had the space to carry through a "politicisation" of the movement that was always denied to his reforming forefathers like O'Donnell.

Patterson's view, and it must be said his suspicion, is that Adams' evolution has been far from straightforward, that he has vacillated throughout between hard-nosed republicanism (which Patterson defines as demanding self-determination for the island as a whole) and a reformist agenda of accepting the legitimacy of Unionist aspirations, seeking to achieve his goals through the renegotiation of the Union rather than its destruction. This means that there is always the threat of a return to armed struggle. Indeed Patterson argues that TUAS (which he calls Tactical Use of Armed Struggle rather than Totally Unarmed Struggle) is a high risk strategy aimed at getting the British to begin a process of disengagement rather than an abandonment of the republican movement's assertion of the



De Valera takes the salute from anti-partition IRA members during the Irish Civil War of 1921

right to wage an armed struggle against the British presence.

Despite his reservations, this section of the book does show how far the Provisionals have travelled since their formation. This is not only in terms of their turn to politics in the early 1980s following the election of hunger striker Bobby Sands to parliament, nor their commitment to community politics (something which was natural for a movement whose many recruits came out of the community-based civil rights movement), but principally in terms of their goals. Particularly since the late 1980s, with the beginning of the pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP, Dublin and the Irish-American lobby, the Provisionals have been turned from a party of war into the party of peace. Patterson quotes a key Adams supporter, Jim Gibney, in the early 1990s, appealing for a turn away from the armed struggle and a turn away from the historic goals of that struggle. Gibney spoke of those who are:

". . . deafened by the deadly sound of their own gunfire . . . trapped inside a complex web of struggle from which they can't or won't emerge . . . incapable of recognising that there is a different world to the one that existed in the mid-sixties or that ... ignore the more recent changes sweeping the globe?" (p240)

Gibney was talking about the IRA, and this at the annual Wolf Tone commemoration rally. He added:

"We know and accept that the British government's departure must be preceded by a sustained period of peace and will arise out of negotiations." (p240)

This, together with subsequent events such as the signing of the Mitchell principles, which committed Sinn Fein to purely peaceful methods, marked a departure for the republican movement. The acceptance of the Good Friday deal marks a consolidation of this departure, albeit not yet its final consummation.

Patterson cannot quite square this development with the republican movement's historic commitment to militarism. And, of course, the fact that this process has gone on with the apparent approval of the IRA makes the development even more astonishing for those who believe that the distinguishing feature of the IRA is its commitment to militarism.

But the mystery is not so deep. The IRA's commitment to militarism marked it out as a revolutionary nationalist movement. But throughout it has remained, as we said earlier, a pan-class movement based on the politics of petit bourgeois nationalism. The repeated teeterings towards reformism (and the transformation of Goulding's official IRA into an out and out reactionary reformist party by the late 1970s), lurches towards social republicanism and back to traditionalism and armed struggle, these twists and turns mark the IRA out as an unstable, petit bourgeois force. Throughout its history it has been incapable of charting an independent working class class strategy for the liberation of Ireland and has been drawn variously towards Fianna Fail, to Stalinism and now to the pan-nationalist alliance, always as alternatives to basing itself on the power, organisations and interests of the working class. Its illusion is that these forces can bring about national liberation. Its flaw is that it believes the working class cannot.

Indeed its petit bourgeois character explains Adams' own vacillations over the last twenty years. In times when it looked like the British could not be moved he was a clear supporter of bombs in order to get them to the negotiating table. But when those bombs became dysfunctional to his attempts to create a pan-nationalist alliance to exploit perceived movement by the British (the fundamental premise of the TUAS strategy) he has distanced himself from them. Hoping that the British could persuade the Unionists, Adams became a persuader of the IRA, getting them to declare the ceasefire that the British demanded as the price for talks.

The end result of Adams strategy is a betrayal of the republican movement's original goals, of the lives of those who fought the British and the Orange state over the last thirty years, of the sacrifices the anti-unionist masses made throughout the war. But it is absolutely of a piece with the restricted horizons of petit bourgeois nationalism. For without a strategy of mass struggle, with the working class at centre stage, of armed struggle subordinate to the needs and interests of the masses and waged by bodies accountable to them, in short, without a struggle for a thirty two county workers' republic, the IRA could not win the war. Increasingly they ran the risk of losing it.

The key question now is how to renew a struggle for unification on a working class basis. The peace deal will not guarantee justice since it preserves the Unionist veto over the Six Counties. It will come under renewed pressure as the world economic cycle moves from expansion to recession. Many in the north will be forced to question their leadership's complicity in the deal, many will be forced to consider alternatives. Revolutionary communism needs to provide those alternatives, it needs to break the influence of Sinn Fein over the anti-unionist masses, it needs to demonstrate the bankruptcy of the traditionalists who will favour a return to guerrilla war and it will need to address the Protestant workers in order to break them from Unionism.

Patterson ends on a pessimistic note, fearing that republican revisionism will lead to new splits and new violence. Revolutionary communists feel no such pessimism. The Irish question is far from solved and the revolutionary mettle of the anti-unionist masses, proved over the years of war, shows that the will to struggle exists.

The illusion of republicanism must be supplanted not by passive acceptance of partition but by a coherent revolutionary communist strategy, organised in a party committed to resolving the Irish national question once and for all on a working class basis. ■

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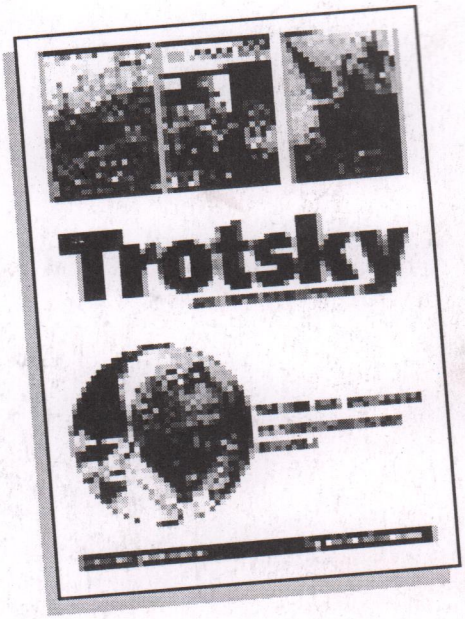

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