

# **Workers ACTION**

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**No.8 – February / March 2000 – Price £1.50**

## **Livingstone versus the control freaks**

**Russia out of Chechnya!**

**What prospects for the  
Labour left?**

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revolution**

# Workers ACTION

0.8 – Feb / Mar 2000

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## Chechnya – Russia's Vietnam

**W**orkers Action unreservedly condemns the Russian government and military for their onslaught against the Chechens. We are not neutral – we are for the defeat of the Russian army by the Chechen fighters and for the establishment of an independent state of Chechnya.

The war is a particularly ugly example of a large and militarily powerful state attempting to crush a minority people with aspirations for self-determination living within its borders. Chechnya is of great strategic importance to Russia – it straddles the vital oil pipeline route running north from the Caspian Sea – and its loss would be a severe blow to a country that relies on oil for most of its foreign earnings. Moreover, a successful breakaway by Chechnya would encourage the other minorities inside the Russian Federation to press their case for greater freedom. The particular interests of the fragile political alliance ruling Russia would also be threatened; a successful Chechen breakaway would strengthen both the Communist Party and extreme right wing oppositions.

The Russians took their cue from the West – if NATO could wage an air war against Serbia with negligible losses, then why couldn't they use long-range artillery and aircraft to force the Chechens into submission? They also reckoned, correctly, that the West would not dare to intervene, even if it had a mind to, for fear of starting a war against a nuclear power war – and because a significant loss or delay in oil revenues to Russia would make it even less likely that Western financial institutions would see a return on their investments.

On the domestic political front, the war has all the hallmarks of an attempt to divert attention from the day-to-day privations of living in Russia, and to ease Yeltsin's appointed successor, Vladimir Putin, into the presidency. Regrettably, the launching of the war was greeted with enthusiasm by many Russians, who were primed in advance by a crude but effective campaign in the Yeltsin-controlled media which characterised all Chechens as terrorists.

Of course, this is not the first conflict in the region – in the war of 1994-96, the Russian army was effectively driven out of Chechnya, suffering heavy casualties. The ferocity of the current Russian attack, and its utter disregard for the safety of civilians, is driven partly by a desire for revenge.

The plight of the Chechen people is appalling. Most of the capital, Grozny, has been reduced to rubble by weeks of indiscriminate shelling and bombing. The civilians have been forced to spend all their time below ground in cellars, in freezing winter conditions, without adequate food or safe water. Those fleeing the conflict – some 250,000 so far – are being held in camps where conditions are scarcely any better. There are reports of rape and brutality at the hands of Russian soldiers. But the Chechen fighters have some tactical advantages

that are preventing the vastly superior Russian forces from rapidly overwhelming them – the cities are good defensive terrain, and in the mountainous south they are able to wage a guerrilla war. The Chechens also have the morale boost that comes from defending their own land.

The Russians have a number of other problems. War is expensive, and while there is no likelihood of Western military intervention, Russia cannot afford to trigger economic sanctions. The promised quick victory has not materialised, there have been serious tactical errors by the army high command, and the body count is rising. There is also a developing anti-war movement – the most visible part of which are the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers which joined with Chechen women to call for an end to the previous war. Meanwhile, the Russian soldiers are short of food and other supplies, and there are reports of demoralisation and high levels of desertion.

Socialists must defend the Chechens' right to self-determination, which has been expressed over a number of years as a desire for an independent state. Such a state would barely be viable in an economic sense, but this is not the point – it is politically necessary at this stage for the Chechens to take control their own destiny. They have suffered at the hands of Great Russian chauvinism under the Tsars, under Stalin, and now under Yeltsin and Putin. We do not place conditions on our support for their struggle for independence, nor is it dependent on the kind of political leadership they choose to follow. But we warn Chechen workers and peasants not to put their faith in politicians who wish to continue the restoration process and fully integrate Chechnya into the global capitalist market. Fight to retain state industries and services, and kick out the capitalists, the bureaucrats and the mafia!

- **Russian troops out of Chechnya!**
- **Victory to the Chechen fighters!**
- **Self-determination for Chechnya!**
- **For an independent socialist Chechnya!**

**Demonstrate to stop Russia's war  
against Chechnya.**

Called by the Campaign to Stop the War in Chechnya  
Speakers include Tony Benn & Jeremy Corbyn.

Saturday 5 February, 12.00

Tothill Street, SW1

(by Central Hall Westminster)

March to Trafalgar Square.

# Ken Livingstone for mayor!

by Mike Calvert

Ken Livingstone's campaign to become London's mayor has generated a huge crisis within New Labour. Polls indicate that he is likely to be elected whether he runs as Labour's candidate or as an independent. Blair's attempts to prevent him standing have so far backfired and New Labour is now seen publicly – on this issue at least – as shabbily anti-democratic.

Why is Livingstone popular? He is not a party hack; he actually seems interested in running London, whereas Dobson couldn't care less about it and the Tory Steven Norris, like his predecessor candidate Jeffrey Archer, would treat the job merely as an opportunity to enrich himself. Livingstone is brilliant with the media, always well ahead of Millbank. Last but not least, he is the only candidate with any relevant previous job experience; many remember the Fares Fair policy brought in when he led the GLC, and black Londoners in particular will recall the GLC initiatives for equal opportunities and against discrimination, which are only now, 15 years later, finding their way into the national political arena after the publication of the MacPherson report.

The political platform that Livingstone is defending is a left one only in the context of labour's huge turn rightwards, and includes a four-year public transport fares freeze; no tube sell off; open government via the internet; making the Metropolitan Police 'London's finest' (sic); firm targets to cut air, water and noise pollution and a mayor's taskforce to tackle the 'inner-city arc of poverty'. These are clearly not going to trouble the City investors and financiers too much. Livingstone is appealing to them to support his bond scheme to fund the Underground, and he is selling his proposed congestion tax as being 'good for business'. Neither are some of his policies a million miles away from Blair's own, but nevertheless, the candidacy of Ken Livingstone poses a serious threat to Blair.

The principal reasons for this are Livingstone's opposition to Railtrack being brought in to run the tube and his opposition

to the Robin Hood-in-reverse Private Finance Initiative. The fear is that Livingstone will get in the way of New Labour's worship of big business, and that particularly in the wake of the Paddington rail crash, his policies will strike a chord with the voters. The other, general reasons are that Livingstone is seen as representing the left of the Labour Party, which Blair would like to wipe out or marginalise, and that Blair has never really got the hang of this devolution lark: according to him you can choose anyone you like as long as it's the New Labour dalek.

Sensing growing support for Livingstone among the membership, the Labour leadership decided to move the goalposts. Careless of the ammunition they would be giving the Tories and heedless of previous assurances that the Labour mayoral candidate would be chosen on a One Member One Vote (OMOV) system, an electoral college selection system was adopted where the members would have a third, the unions a third and the MPs, MEPs and Greater London Assembly (GLA) candidates a third of the votes. This gives 57 Labour MPs, 4 MEPs and 21 GLA candidates as much power as the 69,000 individual party members, and it is revealing to note that the Millbank-selected, as yet unelected, GLA candidates figure in the college while the elected Labour borough councillors – the people who would have to work most closely with a London mayor – are excluded. The reason for this, of course, is that the borough councillors were not Millbank-vetted and are likely to contain a strong pro-Livingstone element.

However, even this blatant fix has proved inadequate and two major unions, MSF and RMT, which have polled their members and would be casting their votes for Livingstone, have been excluded from the college on the bizarre grounds that they paid their 1998 membership dues late. At the same time, the Labour leadership has no problem with Sir Ken Jackson's decision to cast the AEEU's votes according to his own prejudice with no consultation with his members. This is clearly a move to deprive Livingstone of blocks of 20,000 potential votes. It also appears that the

Dobson campaign was allowed access to party membership lists which for a long time was denied to the other candidates.

Meanwhile, the Labour leadership is running an unremitting, though remarkably ham-fisted, anti-Livingstone campaign. This has been so overt that even the liberal media have denounced it, while the Tory media have supported Livingstone purely to discomfort New Labour. Among Londoners, and among London Labour Party members, this campaign has had the opposite effect from that intended; it has increased support for Livingstone. A particular low point has been the organising of 'Don't vote Livingstone' letters from MPs to the members of their constituency parties. The MPs were told that all they had to do was sign the letter, the leadership would handle all the rest. Livingstone recounts how he himself received such a request, and he also tells how several of the London MPs disagreed with the letter but acquiesced to the request to sign it for fear that they would be vetoed for reselection if they did not. The result of this letter, as reported from many constituencies, has been a marked move towards supporting Livingstone, and Livingstone's campaign received over £4,000 in small donations shortly after the letters went out.

The media now appear to have woken up to the fact that Livingstone is a real threat and might actually win Labour's endorsement and the mayoralty. There has been a remarkable *volte-face*. The *Guardian*, dropping all pretence to liberalism and evenhandedness, ran a two-page spread to publicise 'the case against Ken Livingstone'. The Tory *Evening Standard* headlines 'Blair in crushing attack on Red Ken', and the consistently Blairite *Mirror* flies the kite of Mo Mowlam as a Blairite mayoral candidate in place of the hapless Dobson. Blair is unlikely to take this last piece of advice; yet another anti-Livingstone change in the electoral method will shift even more support towards Livingstone.

Clearly, what is being attempted is a rerun of the fiasco in Wales: the ballot is being heavily loaded in favour of the least popular of the three candidates, who happens

to be Blair's puppet, through a college where those whose political careers are in Blair's gift have votes worth 1,000 times that of the ordinary members, and where anti-democratic, right-wing union leaders will cast their union's vote without consulting their members. Presumably this is what Blair means by 'inclusivity'! The consequences of this fiddled selection are obvious – in the event of Dobson going forward as the mayoral candidate, Labour Party members will do next to no campaigning for him and Labour voters will either abstain or vote for an alternative candidate. In Wales, the alternative was Plaid Cymru; in London it may be Livingstone standing as an independent.

But whereas the puppet scraped home in Wales, there seems a good chance that in London Livingstone can win despite all the fixes attempted by Blair. In this context a note of caution is needed; a win for Livingstone in the selection ballot does not sign, seal and deliver his candidacy. Millbank will no doubt invent further hoops to be jumped through – a Millbank-written manifesto is likely to be totally unacceptable, but a rejection of it is likely to lead to Livingstone being removed as candidate. If this takes place it is likely to happen shortly before the close of nominations, partly in order to make it impossible for Labour members to oppose the imposed candidate and partly to make it difficult for Livingstone to organise standing as an independent.

Where does Workers Action stand? At a basic level, we are against the idea that London needs a mayor at all. As we have said before, the way to run a city – or any other political entity – is through a democratically elected assembly. This would not even be difficult to set up in London; although no doubt some faults could be found in the GLC, it would serve as a far better basis for governing London than an individual mayor and a watchdog GLA, which is the current proposal. However, this political battle was fought and lost last summer, and the terrain has now shifted to who should be the Labour candidate.

We support Livingstone's campaign for the Labour nomination, and we will support him in the election for mayor. His intervention has already had a beneficial effect – not so much because of his policies but because the desperate manoeuvres of the leadership to rule him out as the Labour candidate have caused major self-inflicted damage and given new heart to the left. The

possibility of Livingstone campaigning for mayor, and the potential it has for mobilising activists within the 69,000 strong London Labour Party, gives socialists an opportunity to regroup the forces for a socialist current within the Labour Party. We believe that the potential for a left campaign for Livingstone makes this the most important internal Labour Party election since the 1981 Benn-Healey contest for deputy leader, and that it would therefore be irresponsible and sectarian to let the differences among the Labour Party left get in the way of a united campaign for Livingstone.

A successful pro-Livingstone campaign would be a clear defeat for Millbank, and might even change the balance of forces generally in Britain, opening up the possibility of further working class action. In the Connex rail strike of January 27 no more than 10 per cent of scheduled trains ran. While it is too early to make definite claims, this level of support may well be linked to an increase in workers' confidence engendered by the poor showing of Dobson/Blair against Livingstone.

However, we recognise that Livingstone is not a socialist in the sense that we mean it. His most public differences with Blair, over opposition to selling off the tube to Railtrack and over opposition to the Private Finance Initiative, could be the focus of a real fightback against New Labour's pro-big business policies. But we should still call on him to harden his position on tube privatisation, to retain it in public ownership and to finance it through taxing the wealthy; his current line – to raise finance for the tube by issuing bonds – is still a form of privatisation, albeit far less direct than handing over the whole thing to a proven anti-safety, profiteering concern like Railtrack.

On the buses, his policy is similarly inadequate. Bringing back conductors is excellent for safety, and a necessary measure to relieve drivers from the task of collecting fares in order to speed up the buses and thus make them more viable as a public transport system. But he is silent on where the money is to come from – does he think that the private bus companies are going to finance this measure? The only option is public funding, which means either redistribution of tax income or higher taxes and, crucially, the taking of the buses back into public ownership.

It is not an accident that so much of

the political fight for the mayoralty hinges on public transport. With housing devolved to the borough councils, transport is the key London-wide issue. The existing rail and underground lines cannot take further traffic. The problem is so acute that nothing short of a massive programme of building new underground, rail and tram lines, and upgrading and connecting up existing lines, will do. 'More bus lanes' simply fails to address the problem of gridlock caused by cars, and the only significant effect of 'road pricing' would be to make travel for motorists more expensive. A key task for the London mayor will be to address this problem as a whole, while keeping the entire system in public hands.

On other issues, many of Livingstone's policies are supportable but some are not. In particular, his line on making the racist thugs of the Met 'London's finest' flies in the face of all reality. We need to build on his support for Lufthansa Skycheffs and to hold the line on support for trade union rights. In the wider arena we have huge differences with him; probably the most important would be over his support for NATO's blitz on Yugoslavia.

But most of all, we have to call on Livingstone to maintain his political distance from the right wing. The conjuncture of events has propelled him to the fore in the left-right battle in the Labour Party, and his mayoral campaign is key terrain for that fight. In this context, Livingstone's statements that he agrees with almost everything in the Labour manifesto, that he would campaign on Millbank's mayoral manifesto, and that if defeated he would campaign for whichever candidate was the victor, are extremely worrying. A tame knuckling down after a defeat in a gerrymandered electoral college, or worse still, victory in the college followed by acceptance of the policies of the defeated Blairites, would represent Livingstone putting his career ahead of the needs of the fight against the Blair tendency and a betrayal of the thousands of socialists who have supported him.

Livingstone's attempt to become mayor of London has acted as something of a catalyst – it has enabled discontent with the Blair government to be voiced openly, and has revealed that that discontent is more widespread than expected. Socialists in and out of the Labour Party must redouble their efforts to get Livingstone selected as the official candidate.

# Tories – the unelectable in defence of the unspeakable

by Nick Davies

After last year's Tory party conference in Blackpool, millions of people must have reassured themselves that whatever their complaints about the Labour government, on May 1, 1997, they did the right thing by kicking the Tories out. Despite god knows how many relaunches of William Hague and his frequent apologies for not 'listening' (surely what they all loved about Thatcher was the fact that she didn't 'listen'!), Blair continues to have an opinion poll lead that Thatcher and Major would have envied. Why?

The first reason is that people have long memories. Underfunded schools and hospitals, crap public transport and blitzed mining villages and estates are all souvenirs of the Thatcher-Major years. While the Tories are pinning their hopes on an attack of mass political amnesia, their past keeps catching up with them. Millions quite rightly blame the Paddington rail crash on the greed of the rail chiefs and the Major government's booby-trap break-up and privatisation of the rail network.

Then there is the sleaze. The downfall of Archer, the Hamilton-Fayed libel case and Jonathan Aitkin's imprisonment show that this just won't go away. Spivs and chancers have always populated the lower echelons of the Tory party. On top were the lofty 'statesmen', with their rhetoric of 'duty'. It was famously said that under Thatcher, the estate agents took over from the estate owners, and many of the 'one-nation' patricians have retired or lost their seats, leaving the party to the more openly corrupt, semi-criminal elements.

The third reason why the Tories are in trouble is because they can't stand each other. This mutual vilification made BBC's *The Major Years* unexpectedly compelling viewing. They

disagree about the Thatcher legacy, the role of the state sector, the harassment of single mothers, but most ferociously and irreconcilably, they disagree about Europe. The somewhat sheepish appearance by Clarke and Heseltine with Tony Blair on the Britain in Europe platform sent the Eurosceptics into apoplexy. The Tory party's implosion on Europe has coincided with a convergence between New Labour and the City. The Labour leadership has effectively surrendered to the interests of the City and the Treasury, and the City is broadly in favour of greater monetary union. Therefore, the City is prepared to trust the Blair-Brown leadership with its money – hence Labour's colossal election win and its long honeymoon with the media.

The Tory party has never been simply the party of the City, and its electoral success this century has depended on maintaining a coalition, or series of coalitions, between the City, industrial capital, the aristocracy, the middle classes and sections of the better-paid working class. But it's difficult to think of the City without the Tory party, and they usually appear as two tentacles of the same beast. However, at the moment, the City is able to do without the Tories. What of the Tory party without the City? Hague is in a bind. Up against a right-wing but still basically popular Labour government with a huge majority, what can he do? His only choice is still a bad one: to outflank New Labour on the right. The Eurosceptics are running wild, throwing peanuts and cocktail sausages at 'traitors' like Heseltine and Clarke. The 'policies' amount to the current emotional spasms of *Telegraph* and *Mail* readers: a hostility to the EU which boils over into xenophobia, along with crusades in defence of British beef, foxhunting, the House of Lords, the RUC and, of course, General Pinochet. This shop-

ping list is rounded off by a couple of back-of-an-envelope promises to reduce taxes and – and this makes all previous Tory attacks on state education look like mere meddling – take *all* schools out of local authority control. Oscar Wilde described the Tories' beloved 'country sport' as the 'unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable'. The Tory defenders of the murderer and torturer Pinochet can rightly be described as the unelectable in defence of the unspeakable.

Socialists can console themselves that Hague is likely to become the ex-Tory leader shortly after he loses the next election. But it would be a hollow triumph. Blair is building on what the Tories started. Moreover, he gives it legitimacy. Even in her electoral pomp, Thatcher was hated in most of the north of England, Wales and Scotland. But Blair is still popular. The trade union leadership still backs him. The attack on the post-war settlement and the increase in exploitation in the form of 'free trade' and 'deregulation' finds its principal political expression in the New Labour leadership.

The Tories look like being out of power for years, and possibly, in their present form, forever. Blair was not just taunting the likes of Clarke and Patten when he invited them to defect to New Labour. It is perfectly possible that, in time, they will give up the fight to recapture the party from the hard-right, resulting in a convergence towards the centre with Blair, Straw and the Liberal Democrats. This would further marginalise the left and would therefore suit the Blair project perfectly. Blair has publicly regretted the Lib-Lab split at the beginning of this century, and if anything, the Tory left is closer to Blair than many of the Liberal-Democrats, who dislike New Labour's right-wing approach to, for example, law and order and taxation.

Whatever happens, we are now confronted with the supreme political irony of a party in the electoral wilderness, with its membership in a state of near collapse, finding its policies (along with some that never made it beyond the think tank), not to say its whole ideology, appropriated by the party which has just handed out its worst ever defeat.

WA

## How should socialists relate to Labour?

The following article was originally written for the Labour Party 1999 conference. The political situation has moved along in the intervening four months: the 'Livingstone for Mayor' campaign has redirected the thoughts of activists back into the Labour Party and the in / out debate has therefore receded. If Livingstone is both selected as the Labour candidate and elected as Labour mayor, then, for the first part of his mayoralty at least, this debate is likely to stay in the background. However, if there is some other outcome to the campaign the question of 'in or out of the Labour Party' is likely to resurface with redoubled energy. We reprint the article as a contribution to the debate

by **Charli Langford and Philip Marchant**

**W**hat tactics should socialists employ, given the success of the Blair project in both the Labour Party and society as a whole? We are reminded, unfortunately, of the words of the Russian chessmaster Tartakower: 'In a bad position, there are no good moves.' The current heated debate over whether to remain inside the Labour Party or to strike out independently has been characterised by a degree of exaggeration on both sides. There have been absurdly optimistic assessments of the combativity of the working class and its willingness to break from Labour from those who favour building an open alternative to Labour, while some of those who recommend staying in the Labour Party do so from an essentially reformist standpoint. The irony is that most of the criticisms each side has of the other are true, and most of the arguments put forward by each side to support its position are false.

As regards the potential for standing independent socialist candidates, there is no evidence, for example, that the relative success of the Scottish Socialist Party in the elections for the Scottish parliament could be repeated in England and Wales if socialists were 'better organised'. The size of the vote achieved by Tommy Sheridan was not only because of his stand against the poll tax – it reflected the particular political conditions in the de-industrialised parts

of Scotland, particularly Glasgow, where there has been a larger constituency for left parties historically, and where 'rule from London' is an aggravating factor. The more Labour has espoused Tory policies, the more it has been identified as a party of 'national oppression', and the greater the likelihood of Scottish workers seeking an alternative, especially outside of general elections. If it were enough to have a good record as a class fighter and be reasonably well organised, then surely Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party would have done better in the European elections. As for the big swing to Plaid Cymru in south Wales in the Welsh assembly elections, that too was the result of special local factors. The imposition of Alun Michael as Labour leader in the assembly over Rhodri Morgan, the clear preference of the Welsh party, demonstrated that Blair was in no mind to extend genuine devolution to Wales.

A better argument for there being an anti-New Labour mood within the working class might be made from the support given to non-Labour Party candidates in the general secretary elections in the rail unions – Mick Rix of the SLP won in ASLEF and Greg Tucker gained 34 per cent against Jimmy Knapp in the RMT. Meanwhile, the FBU conference voted (against the executive's recommendation) to allow political fund payers to stipulate that their payments should not go to Labour. But while these developments are undoubtedly significant, they are limited in scope, and connected

to the specific nature and history of the industries involved and the ability to organise the left, as well as current attacks such as the government proposal to ban strike action by firefighters. The much-publicised comment by Ken Cameron of the FBU as to whether unions should continue to fund Labour should not be taken at face value. Its purpose was to retain Cameron the support of his members, while attempting to exert some pressure on Labour.

On the other side of the debate, great things are being made of the 50,000 plus votes which led to three Grassroots Alliance candidates being elected to the Labour Party NEC in the Constituency Section. The fact that 50,000 members – many times the combined far left outside Labour – are willing to vote against Blairism is certainly good news. But the down side is that realising the potential of this force will be very difficult with the Campaign Group in retreat, with many long-serving activists leaving the party altogether, and with the leadership stepping up its attack on the constituency organisations. The next stage in the attack on internal democracy, contained in the consultation paper '21st Century Party: members the key to our future', is to abolish, or at least sideline, the constituency party general committees. Proposals to replace the leadership role of GCs with quarterly meetings open to all members, which has already been tested out in Enfield Southgate constituency, will be placed before next year's

*Continued next page*



### How should socialists relate to Labour?

*Continued from previous page*

conference. Such meetings, even if run democratically, will find it impossible to consider fully all the political questions raised over a three-month period and will be reduced to rubber-stamping the executive's decisions

The fact that over 100 Labour MPs failed to support the government on the vote to cut benefits for the disabled has also been overplayed. Although there is clearly some unease among MPs over New Labour's direction, criticism has been confined to single issues and there has been no attempt to form an organised resistance to the whole project.

At the March 1999 meeting of the London Socialist Alliance, the SWP speaker, supporting the proposed electoral adventure against New Labour in the European elections, described the present period as the best in her experience as a socialist – a view that was echoed to some extent by the Socialist Party and CPGB speakers. Yet the key measure of working class activity – working days lost due to industrial action – is almost the lowest it has ever been. Even Socialist Outlook and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty are now taking steps down the disastrous path followed by the SP and are attempting to build 'alternatives' to Labour – as if all that is necessary is to have the right programme and tactics and the masses will flock to your banner.

That said, there is one pointer to the right tactics. Workers have often despaired of the divisions within the left. The united front – the unity of the working class in action – is an essential. For this reason it was particularly disappointing that the organisations moving towards setting themselves up independently attempted to do so around an electoral challenge to Labour. This was the total opposite of the united front – and a complete misunderstanding of how consciousness develops – in that no common campaigns were suggested, but rather Labour supporters were called upon to break with Labour at the ballot box in favour of a 'better programme'. It is ironic that these organisations – ever-ready to denounce the Labour Party left

for its electoralism – should join together for no other purpose than to mount their own electoral campaign.

Whether to be in or out of the Labour Party is not a moral, but a practical, question. It may well be the case that before Blair can formally put an end to Labour as a bourgeois workers' party, it has become barren as a forum for struggle, or even debate. The key question is how to create the best conditions for working class struggle against Blair, and for this we need unity between forces both inside and outside the Labour Party. We must not write off the 50,000 who supported the

Grassroots Alliance, but equally we must not be tied to electoral support for Labour in circumstances where credible forces based on the working class mount a challenge. We also have to be aware that the answer to the question 'in or out?' will not necessarily be decided by us – if Livingstone stands against an official Labour candidate for London mayor there may well be a fresh wave of expulsions. The way we have to relate to the Labour Party is purely and simply as an arena of struggle – albeit a very important one given Labour's historic connection with the working class. **WA**

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# Destroying party democracy – the key to Blairism's future

by Martin Sullivan

Last autumn a glossy brochure from Millbank plopped through the letterboxes of Labour Party branch secretaries. Entitled *21st Century Party* (with the subtitle *Members – the Key to Our Future*), this discussion document was prepared by the party's Partnership in Power Taskforce and is intended to provide the basis for a consultation on whether there is a need to 'reform and modernise' the present structure of Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs).

After the consultation is completed, the taskforce will draw up proposals on party organisation which will be presented to this year's conference and, if agreed, implemented in January 2001. It is not difficult to predict what those proposals will be. They will involve destroying democracy in the CLPs and handing over the control of local parties to small Blairite cliques.

That isn't immediately obvious from a reading of *21st Century Party*, an apparently bland document which contains some general observations about the failings of the existing Party Branch / General Committee (GC) structure and offers to consult the membership on ways in which to improve the situation. A questionnaire at the end of the document, which secretaries are asked to distribute to members, invites comments on the present performance of CLPs.

It would be difficult for members to answer positively to many of these questions. Replying to the one on 'Recruiting and Retaining Members', for example, who could honestly claim that their CLP is doing 'very well' at this? Millbank itself privately admits to 75,000 members having left the party since the 1997 general election. Similarly with the question on 'Mobilising Members to

Fight Elections'; few could claim great achievements for their CLP on this score. In last year's Euro elections long-standing party members not only refused to turn out and campaign for the party but in many cases even refused to vote for it. However, *21st Century Party* carefully avoids asking members to give their opinions on the *political* reasons for the CLPs' difficulties.

The fact is that most Labour Party supporters are opposed to important aspects of government policy. They don't agree with abolishing single parent benefit, imposing tuition fees on students or attacking the rights of asylum seekers. They want the government to restore the link between pensions and earnings, to set the minimum wage at a much higher level and to tax the rich in order to fund public services. They want the government to stop cosying up to millionaires and pandering to the prejudices of *Daily Mail* readers, and instead to show greater responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of ordinary working people.

Labour supporters who are not yet members are hardly motivated to join the party if they are dissatisfied with the policies of the Labour government, while many of those who are already in the party have become disillusioned and see no point in renewing their membership. And in the case of party members, their dissatisfaction has been aggravated by the contemptuous attitude of the party apparatus towards their democratic rights.

The Blairites at one time believed that an 'oppositional culture' was limited to party activists, and that the wider membership was politically sympathetic to the leadership. Shortly before the 1997 general election Peter Mandelson proclaimed that One Member One Vote was the essence of New Labour. So it came as an unpleasant shock to Mandelson when he stood later that year in an OMOV ballot for the constituency sec-

tion of the party's National Executive Committee and was defeated by none other than Ken Livingstone. The party apparatus drew the obvious conclusion from Mandelson's humiliation. If the individual members couldn't be relied on to vote the right way in internal party elections, then their right to vote should be severely restricted.

Hence the adoption of the closed list system for the European parliamentary elections. Although members were allowed a consultative vote, the results were ignored and the lists of candidates were drawn up by an NEC sub-committee in accordance with the requirements of the party leadership. Sitting MEPs with any record of dissent were placed so far down the lists that they had no chance of getting re-elected, while Blairite loyalists were placed at the top. It was this above all which led many party members to refuse to participate in the election campaign. They were not going to be 'mobilised to fight elections' for Millbank-imposed candidates who had not been democratically selected.

The procedure adopted in selecting candidates for the Scottish parliament and the Welsh and Greater London assemblies was no less undemocratic. Here the preferred method was to exclude anyone suspected of not being entirely 'on message' by means of a scrutiny panel. In Scotland the panel found veteran left-wing MP Dennis Canavan to be unworthy of representing the party in his country's new parliament, and in the case of the GLA the panel blocked numerous non-Blairites from putting themselves forward for selection. The same approach will undoubtedly be used to prevent potential oppositionists from being selected as candidates for the Westminster parliament.

Still another method was employed for the election of the leader of the Welsh

*Continued next page*

### Destroying party democracy...

*Continued from previous page*

Labour Party. Here an electoral college was established in order to secure the victory of Blairite Alun Michael over Rhodri Morgan, the candidate supported by most party members and trade unionists. The same stitch-up was used in the selection of the party's candidate for London mayor. As one-third of the votes were given to MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates, the result was loaded from the start in favour of the leadership's choice, Frank Dobson, and meant that even if Ken Livingstone won large majorities both in the individual membership section and among the trade unions and other affiliates he could still end up losing to Dobson. Even the liberal bourgeois press condemned this as a 'shameful fix'.

While the party apparatus has lost its earlier enthusiasm for OMOV, it remains committed to attacking the delegate-based structures of the party through which activists are able to assert their influence. That was the motive for adopting the byzantine Policy Forum structure contained in the 1997 'Partnership in Power' reforms, the undemocratic consequences of which have since been revealed for all to see. At last year's National Policy Forum, in the face of an alliance between the Blairites and trade union leaders, amendments to the official policy documents were either withdrawn under pressure or failed to secure the required number of votes. The result was that no minority positions were put to party conference, which was largely reduced to a pro-leadership rally with handpicked delegates delivering speeches written for them by Millbank praising the achievements of the Blair government.

Far from an attempt to improve the organisation of CLPs, *21st Century Party* is merely the latest manifestation of the leadership's plan to destroy inner-party democracy in the interests of implementing a programme and political project to which the majority of the membership are opposed.

This is spelled out in the 1998 paper 'The New Labour Party: A Vision for Organisational Modernisation', which provided the inspiration for *21st Century Party*. Written by David Evans, a party organiser in the North West, it argues that

'representative democracy should as far as possible be abolished in the Party'. General Committees should be replaced by all-member meetings, one of which would each year elect a small executive that would control the local party for the next 12 months without being answerable to any democratically elected body. Evans is quite explicit about one of the main objectives of the proposed reorganisation: 'it will empower modernising forces within the Party and marginalise "Old Labour".'

That this is the underlying aim of the *21st Century Party* document becomes clear if you look at the section headed 'New Ideas', which presents examples of the exciting modern organisational arrangements adopted by various CLPs in which Blairites are dominant. One of these is Enfield Southgate, where the traditional structure of the CLP has been entirely dissolved. Even the branches have been wound up, and in their place members now have constituency-wide 'issue groups' which discuss political questions such as foreign policy, employment and constitutional reform. This is the model which the Partnership in Power Taskforce, after due 'consultation', will no doubt seek to impose on all CLPs.

Unfortunately, some comrades who should know better seem prepared to go along with this. Thus Ann Black of Labour Reform, writing in the September 1999 issue of *Labour Left Briefing*, argues that we should not be dogmatic about defending existing structures. After all, she reasons, who can claim that poorly attended GCs are an institution worth retaining? Given widespread support among the membership for non-Blairite policies, she concludes, 'all-member meetings can vindicate, not marginalise, the centre-left majority'.

But the evidence is that the new structure adopted in Enfield Southgate has undermined democracy without doing anything to improve participation. The new issue groups have attracted between four and seven members, while an all-member meeting to discuss local issues with leaders of Labour-held Enfield council drew precisely 19 of the CLP's 600-plus members. Reports from other CLPs where GCs have been wholly or partly abolished show that within a mat-

ter of months, after the initial novelty has worn off, the all-member meetings end up with fewer participants than the old delegate-based GCs did. What is the point of turning up to meetings if they have no power to make decisions or decide policy, and when all political authority is vested in a handful of unaccountable executive members?

The abolition of GCs has the additional damaging effect of severing the link between the party and the trade unions at constituency level, as unions are then no longer able to send delegates to CLPs. Even such an arch-moderniser as AEEU general secretary Ken Jackson baulks at this. True, he produces a right-wing argument in defence of the link – that the participation of the unions is necessary to counter the influence of the left. Nevertheless, the defence of CLP democracy does present the possibility of breaking the trade unions from their present bloc with the Labour leadership against the constituency-based opposition, and drawing them instead into an alliance with constituency activists against the Blairites.

We need a national campaign to rouse the party against the threat posed by the *21st Century Party* consultation. This campaign should be as broad as possible, and in building it we should be prepared to ally ourselves with the devil, his grandmother and even Ken Jackson. If the Millbank Tendency gets away with this attack on inner-party democracy, it will be a major step along the road to the full implementation of the Blairite project – the destruction of the Labour Party itself. ■

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# A lobby isn't enough!

by Will Matthews

Every year the SWP organises a lobby of Labour Party Conference. In doing this, it recognises that workers have a connection to Labour. If they don't, why is it necessary to lobby Labour in the first place? However, the SWP has failed to learn the political lessons of these lobbies.

In 1998, there was increased participation in the lobby from the SLP and 'Action For Solidarity', which is fronted by the AWL. Genuine socialists recognised this as a tremendous step forward. The logical conclusion of this would have been for the leaders of the SLP, the SWP and the then newly-formed SSP to have spoken with members of the Labour left and tried to organise a broad organising committee for the lobby with real roots in the working class throughout the country. Instead, both the SLP and the SWP leaderships have continued to promote various 'building the party' exercises. This has led to the demise of the SLP as a serious force. Meanwhile, rumours are rife of a possible split inside the SWP in the future. This false approach has led to many people questioning the integrity of the lobby. It seems to most Labour Party members that it is just a stunt organised to win a few new members, at which people struggling against Blairism are told that the only solution is to join the SWP.

Another reason for the disintegration of the SLP has been its sectarian attitude to the Labour Party, and the same is true of the formerly powerful Militant organisation, now known as the Socialist Party. Both of these organisations used to work in the Labour Party, but now claim that the Labour Party is no longer a bourgeois workers' party – that is, a party that embodies a contradiction between its bourgeois policies and its mass working class base. Whilst the SWP rightly

insists that the Labour Party is still a bourgeois workers' party, since the 1960s (when it left the Labour Party) it has failed to understand the practical consequences of this. It has continually claimed that members are leaving Labour in droves. This is a blatant lie, as the 1998 and 1999 Labour NEC election results show. For two years in succession, left-winger Liz Davies has received over 50,000 votes. Neil Kinnock labelled her a Trotskyist and Clare Short accused her of being a member of Militant, yet she is now the third most popular constituency member of the Labour Party. In addition to this, the 1999 NEC elections saw another genuine left-winger, Christine Shawcroft, elected. She was the only candidate who saw a spectacular rise in her vote. She had opposed the bombing of Serbia and Iraq, and stood on a platform demanding a decent minimum wage, party democracy and the re-nationalisation of the utilities.

Despite the fact that in every vote of Labour Party members the left's proportion of the vote has been going up for years now, the SWP, seeking to justify its existence on the fringes of the Labour movement, claims that left reformism is in crisis. Yes, left reformism is in crisis in that it provides no coherent alternative to Blairism. Nonetheless, it has made considerable gains even in a time of low levels in the class struggle. It is seen by working class Labour members as the only alternative to Blairism because there is no sizeable Marxist tendency within the party. Also, if left reformism is in crisis, then why does the SWP feel obliged to tail-end Tony Benn in every anti-war or anti-government demonstration? In dealing with left reformists, Marxists should be guided by what Trotsky said on the policy of the opposition in the Labour Party of the 1930s: '... it is necessary to counterpose to it inside the Labour Party another, a correct Marxist policy. That isn't so easy? Of course

not! But one must know how to hide one's activities from the police vigilance of Sir Walter Citrine [the TUC general secretary at the time – WM] and his agents, until the proper time.'

This is still relevant today. The possible creation of a national government in the event of economic crisis or an attempt to merge the party with the Liberals and ditch the trade union link could see the bulk of the Labour membership split from Blairism. An economic crisis could also push thousands of workers and youth into the political arena for the first time. It is inevitable that some of them will be attracted to the Labour Party. Therefore, it would be more profitable to raise the demands that the SWP raises at the lobby of the Labour Party conference inside the Labour Party itself. It may be hard to do this under the noses of Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, but it must be done. Historically, the reflection of increased militancy in the trade unions has been a rejuvenated left-wing inside the Labour Party.

Whilst the SWP has an ultra-left rejection of working in the Labour Party, it has an opportunist relationship to mass movements. Often the SWP can be seen tail-ending different groups of left reformists, with slogans no different from those peddled by Benn and Co. This tail-ending reached its logical conclusion during the bombing of Serbia, when the SWP's Alex Callinicos signed an open letter in the *New Statesman* which appeared to say that the war would have been alright if it had been carried out under the auspices of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe rather than NATO!

The SWP does well in pointing out Blair's inadequacies. However, this isn't enough! Socialists need to be putting continuous pressure on the Labour leaders. This task can best be taken up inside the Labour Party. If the SWP's only response to those who want to fight Blairism is to urge them to join the SWP, the group will be condemned to remain on the fringes of the labour movement. Trotskyists should be consistent in their struggles. This involves a serious orientation to all sides of the labour movement, including the Labour Party. ■

After the Ladbroke Grove train crash ...

# Workers must control rail safety

by Charli Langford

**O**n October 5, at 8.11am, a three-coach local train westbound from London's Paddington Station collided with the incoming Cheltenham express at Ladbroke Grove, two miles outside Paddington. 31 people were killed and 258 injured. The immediate reports of the accident said that the local train had passed a signal set at danger and travelled onto the same track that the express was using. Later reports added that the local train's driver had qualified two months before the accident.

The rail unions at once challenged these reports, claiming that they were an attempt to pin the blame on the driver and avoid the wider issues raised by the crash. Over the following months they have been proved right. Due to the political conjuncture of the accident, of Railtrack's profit reports, and of the New Labour government's decision to give Railtrack the contract for running the sub-surface lines of London's underground combined with Labour's farcical attempts to prevent Ken Livingstone being a possible Labour candidate for London's mayor, the question of Railtrack's responsibility for this accident has become central. A further probable reason for this crash receiving far more attention than previous rail accidents may well be that the ruling class and their immediate managerial allies were a far larger proportion of the victims than usual – a senior civil servant from the Northern Ireland Office and many senior managers and directors from Britain's Silicon Valley were among the dead and injured.

## Railtrack's safety history

Railtrack is the company that bought the infrastructure of the network as part

of the British rail privatisation. It is responsible for all aspects of the track and signalling, including the track-based part of the Automatic Train Protection (ATP) and Automatic Warning (AWS) systems. The level of concern it has over passenger safety can be judged by a memo of January 28, 1997. In relation to transmission problems on an ATP system that would cost £350,000 to fix, the memo argued that if the money was spent Railtrack could say that it had done everything possible to avoid any danger.

It was Railtrack's decision to allow trains to operate over the Paddington system without ATP, and there have been plenty of warnings of the folly of this decision. In the Southall crash, September 19, 1997, a train with both ATP and AWS switched off passed through a red signal and hit another train. In February 1999 a Heathrow Express almost hit a Great Western train running with ATP off. In last October's crash the Ladbroke Grove express also had its ATP turned off. If it had been on, as soon as the local train entered the same line the ATP would be signalled to stop and the express's emergency brake would have been applied. The collision would still have occurred, but at a much slower speed.

## Fatally flawed signalling

Coming out of Paddington there are six tracks running adjacent, on a long right-hand curve with numerous roadbridges over the tracks. The curve of the track makes it difficult to see which colour light signal applies to which line, and the bridges obscure the signals so in many cases a driver has only a few seconds to observe a signal before passing it. Over the last few months Paddington and its approaches have been redesigned to accommodate

the Heathrow Express services from London Airport. These are electric trains and the signal visibility has further deteriorated through the erection of posts, gantries, cables and insulators for the overhead electrical power supply.

Colour light signals also have a particular problem, 'phantom aspect'. When the light from the sun shines straight into a signal, it produces a yellow reflection back into the driver's eye no matter what colour the signal is showing. At 8.11am on a sunny October morning the sun would be low in the eastern sky, producing ideal conditions for phantom aspect for westbound trains.

The AWS is a fatally flawed system. Due to the way it developed historically it does not differentiate between yellow and red signals, giving a warning on both, and it therefore cannot guard against phantom aspect. Neither does it automatically apply brakes. In the Ladbroke Grove accident, the Thames Trains driver had no help at all from his AWS.

With all these difficulties, there is little wonder that signals are regularly passed at danger. Between 1990 and 1998 signal SN63 out of Paddington was passed ten times while red; signal SN109 – where last month's accident happened – is two signals further west on the same line and was passed eight times at red during the same period. There are eight other signals with worse records; at Swinton in South Yorkshire is a signal that was passed at red 16 times.

It is absolutely clear that signals alone are insufficient to protect a railway system where speeds regularly reach well over 200 kph, and crash investigations time and time again have demanded further measures. The safest modern system is automatic train protection (ATP), where radio signals

are transmitted to each train to advise the maximum safe speed – the maximum safe speed past a red signal is zero – and the system can automatically apply the train brakes if the driver does not slow down as required.

The lines into Paddington were extensively reorganised for new faster trains in 1993, and for the last mile and a half into Paddington bi-directional working and signalling was used to allow a greater number of trains to use the station. Signal SN109 is at the point where the bi-directional working starts. It was into this very heavily used section of track that the Heathrow express was introduced. The planner of the Heathrow Express layout, interviewed on *Panorama* on November 4, 1999, said that a basic assumption of his design was that ATP would be in use by all trains over the whole system.

### Failure of monitoring

Railtrack claimed that they had received no representations by any bodies on the questions of safety. In the same *Panorama*, the Railway Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) said that they had expressed concerns for safety on the Paddington approach to Railtrack. But the level of safety enforcement by the HSE has been pathetic; after the October crash they put prohibition notices on SN109 and 22 other signals – which immediately poses the question of why a disaster had to occur before they acted on signals they already knew to be unsafe. The HSE agreed with Railtrack that ATP was too expensive, and they approved the Railtrack's safety case on the design of the Heathrow Express track layout without ATP even though the designers basic assumptions included use of ATP.

But even allowing for the HSE's dismal performance, Railtrack are lying. The railworkers trade unions, ASLEF and RMT had raised the question of the visibility of signal SN109 at least *seven times* with Railtrack.

There are also two questions of good railway practice that were ignored by Railtrack in moving the local train through signal SN109. Coming out of Paddington, the local train was

on line six, the most northerly. Its route involved crossing to line two, where signal SN109 controls the joining of line three to line two. The usual safety practice would be to hold a train on its starting line until a path through to the destination line is clear, and then the train can run clean through making minimal obstruction of the intervening lines. In the Ladbroke Grove case, once the driver of the local train was given the signal to leave line six, he would expect a clear route to line two. Contrary to good practice, Railtrack only cleared him to line three.

The second poor practice concerns the track layout. Where two lines join into a single line, the normal safety practice is to build in an 'escape' track parallel to the single line. An extra set of points is built beside the signal and when the signal is red these points direct the train down the escape track. Only when the signal allows the train onto the single track are these points shifted away from the escape line. If a train overshoots the signal it is then directed down the escape track rather than onto the main line. Signal SN109 had no such escape track.

### Profit, not safety

The motivating factor in all of these failures by Railtrack is money. The track design to give access to Paddington for the Heathrow Express contains points, rather than flyovers, because points are cheaper. The escape roads are left off the signals to cram the track into a smaller space. Most pressingly, ATP is expensive – after the Clapham rail crash in 1988, the accident inquiry recommended installing ATP on all British railways; the Tory government rejected the recommendation because the £1 billion cost would make the railways difficult to privatise. It was rejected it again after the Watford crash in 1996, and yet again after the Southall crash in 1997. But Railtrack cannot openly admit that its customers run the risk of death to maintain Railtrack profits, so it takes refuge behind the inactivity of the HSE and ignores the representations of its workers.

In Denmark, France, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, or Sweden the

Ladbroke Grove accident could not have happened. The entire rail systems in these countries are protected by ATP. In Germany a system stops trains going through red signals and after last June's crash the entire system is being upgraded. Japan has had no serious railway accident in 35 years. The railway death rate in Spain is 4 times less than in Britain; in all the other countries mentioned except Germany it is less than half.

### Privatisation and profit

Transport Minister John Prescott has said that if the inquiry into the Ladbroke Grove crash recommends ATP he will order it. He didn't say who will pay for it, which is of course the key question. The Tories announced the privatisation of British rail in 1990, and started it in 1994. It was not until mid-April 1997 – two weeks before the general election – that the privatisation was completed. The rolling stock was sold for £1.8 billion to groups of BR managers who sold it on for £2.7 billion – a £900 million undervaluation. Railtrack was sold the permanent way and accoutrements at an undervaluation of £1.5 billion according to the audit office. Railtrack shares have gone from £3.90 each at flotation to a high of £17.63 and stood at about £12.50 at the time of the Ladbroke Grove crash. Railtrack have also paid out £450 million in dividends to shareholders. At current share prices that represents a profit of about £4 billion to the buyers – all of which has been paid for from taxes.

Privatisation has meant that the rail infrastructure has been frozen since 1990. Almost all the trains, track and signalling has had minimal maintenance for ten years. Delays are getting longer and cleanliness standards are dropping. The various companies running trains are measured on their timetable performance, so timetables are based on what is easiest for a company to achieve; for this reason there is little co-operation in arranging convenient connection times between trains and no scope at all for holding a train if a feeder train is de-

*Continued next page*

### Workers must control rail safety

*Continued from previous page*

laid. Through fares and ticketing are also complicated by the number of companies involved. Railtrack's main investment has been in stations where there has been much growth of rented kiosks and shops to attract the captive audience of delayed would-be travellers.

Railtrack claim that accident levels on the railways have dropped in recent years; they don't say why, preferring to let customers assume it is due to good management. In fact the real reason is that train speeds have fallen due to the plethora of speed restrictions on poorly maintained track. On December 16, a train was derailed in a tunnel in Kent when it ran into a large piece of chalk that had fallen from the roof. Railtrack claim the tunnel is inspected regularly; it is clear that the inspection standards are inadequate and that even minimal safety precautions – in this case, netting the tunnel to catch falling rock – are not taken. As the deterioration of the system continues, Railtrack will be forced to choose between yet further slowdown or a rising accident rate due to inadequate maintenance.

A particularly obvious comparative example of the decline of Railtrack's infrastructure is provided by the dramatic slowdown of the Eurostar trains on the British side of the Channel Tunnel. And, as Gérard Tavernier, a Eurostar driver, told *Le Parisien* 'On the English side of the Channel, a Eurostar can crash any red signal it likes without being stopped ... Everything rests on the driver. The slightest human error can be fatal.'

### Confusion over responsibilities

And it is now far more difficult under privatisation to assign responsibilities for accidents. There is immense bureaucracy at the interfaces between Railtrack and the various companies running trains. The scope for error has increased massively. It is giving companies many ways of ducking their responsibilities. In the wake of the Ladbroke crash blame has oscillated

between the driver of the local train (Thames Trains), signalling (Railtrack), and the ATP on the express (Great Western).

There are lessons that should be learned – but probably won't – by the government. The planned privatisation of Air Traffic Control will allow accidents against which the Ladbroke Grove crash will be as nothing. In the worst case, on a rail network all the trains can be brought to a halt to avoid an accident. There is no such possibility with aircraft.

Railtrack have now asked for partial renationalisation. Because they cannot fund the safety and track improvements required over the next ten years (and this is before any decision on ATP has been made), they suggest that the government take a 15% shareholding. Railtrack could issue more shares and at the same time have in the government a sure buyer. In exchange Railtrack want to become the franchised operator for the East Coast Main Line – a far more profitable investment than track. This is a very clear 'heads we win, tails you lose' situation. A government spokesperson said of Railtrack's offer: 'If the government had a minority of Railtrack shares, and we had an accident like Paddington, we would end up with a majority share of the blame'. It is good to see reality raise its head, even if only momentarily, in government policy.

### Renationalise!

The answer, of course, is full renationalisation. It is absolutely clear that a private company, oriented towards profit, cannot have a clear commitment to an unprofitable concept like safety. And this renationalisation has to be without compensation. The current owners of the railways have made billions out of the Tory giveaway; they must not be allowed to hold out for even more money for returning what was stolen from us.

But renationalisation alone is insufficient. There were many accidents on the nationalised British rail network – Clapham, Hither Green, and others. There is no automatic growth in safety because an industry is nationalised.

Governments too can have their own vested interests in starving industries of cash for necessary investment in safety. The pre-election tax cut, the pressures to cut public spending by bodies such as the IMF, or the council of Europe, or the Maastricht convergence criteria, can cause safety to be sacrificed as easily as a fat cat's hunger for profit.

The dismal failure of the HSE in preventing the Ladbroke Grove disaster is the proof of this. As a government department it was unable to oppose government policy. During the whole period of privatisation, not once did the HSE comment upon related safety issues. During the signalworkers' dispute of 1994 the HSE even ignored the staffing of signalboxes with untrained and unqualified managers and supervisors. The conclusion from this is very straightforward – we have to go further than demanding just the renationalisation of rail; we need the safety of the industry to be administered, monitored and enforced by those who have the clearest interest in ensuring safety rather than profit, and those are the workers in the industry and its users, and there must be no governmental restrictions in performing these tasks. That is the only way to ensure that safety is not compromised for profit. **WA**

### Lufthansa Skycheffs

273 airline catering workers sacked by Lufthansa Skychef/GCC on November 20 1998 are still campaigning for reinstatement. The victimised workers, members of the Transport & General Workers Union were sacked after participating in an official one-day strike. All those who supported the strike were sacked, even if they were off sick or on holiday. To send messages of solidarity and donations to the strikers hardship fund, write to: TGWU 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB or telephone 0181-573 9494. **WA**

# Section 28 to go

by Charli Langford

Workers Action offers a cautious welcome for New Labour's plan to repeal section 2A of the Local Government Act – the legislation formerly known as 'section 28'. This is the legislation which forbids councils from 'promoting homosexuality' and categorises gay and lesbian couples as 'pretend family relationships'. It has had a massive effect, particularly in schools where teachers and other school workers have effectively been prevented from opposing homophobia for fear of prosecution.

There has been immediate opposition to the plan from the right. The Roman Catholic Cardinal Winning, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool James Jones, the Secretary General of the Moslem Council for Great Britain Iqbal Sacranie, the President of the National Council of Hindu Temples Om Parkash Sharma, and the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks have all teamed up with Baroness Young to denounce the measures. Brian Souter, the evangelical Christian and much-reviled boss of Stagecoach, the bus and train company, funds their campaign. The Tories have a three-line whip to defend the section and have been willing to accept the high-profile defection of Tory Shaun Woodward to New Labour on the issue.

Although the right are talking about 'protection of traditional family values', their hostility to equalisation of the age of consent and to allowing gays and lesbians into the military, neither of which relate at all to the family, indicates that their motivation is pure homophobia. So any concession to 'family values' by New Labour is ridiculous, since this is merely a mask for homophobia. The right don't give a fuck for families – the family break-ups caused by deportations, the denial of abortion rights, economic migration, and the behaviour of the right towards

their own families, are the proof of this.

Tactically, also, appeasement is crazy. The rabid right won't meet New Labour half-way; instead, they will see every gesture of appeasement as a sign of weakness and they will redouble their demands.

This is the reason for the caution in our welcome. The government never tires of explaining the importance of the family and has promised 'to place marriage and family life at the heart of strengthened sex education guidelines' and to give new guidance on sex and relationships 'along the same lines' as section 28. Since failing to follow guidelines is an effective ground for a career-destroying complaint against those involved in care and education, this is in effect maintaining the content of section 28 while going through the form of repealing it. David

Blunkett, the education secretary, said to the cabinet: 'What people do not want is proselytising in favour of gay lifestyles.' He seems unable to grasp that most of society is proselytising in favour of the heterosexual nuclear family and that in the absence of explicit countermeasures this provides a fertile growth medium for homophobia.

Over the past 30 years or so there has been a marked change in the public attitude to homosexuality. Many New Labour MPs have been direct beneficiaries of this change. Ben Bradshaw is probably the best example, an out gay man campaigning directly against a homophobic bigot and winning in the May 1997 general election. Peter Mandelson, probably the least-liked New Labour MP, has been condemned for sleaze, for spin, for manipulation, and for the Millennium Dome, but never for being gay. This change has encouraged many lesbians and gays to come out, and now among younger people it is unusual to find someone who has no lesbians or gays in their friendship network. That

*Continued next page*

## Book bargains:

*A few copies of the following books are available at bargain prices:*

### **Year One of the Russian revolution**

Victor Serge, 456pp, Pluto Press ..... £6.50

### **Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: An introduction to their lives and work**

David Riazanov, 231pp, Monthly review Press ..... £4.00

### **The early homosexual rights movement (1864-1935)**

J Lauritsen & D Thorstad, 121pp, Times Change Press . £1.95

Prices include post and packing to mainland British destinations

Workers Action,  
PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



**Section 28 to go***Continued from previous page*

is not to say that there is no hostility – the syndrome of ‘my mate is OK but I hate all other gays’ is still quite common, and while it is difficult to make accurate comparisons there are many reports of anti-gay bullying in schools. However, the predominant view reported from surveys among both children and adults is that homosexuality is a valid lifestyle and that sex education should give factual information with no pressure towards any particular orientation. Seen in this light, Blunkett’s action in deciding that he needs to consult with religious leaders to establish what people really want is particularly perverse. Given that the leaders of all the major religions are explicitly campaigning to maintain section 28, it is easy to predict what the response is likely to be.

The real indicator in this affair is that the Tories are imposing a three-line whip – that is, they are making it mandatory for their MPs to vote against the repeal of section 28. The question is not one of ‘individual conscience’ on a social issue – ‘conscience’ has always been the get-out clause that reactionaries have used to avoid voting for a liberalising measure that their party supports, be it anti-capital punishment, anti-abortion rights, or even anti-slavery. The question is one of equal rights. We have to demand that New Labour promotes the abolition of Section 28 with the same commitment as the Tories defend it, and insist that their MPs vote according to party line.

Within this debate, lesbian and gay campaigners are fighting for identical treatment to heterosexuals. This leads to some very contradictory situations; for example, support for the removal of the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces. It seems somehow rather strange to celebrate as a victory the fact that lesbians and gays now have an equal right to rain bombs down on Belgrade, or to be shot to pieces defending British interests in Ireland or Iraq.

Similarly, there is a claim that lesbians and gays have equal rights to

‘family life’, which underpins arguments for marriage ceremonies and church weddings for same-sex couples. This takes for granted that ‘family life’ is a good thing. The family has a particular role under capitalism; it is the means of reproduction and servicing of the labour force and it is paid for by the wage granted to family members and therefore at no additional cost to capitalism.

For a long time feminists and socialists have seen the family as a basis for the continuing oppression of women, and many argue that much of the oppression of children is located within the family as well. A same-sex couple’s relationship will not contain the inbuilt structural pressures towards inequality that beset male-female couples, and therefore can offer a better model for an equal relationship, but when a couple wants to take on responsibility for children, by virtue of starting as a couple they are most likely to transform into the isolated two-generation nuclear family rather than follow one of the more extended models. The nature of employment is such that almost always one member of the couple will take major responsibility for the children and the other for the finances. This recreates the traditional dilemma of the nuclear family – several people having to sustain themselves on one person’s wage – and it gives power within the structure to the wage earner, on whom all the others are dependent. A key component of ‘family values’ is to defend this structure and to assign males to the wage earning and females to the nurturing role, and to extend these roles from the nuclear family to other kinds of families as well. Socialists have demanded the rights to collectivised childcare and collectivised domestic labour in order to undermine such inequalities.

So while we should defend the rights of homosexuals to equal treatment with heterosexuals, we must not assume that solves all problems. The family is a very emotional subject with most people because it structures our relationships with those closest to us and it provides care and support that often cannot be found elsewhere. That does not mean it is oppression-free. **WA**

# Holocaust day

The government has announced that from next year January 27 will be ‘Holocaust day’. It is rare for this paper to express agreement with New Labour but on this occasion we will make an exception. With the current upsurge in the politics of the far right in France, Germany, Austria and Italy, not to mention the states of Eastern Europe, a permanent reminder is needed in order to help mobilise the working class against fascism.

However, we cannot but comment on a number of other actions of New Labour that cut across this one. The release of General Pinochet, responsible for the murder and disappearance of several thousand oppositionists in Chile, contrasts markedly with the attitude taken towards important old Nazis. Jack Straw’s Asylum Bill, which sends victims of persecution back to their homelands to face torture and death, would seem to be aiding and abetting modern-day dictators. Among the most obvious cases are Kurds who have been returned to Turkey, where the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan has only just heard that the Turkish authorities have bowed to international pressure and won’t execute him. Less well-known, but compelling in that they were on Hitler’s list of undesirables as well, are the 2000-plus Romany who have fled Eastern Europe for Britain, not one of whom has been granted Asylum here. Back on the streets of Prague Czech skinheads regularly murder Romanies. **WA**

Global victory for workers in Seattle:

## Workers, students, activists rout WTO

by Steve Zeltzer

In the biggest global victory for workers in decades, thirty thousand unionists, and tens of thousands of students, environmentalists and human rights activists stopped the World Trade Organisation in its tracks and sent its 133 Trade Ministers home in utter defeat. The Battle of Seattle has made it almost impossible for the WTO to take major new steps in the next few years to further drive down wages, working conditions and environmental standards throughout the world. Before the week of protests and demonstrations, most workers in the US and around the world had never even heard of the WTO, but now the capitalist governments that run it and their thieving corporate masters can no longer work quietly in the dark to undermine workers and farmers everywhere. Seattle may well be the first step in stopping and turning back a generation of losses for working people, a real turning of the tide.

### First national political protest by labour in decades

This was the first major political protest by US workers in decades. Major unions such as the Steelworkers, ILWU and a host of others mobilised thousands of their members. Over three thousand workers from Canada and delegations from many countries around the world also joined together to make their voice heard. Over 50 buses were paid for the British Columbia labour movement for workers and protesters to the WTO. West coast ILWU longshoremen shut down the coast for 8 hours, Seattle Taxi drivers went on strike on Tuesday November 30 and tens of thousands of workers throughout Seattle and around the country took off work to attend the demonstrations and meetings.

Brian McWilliams, president of the ILWU challenged the multi-national

bosses in a speech at the labour rally. 'In closing the ports, the ILWU is demonstrating to the corporate CEOs and their agents here in Seattle that the global economy will not run without the consent of the workers everywhere in this country and around the world.' This received a huge response from the crowd.

'When the ILWU boycotted cargo from El Salvador and apartheid South Africa, when we would not work scab grapes from the California valley or cross picket lines in support of the fired Liverpool dockers, these were concrete expressions of our understanding that the interests of working people transcend national and local boundaries, and the labour solidarity truly means that when necessary we will engage in concrete action,' Williams continued.

Also for the first time at an AFL-CIO mass protest, Williams made clear where the wealth comes from. 'Let's not allow the free traders to paint us as isolationist anti-traders. We are for trade. Don't ever forget - it is the labour of working people that produces all the wealth.' These are new words for the AFL-CIO and the rank and file.

The protest was also the most important linking up of the environmental movement and human rights movement with labour since the 1960s civil rights movement. It was the power of this alliance that brought the WTO down, uniting labour's numbers and organisation with the daring civil disobedience and broad-based support of students, environmentalists and other activists, whose actions allowed workers to cut loose from the attempts of union bureaucrats to keep the protests 'within bounds'.

Arrested protestors were now joined together in jail. 'After he was arrested in Seattle, (UC Student) Vandaei found himself sitting alongside people who were involved in different causes than he was. They were gathered with their hands tied behind their backs, wait-

ing for hours to be taken away by police wagons. "It forced us to sit here together with union workers, with Teamsters, with environmentalists," Vandaei said. "You get arrested together, you ask each other's names," said Vandaei.' (*San Francisco Examiner*, December 5, 1999)

It is this newly forged alliance that will give workers the strength they need in every city in the country.

### A lightning rod for world mobilisation

What brought this together as a lightning rod was the international meeting of the World Trade Organisation. The WTO is the organisation where multi-national corporations and their servants in governments come together to secretly map out how they will increase their control of the world's economy. The past round of trade negotiations and decisions organised by the WTO has led to massive privatisation and deregulation of the banking, telecommunication and utility industries combined with massive cuts in education, housing and healthcare. The WTO ordered governments to eliminate environmental, health and safety regulations, and pressed them to cut back on any protection of workers in a race to cut the cost of labour to the bone. Collaborating with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, the WTO pressured countries to go along with this economic agenda or face trade sanctions and huge fines.

The latest planned WTO meeting was an effort to extend the 'liberalisation' toward the total elimination of all food and agricultural tariffs, a move that would benefit the giant US agricultural and food conglomerates while wiping out small farmers and agricultural workers around the world. It would create a new flood of unemployed coming out of the countryside and drive wages down still further. The resistance of not only

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**Workers, students, activists...***Continued from previous page*

underdeveloped countries to this expansion of the WTO but even of major economic partners, who face their own protests back home, was evident even before the WTO met. A new round of trade negotiations would have inevitably led to more attacks on workers directly as well, more privatisations, more gutting of social services and more wage cuts.

**'Don't blame us,' says Clinton**

The WTO is in reality controlled by the United States government with help from its major allies, Japan and the European Union. For small countries, it is part of an American-run world government. Because the WTO makes its decisions in secret, far from any possible democratic control, it has functioned as a way for corporations to win wildly unpopular policies that hurt workers in the United States as well. 'Don't blame us,' say American politicians like Bill Clinton. 'The WTO forced us to do it!'

Growing opposition to the expansion of the WTO rules on agricultural subsidies was also significant in major capitalist allies of the United States like Europe and Japan. The Japanese LDP government and Prime Minister Obuchi's base of support is in the countryside. After the war the capitalists with the support of the US gerrymandered the country to favour the more conservative countryside. An elimination of tariffs in Japan would eliminate the rice farmers and drive the LDP out of power. Clinton and proponents of expanding the WTO coverage were aware of this and realised that they had nothing to lose by 'talking' about including labour rights.

**International labour bureaucrats welcome WTO's Mike Moore**

The Director-General of the WTO, Mike Moore, was a true example of the kind of collaborator the WTO looked to in its effort to expand. Moore had in fact won the job for helping to lead the biggest assault on New Zealand's working class

and poor in history. While leader of the New Zealand Labour Party, Moore launched a massive privatisation of whole sections of the economy from the ports to health and safety. These actions split the New Zealand labour movement and created a dangerous division between the public workers and private industry workers.

Leading up to the massive protest at the WTO convention was a meeting of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). This was its first meeting in the United States. This organisation, which was set up by the AFL-CIO and the CIA to help be a counterweight to the Russian controlled World Federation of Trade Unions, has now become the largest international trade union federation with the membership or affiliation of most unions around the world.

Bill Jordan, chair of the ICFTU, is also the former rightwing leader of the AUEW in the United Kingdom. He had invited none other than Mike Moore to have an exchange at the ICFTU conference. Moore was clearly uncomfortable but did his best. He accused the ICFTU and other opponents of the WTO of being against 'internationalism'. He said that their opposition to free trade would hurt workers around the world. Bob White of the Canadian Labour Congress was the sharpest critic. He called Moore's view 180 degrees wrong. White said the problem was that multi-nationals and other corporations were seeking to violate laws and protections of workers in order to continue their child labour and other labour violations. White and others at the meeting called for Moore and the WTO to integrate the ILO and UN resolutions on labour into all trade agreements.

However, the focus of the ICFTU meeting, besides getting a seat at the table for the union officials, was to push the WTO to set up a 'working group' that would discuss labour and environmental conditions that, according to their plan, would eventually be included in the text of the WTO agreements. This was hardly radical. In fact, the US head of the Chamber of Commerce agreed with this perspective and Clinton in a private meeting with John Sweeney and others said he would continue to push for this

'reform' of the WTO.

While raising the issue of labour rights and environmental clauses, very little was said by both the ICFTU leaders and the AFL-CIO leadership about the actual economic program of the WTO. This so called 'liberalisation' and 'structural reform program' of the WTO went mostly unchallenged at the ICFTU meeting and in most speeches of the AFL-CIO leadership. Women unionists demanded to know of Moore whether he supported continued 'privatisation' of education and turning it over to the 'market economy'. Moore refused to address this and many of the other questions.

When media critic and journalist Norman Solomon asked Sweeney at an ICFTU press conference on December 29 if the reason that he was only asking for a 'working group' was so that he would not embarrass AFL-CIO supported presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore, Sweeney was livid. He declared that this was not tokenism and that they wanted their 'whole agenda'.

He was also asked how the AFL-CIO and the German trade union DGB could call for more transparency of the WTO when these organisations themselves were undemocratic. Sweeney and Dieter Schulte of the DGB denied that they were undemocratic and said the questioner was only really representing the interests of the corporations.

**'The WTO must go!'**

Most of the coalition that came to protest against the WTO had a clear demand - get rid of it. As the demonstrators chanted, 'The WTO must go!' The very least protestors aimed at was preventing the new round of negotiations from starting.

But John Sweeney and the other top labour leaders had other ideas. Pursuing a strategy of not breaking with Clinton and Gore, but being pushed by tens of thousand of rank and filers to protest the WTO, Sweeney and company planned a tame protest, keeping the tens of thousands of labour marchers away from the WTO meeting place and the militant protest of students, environmentalists and others. But the rank and file had other ideas.

On Tuesday, November 30, 1999, the mobilisation exploded in the streets. Besides the trade union rally and march, thousands of protesters blockaded the intersections and WTO delegates from around the world were unable to get to and from their hotels.

When the WTO has met in other countries, whole sections of the inner city are blocked off to prevent protesters from getting close. The mayor of Seattle thought that he could continue to have the WTO meeting by simply blocking off the convention centre. The police at first did not charge the demonstrators but when it became clear that the whole convention could not even convene without clearing the streets, the order was given to blast away. CS gas was shot into the crowds, concussion bombs were exploded and large cans of pepper spray were used on the protesters as well as any tourist who might happen to be around. The police also began to beat the demonstrators and anybody else they could get their hands on. This led to an angry crowd and the trashing of the windows of The Gap, Starbucks, McDonalds and a host of other chain stores.

Prior to the march, the police were using gas but when the labour march began, the tear gas stopped as thousands of unionists left the stadium and were headed downtown. The IAM march marshals sought to prevent the unionists from reaching downtown to join the mostly young protesters. They physically blocked two intersections and sought to divert the marchers toward another hotel where they said a sit-in would take place. They were primarily interested in preventing the linking up of the thousands of youth with the unionists in battle against the police and the WTO.

Many workers marched right past the marshals. The ILWU and many other unionists went downtown to join the youth who were protesting. In one instance, police were chasing some youth and saw a delegation of ILWU longshoremen. They quickly turned around and went back.

The Steelworkers had brought hundreds of striking workers from Oregon Steel and Kaiser Aluminum to Seattle for the whole week and they got a view of American justice that will

never go away. This 'education' signals a very important change in the thinking not just of the steelworkers but hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the United States.

The beginning of the week was just the start of a tumultuous four-day police riot. The police also attacked a steelworkers' march a few days later with tear gas and marauded through not only the downtown but also neighbourhoods like Capital Hill to terrorise the population. The mayor brought in the National Guard and also declared a state of emergency and curfew after 7pm on Tuesday. This was used by the police to make further arrests, and encouraged their rampage against the protesters. Over 600 were arrested and dozens were injured from beatings and plastic bullets.

### The rout of the WTO

The result of this battle was a complete rout not of the protesters but of Clinton and his cronies. Not only could the WTO not open on time, with the centre of Seattle tied up by protests and turned into a military camp by police in Star Wars gear, it was impossible for them to accomplish anything. The trade talks collapsed without even a final statement – there is to be no new WTO round of negotiations. Clinton was scared to ram through a new agreement because he knew that his buddy Sweeney could not control the labour troops. His signature on a new WTO agreement would mean that millions would depart the labour-Democrat alliance. 'Mr. Clinton's advisers worried that the agenda emerging from the talks would so outrage American labour unions that they would denounce both the administration and Vice President Al Gore, who needs the unions' energetic support in his bid for the presidential nomination. Some feared that this agenda could further jeopardise chances of winning Congressional approval for China's entry into the trade organisation, which was negotiated in Beijing just two and a half weeks ago.' (*New York Times*, December 5, 1999)

The most overt anger from the union bureaucracy over the collapse of the talks was International Metal Workers General Secretary Marcello Malentacchi. On December 7, 1999, in

a public statement, Malentacchi complained about the protests.

'The march was a success until a few hundred started the riots and managed to attract all the mass media's attention. And now these people are claiming victory. Maybe they are the winners. But then what? The trade unions have lost two years of hard work. We will have to start all over again and organise our action even better, to make sure that at the next meeting, in two years' time, our demands are met by the ministers of trade.' Maybe Malentacchi is pitching himself for the job that Mike Moore will soon be leaving and wants to set the proper tone.

Other governments saw well enough what would happen back home if they struck a new rotten deal. 'All these post-Seattle manoeuvres are being carefully monitored in Beijing. "The Seattle meeting has poured some cold water on WTO prospects," says Hai Wen, deputy director of the China Center for Economic Research at Beijing University. Already conservatives are counselling Beijing to go slow on economic reform and privatisation.' (*Business Week*, December 20, 1999)

### Rank-and-file alliance brought victory

Only the alliance of rank-and-file workers with students, environmentalists and other activists made this victory possible. As many workers themselves noted, without the civil disobedience that tied the conference in knots, a polite labour rally would have just resulted in a few editorials. And without the presence and active participation of thousands of trade unionists in the militant demonstration in the centre of Seattle, the police would have used mass arrests from the start to sweep 'a few crazies' away from the convention centre. But with this alliance, the protesters could not be dismissed or repressed. We won this round. The WTO and the capitalists lost.

Millions of Americans now began to learn about the real role of the WTO, and workers and people throughout the world were uplifted that finally the US people were going on the offensive against this world corporate dictatorship.

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**Workers, students, activists...***Continued from previous page*

Reality is beginning to sink in that the few democratic rights we have are quickly being usurped by the needs of the corporations. This was clearly illuminated by the militarisation of the police and their tactics of torture and beatings. Many of the demonstrators were stunned that for their peaceful picket they would be met with such tactics. These tactics of course are common practice in many parts of the world.

The failure of the talks is absolutely due to this massive protest. The confidence of the Clinton and the corporate controlled politicians has been shaken. This fear of this massive demonstration of anger against the system is a threat to both political parties and corporate America.

'The victory in Seattle has emboldened labour, environmental, and other anti-WTO forces to redouble their efforts. On December 8, AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney and the labour leaders joined an anti-sweatshop vigil in Manhattan – the first time they have joined the annual rally.' (*Business Week*, December 20, 1999)

Gerry Fernandez, director of International Relations for the United Steel Workers of America, at an international USWA educational in Seattle on November 29 gave an international perspective in fighting the WTO:

'We need international labour solidarity. The fact of the matter is that international solidarity works. The WTO talks about core labour standards. They say we should support the incorporation of the ILO core conventions into the WTO. They talk about social clauses, social mandates, labour standards.

'Let me tell you about the ILO: unions have won only two cases in the ILO over the past 18 years. We can't count on these folks, just as we can't count on the WTO. The WTO is run by the corporations. The only thing we can count on is ourselves. With the global corporate economy, we can no longer win on the picket line. We have corporations – and politicians – who close down factories and move overseas if we strike. These same folks push for striker replacement. These are the people who run the WTO. Are they really going to give

us a seat at the WTO table? I say they aren't. When we have a strike here, we need to have actions in 20 countries or more. We have to internationalise our labour movement.'

While Fernandez is wrong about the power of a real strike he is absolutely correct about the need for internationalising the labour movement with global contracts and joint action world-wide.

**Political danger**

For the working class, this was an important and historic political action against the multi-nationals and the US government. John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO, as well as Hoffa Jr. and most of the leadership, will seek to keep this mobilisation contained. The political danger for the AFL-CIO bureaucrats is that once millions of workers become engaged in this fight, they will undoubtedly begin to question how the trade unions can continue to support the very politicians that support global robber barons. They will also begin to question how they can seriously fight for their rights, when in most unions they have little control over their own structure. The next mobilisation may come in the third week of April 2000

when the World Bank and the IMF are holding their international conferences in Washington DC. Already discussions are going on about a national march in Washington against these organisations and against the entry of China into the WTO. Some unionists are also seeking to push for a national one-day strike to demand that the US pulls out of the WTO. This would clearly put Sweeney and the others who want to reform the WTO on the spot.

For the first time since the 1930s, the US working class is going into a new confrontation with capital that is immediately international in its character. This new alliance with other sections of the population can be a powerful vehicle to begin to not only throw back the WTO and other anti-working class attacks but to lead to a real working class political alternative. We will be taking this alliance back home to form similar citywide alliances all over the country. The battle of Seattle is an exciting indication of things to come. ■

**Workers Action thanks Steve Zeltzer for permission to reprint this article**

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## **ILWU International President Brian McWilliams' speech for WTO labour rally, November 30, 1999**

**T**he free trade advocates of the WTO have come to Seattle to further their strategic takeover of the global economy. We in the ILWU want to give them the welcome they deserve and let them know what we think of their plans. So we've closed the Port of Seattle and other ports on the West Coast. There will be no 'business as usual' today.

In closing these ports the ILWU is demonstrating to the corporate CEOs and their agents here in Seattle that the global economy will not run without the consent of the workers. And we don't just mean longshore workers, but work-

ers everywhere in this country and around the world. When the ILWU boycotted cargo from El Salvador and apartheid South Africa, when we would not work scab grapes from the California valley or cross picket lines in support of the fired Liverpool dockers, these were concrete expressions of our understanding that the interests of working people transcend national and local boundaries, and that labour solidarity truly means that when necessary we will engage in concrete action.

That is why the ILWU is here today, with all of you – to tell the agents of

*Continued next page*

# Mumia Abu-Jamal facing execution again

**M**umia Abu-Jamal is a long-standing fighter against racism and injustice. He was a prominent member of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and the MOVE organisation in the 1970s and is a renowned journalist. Because of this he was targeted by the police and was framed and falsely convicted in 1981 for the killing of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. The result is that Jamal has become America's most prominent death row prisoner.

Mumia has now been fighting for his life for nearly 20 years. His most recent court efforts have been hampered by the 1996 Effective Death Penalty Act. His death warrant was signed again in 1999 by Philadelphia Governor Tom Ridge as part of the campaign to speed up executions, but an application for *habeas corpus* by the legal team has generated a further stay of execution. The *habeas corpus* hearing is due to start April 2.

There is a huge international campaign to save Mumia. Part of this campaign is a demonstration in London on March 4. **WA**

**Mumia Must Live!**  
**National demonstration**  
**Saturday 4 March, 1.00pm**  
**Embankment tube**  
**March to Trafalgar**  
**Square.**

## **ILWU International President...** *Continued from previous page*

global capital that we, the workers, those who care about social justice and protecting our rights and our planet, will not sit quietly by while they meet behind closed doors to carve up our world. We know that what they have in mind for us is a race to the bottom, dismantling our protective laws wherever they find us weak, that they want to pit workers of one country against the workers of another, to erase our protections and standards in an international corporate feeding frenzy in which workers are not just on the menu – we are the main course. We will not co-operate! We know our history, our legacy and our ongoing responsibility.

No one can make this statement stronger than longshore workers who make their living moving international cargo. And what do we want? We demand fair trade – not free trade – not the policies of the WTO that are devastat-

ing workers everywhere and the planet that sustains us. And let us be clear. Let's not allow the free traders to paint us as isolationist anti-traders. We are for trade. Don't ever forget – it is the labour of working people that produces all the wealth. When we say we demand fair trade policies we mean we demand a world in which trade brings dignity and fair treatment to all workers, with its benefits shared fairly and equally, a world in which the interconnectedness of trade promotes peace and encourages healthy and environmentally sound and sustainable development, a world which promotes economic justice and social justice and environmental sanity.

The free traders promote economic injustice, social injustice and environmental insanity. We are sending the WTO this message loud and clear. We will not sit idly by while you corporate puppets of the WTO plot this economic coup. You will not seize control of our world without a fight. Are you ready for the fight? Damn right! **■**

## The US and the death penalty

The US is notorious for its use of the death penalty. There are reports in British newspapers almost weekly of death sentences being carried out or – almost as frequently – being quashed a few days before execution is due.

Governor George Ryan suspended the use of the death penalty in Illinois on January 31 because he was not confident that those sentenced could reasonably be declared guilty. Of 300 cases that could have resulted in a death penalty in Illinois since 1976, over half are being retried. 35 people sentenced to death had to be retried because it was subsequently found that their defence attorneys had been disbarred or disqualified. 13 people had their death sentences quashed on appeal. There have been only 12 executions since 1976. These figures suggest that the death sentence is applied recklessly in Illinois.

There is no reason to believe that Illinois is any worse in its use of the death penalty than any of the other 37 states that also use it. The response by the US congress to the national statistics on the quashing of death sentences was the 1996 Effective Death Penalty Act, which denies prisoners the right to present new evidence that might exonerate them on appeal.

US politicians have to be tough on crime in order to be elected. State governors running for re-election or higher office often show how tough they are by publicly signing a death warrant in the run up to election. In 1992 Bill Clinton, then Governor of Arkansas, signed such a death warrant on a man with severe learning difficulties, who was so unaware what was happening to him that he hid the sweet from his dinner so that he could eat it when he returned from the death cell. **WA**

# Self-determination for Kosova!

by Nick Davies

As we argued in Workers Action No.7, NATO's war in the Balkans was dirty and dishonest. It was dirty because it inflicted civilian casualties from the air with little or no risk to the NATO participants, caused long-term environmental damage in Serbia and increased the hardship of those in the neighbouring, fragile economies. It was dishonest because it claimed to be a humanitarian war in defence of the democratic rights of the Kosova Albanians. The Kosovars were being used by NATO; the real purpose of the war was to 'stabilise' the southern Balkans, to prepare the ground for the reconstruction of a fully functioning market economy and to establish a military presence to defend NATO's southern flank. The strategic importance of the area regarding potential oil pipelines between the Caspian and the Black seas no doubt figured in Western calculations. The Kosovars themselves came a long way down the list.

Two obvious beneficiaries of the war are Tony Blair and George Robertson. Blair has learned from Thatcher that it's a good idea to have a successful war under your belt before the end of your first term. The sinister George Robertson has got himself a new job in NATO, where he can develop his obvious talents to the full. Of course, it is true that the Kosova Albanians who had fled or had been driven out have been allowed back, under NATO protection. But Kosova is bombed, mined and very poor, its infrastructure shattered by war. The settlement that ended the war made no mention of independence for Kosova, and since then UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has publicly ruled it out. The Kosovars are not going to get what they wanted. Obviously, for the West, allowing the Kosovars back in to a blitzed, poverty-stricken protectorate is a fair price to pay for the establishment of a NATO military presence in the Balkans.

Since the end of the war there have been murders and expulsions of Serbs, carried out by Albanians seeking revenge. Some of the victims are undoubtedly civilians, guilty of nothing more than being Serbian in the wrong place at the wrong time. In some of the Western media, the KLA has made the transition from an organisation of romantic freedom fighters to one of gangsters, murderers and Serb-hating nationalists. The attacks on Serbs and on Kosova's Roma population, combined with what appears to be a long-term NATO occupation of Kosova, have caused many on the left to question our position, held before and throughout the war, of support for the right of self-determination for Kosova. In making this demand, so the argument runs, we are taking sides in a nationalist conflict that is furthering the break-up of Yugoslavia, and we are lending support to an organisation involved in ethnic cleansing, which is acting more or less under NATO's protection.

In reply, we say that we condemn unreservedly and unconditionally all acts of aggression against innocent Serbs, and all discrimination against Serbs on grounds of nationality or religion. We have always made it absolutely clear that any relationship between the KLA and NATO would be to NATO's benefit only. The tension between the KLA and NATO over the surrender of weapons and whether there should be a continuing, armed KLA presence bear this out. The faction of the KLA that did not want to go to the pre-war Rambouillet talks because, rightly, it did not trust NATO also supported equal rights for the Serb minority. The leader of that faction, Adem Demaci, opposed the NATO bombings calling them 'attacks against Serbia and the Albanians'. That faction is now in eclipse and Demaci, regarded as a traitor by the present KLA leadership, is living in exile in Slovenia. There is an obvious relationship between the present leadership's willingness to do business with NATO and its hard-line

anti-Serb nationalism. In neither sense does it offer any way forward for the Kosova Albanians. But, whatever the mistakes or crimes of the present KLA leadership, as with any national liberation organisation, that should not be a barrier to us supporting the unconditional right to self-determination of the Kosovar Albanians, if they want it. The fact that the Kosova Albanians are being fobbed off with a poverty-stricken, NATO-dependent, tenth-rate excuse for self-determination makes it more, not less, urgent that we support them if they demand the real thing.

Much has been made of the rapturous welcome given by the Kosova Albanians to the advancing NATO forces, and to Tony Blair on his visit to Pristina. That reflects the desperation felt by the Kosovars, and, tragically, the weakness of any other potential ally, such as the European workers' movement. (In 1969, when British troops went into the north of Ireland, some nationalists thought they would protect them against Loyalist paramilitaries, and made them tea. They were, of course, mistaken, but it didn't make them 'pro-imperialist'.)

Breaking up Yugoslavia? Unfortunately, it broke up years ago, in large part due to the Serbian nationalist project of Milosevic and that of his Croatian twin, the late Franjo Tudjman. As we pointed out in Workers Action No.7, a future socialist federation of the Balkans, which is the only realistic alternative – however distant it may be – to the present nightmare, must be voluntary, otherwise it's not worth fighting for. If it's voluntary, then it must involve the right to secede.

During NATO's Balkan war, the record of socialists in Britain was mixed. Some took at face value that this was a war for 'democracy', or at least to prevent the Kosova Albanians being wiped out. Some were undoubtedly encouraged in this belief by the refusal or unwillingness of many of those who opposed the war to support the right of self-determination.

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# The SWP and the war against Serbia

by Nick Davies

Wars have a habit of putting socialists to the test. NATO's attack on Serbia was no exception. As the biggest far-left organisation in Britain by some way, whether the SWP passed, failed or just muddled through this test was not simply its own affair, but would have a significant effect on the anti-war movement.

On the plus side, the SWP was right on the button with its slogan 'It's a war about NATO power'. The SWP correctly opposed the war and was prominent in organising demonstrations and public meetings against it. But it was wrong in confining its slogan to 'Stop the war'. Socialists had a twin duty: to oppose the war *and* defend the Kosova Albanians. But in fact, at anti-

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## Self-determination for Kosova

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nation for Kosova. In the aftermath of the war, socialists in Britain have to counter the propaganda coming from NATO and the government that they are bringing security and self-determination to the Kosovars. This propaganda states: 'we have liberated your homeland for you, so now we're going to send you all home', thus justifying both the war and New Labour's asylum bill. With only nominal opposition from Labour backbenchers, this vile legislation looks likely to become law. Socialists in or out of the Labour Party must campaign against it until it is repealed.

- NATO out of the Balkans!
- Self-determination for Kosova!
- Serbian workers kick out Milosevic!
- For a Balkan socialist federation!
- Asylum rights for all refugees – open all borders!

**WA**

war meetings, SWP members seemed reluctant to mention the Kosovars at all, preferring to rely on simplistic, rabble-rousing stuff about getting Serbs and Albanians to join trade unions. Therefore, the SWP failed in its elementary duty of solidarity towards the victims of one of the most appalling campaigns of mass murder since the Second World War. Why? According to the SWP, to attract the widest possible support for the anti-war campaign, its aims had to be kept simple. But in 'keeping it simple', the SWP appeared to have a low opinion of its members, or audience. Couldn't they oppose the war *and* defend the Kosovars? If the claims that the war was a 'humanitarian crusade' on behalf of the Kosovars were cynical hypocrisy, as the SWP correctly pointed out, and people were prepared to join the anti-war movement on that basis, then surely it would have been possible to raise the two demands at the same time?

In failing to defend the Kosovars the SWP left the anti-war campaign vulnerable in two ways. Firstly, many workers reluctantly went along with the bombing because they believed it was protecting the Kosovars from annihilation. If the anti-war movement had nothing to say about the defence of the Kosova Albanians, can you blame them?

Secondly, it left the anti-war campaign vulnerable to influence from Serb nationalists and their British hangers-on. The SWP did not challenge the pro-Serb line of the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, or the Chetnik presence on anti-war demonstrations. The SWP may not have approved of these people, but its position on the war made it more difficult to challenge them and so the SWP kept a diplomatic silence.

To justify its stance on the war, the SWP adopted a succession of bizarre and wrongheaded positions. The SWP pamphlet *Stop the War* (March 1999) argued that it was wrong to de-

scribe the treatment of the Kosovars as genocide. But since 1989 the Albanians had had no civil rights and were subject to police terror. By April 1999 an estimated 1.3 million had fled or been driven out. They were lucky. In some villages all the men between 16 and 60 were marched off for execution. Elsewhere, Serbian goonsquads were less discriminating. Milosevic's intention was to wipe the Kosovars off the map. The difference with the holocaust against the Jews is one of degree, a distinction that might be lost on most Kosovars right now. If there's no holocaust, then there can't be a Hitler, so, according to *Stop the War*, 'Milosevic is the Serbian version of Norman Tebbit.' *What!?* When did Tebbit, an admittedly obnoxious racist, advocate the forced repatriation of black and Asian people, let alone try to carry it out? In quibbling about the definition of genocide, in attempting to draw a qualitative distinction between the genocide of the Jews and Kosovars, and then comparing the latter with Tebbit's 'cricket test', the SWP simply parts company with reality.

The SWP refused to support the Kosovars' fight for freedom. 'Arming the Kosova Liberation Army and backing Kosovan independence would make the situation worse,' wrote Alex Callinicos in *Socialist Worker* (April 10, 1999), while in *Socialist Review* (May 1999) Chris Harman said that there could be 'no excuse for any genuine socialist backing the KLA's nationalism'. It seems that for the SWP, the right to self-determination, which if necessary must involve the right to separate, doesn't extend to the Kosovars. Harman rails against the KLA's nationalism, but he is unable to distinguish between the nationalism of the Serbian ethnic cleansers and the nationalism of a people fighting for its very existence. He appears to be unable to distinguish between the duty of solidarity owed by socialists towards

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### The SWP and the war in Serbia

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oppressed peoples, and political support for nationalism. He points to the KLA's relationship with NATO, a relationship born out of desperation. He appears to be ignorant of the fact that national liberation movements have frequently sought the support of one imperialist power or another, or the USSR (which the SWP always argued was no better). Does this invalidate in itself the Kosovars' right to self-determination? No! Where the SWP gratuitously insults the intelligence of its audience, and its members, is when it expresses a fear that the KLA will end up like the Afghan Mujahadin. Those with long memories will remember that the SWP *supported* these Muslim fundamentalists who were lavishly armed by the USA, unlike the KLA *which has had to hand its weapons in!*

If socialists were to adopt the SWP's position towards the Kosovars it would only strengthen the latter's illusions that NATO is their only friend,

thus making it more difficult to build practical solidarity with them, let alone confront the nationalism of the KLA. Harman is forced to admit that there is a place for Kosovan self-determination in a 'final, peaceful, outcome for the region'. In other words, the SWP can make propaganda for Kosova self-determination in the distant future, but when the Kosovars are fighting with their backs to the wall the SWP says they can't have it! The SWP advocates as a solution a socialist federation of Balkan republics. Nothing wrong with that, but for such a solution to be viable, it has to be voluntary. There must be a right to leave. A future Balkan federation can only be built on this basis. In the present situation, the right to separate has to be established before a federation can become a real possibility, but it is that right that the SWP seems unable to allow the Kosovars, or at least not unconditionally. Therefore, for the SWP, a socialist federation becomes either the status quo, or a piece of abstract propaganda. It was the same with Bosnia. The defence of Bosnia-

Hercegovina was how the defence of the multi-ethnic areas of Yugoslavia could be practically realised. However, the SWP spurned the concrete in favour of the abstract. Instead of building practical solidarity with the defenders of the multi-ethnic areas, the SWP issued banal appeals for 'workers' unity'. Its 'plague on all their houses' approach meant that when the Western powers, particularly Britain, starved out and then partitioned Bosnia-Hercegovina, the SWP had nothing to say.

The SWP tends towards a very simplistic approach to politics, shying away from the often complex questions raised by events. This explains in part its conduct during the war. The other factor was the SWP's accommodation to the politics of the leadership of the anti-war movement, because it thought it could recruit more new members that way. That, unfortunately, is how the SWP approaches everything it gets involved in. Instead of 'keeping it simple' the SWP has only tied itself in knots, and failed in its basic duty of solidarity with the Kosovars. **WA**

# Letters

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Dear comrades,

Jonathan Joseph ('A critique of catastrophism', Workers Action No.7) seems to imagine that Ernest Mandel defended a vulgar determinism in which class struggle has no impact on capitalist development. By implication, I imagine, Joseph considers this to be the view of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, of which Mandel was a post-war leader. In fact Mandel's view was otherwise.

Mandel argues: 1) that it is broad tendencies in the rate of profit that trigger downturns (the rate of profit is determined *in part* through class struggle) and 2) that the ingredients for upswings are *by contrast* generally political and extra-economic.

Joseph's turn of phrase gets especially misleading when he puts in Mandel's mouth the idea that key capitalist spheres are 'self-regulating'. He suggests that Mandel considers the

long boom to be a product of self-regulating, internal market mechanisms rather than social developments. This is a misleading suggestion, as can be confirmed by anyone who knows what Mandel and the USFI argued about the relationship between the cold war and the long boom. Sadly, this talk of self-regulation could give some readers the notion that Mandel saw capitalism as self-balancing and self-sustaining. That is a neo-liberal view: the opposite of Mandel's.

Mandel's approach is of lasting value to economists and anti-capitalists. This contribution is now developed in Francisco Louça's book *Turbulence in Economics*. It deserves a more serious critique, at least by an author who could refer to its basic text: *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (Verso, London, 1995).

Chris Brooks

London SE24

# The role of the peasantry in the Cuban Revolution

## by Theodore Draper

### Introduction

In this section, we reprint two extracts from books by Theodore Draper which deal with an important aspect of the Cuban Revolution which most analyses, whether by pro-Castro Trotskyists or by those in the Stalinist orbit, tend to obscure rather than illuminate – the role of the peasantry. The former tend to see the Cuban revolution as the product of an ‘objective dynamic’ of permanent revolution, which swept the Castroite leadership along and propelled it into a proletarian revolutionary orientation, while the latter see the transformation of the radical nationalist July 26th Movement into the Cuban Communist Party as vindicating the theory of two distinct stages of the revolution. Yet both tend to attribute a key role to the peasantry, and the entry of the Rebel Army into Havana in January 1959 is seen as the culmination of a sustained period of peasant guerrilla warfare. Michel Lowy, one of the main theoreticians of the United Secretariat, writes that: ‘By 1959 two years of revolutionary warfare had succeeded in smashing the main pillars of the Cuban state – above all, its organs of repression. It is important to emphasise that the guerrilla columns were only the first act of the Cuban revolution, but their achievements were decisive, as they opened the way to a process of uninterrupted revolutionary mobilisation and transformation.’<sup>1</sup>

The cool and sceptical note struck by Theodore Draper in his two books *Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities* (1962) and *Castroism: Theory and Practice* (1965) was not likely to endear him to the New Left

and other radicals keen to embrace a successful revolution after the long night of 1950s America. In 1961, Joe Hansen of the US Socialist Workers Party wrote an article – ‘In defence of the Cuban Revolution: An Answer to the State Department and Theodore Draper’<sup>2</sup> – whose title none too subtly attacked Draper as an accomplice of US imperialism. Certainly, Draper did not clearly defend Cuba so much as warn that US intervention would push Cuba further into the Soviet camp, and this was surely connected to his own politics, of which we shall say more below.

In terms of analysis, however, Draper's books stand up well in comparison with New Left and most Trotskyist accounts of the Cuban Revolution. In particular, his view that the revolution was led by the urban middle class, with both workers and peasants only occupying an auxiliary role, has stood the test of time rather better than the romantic mythology of peasant guerrilla warfare. The attempt by various guerrilla groups, with the United Secretariat following behind<sup>3</sup>, to export the ‘Cuban model’ to other Latin American countries in the 1960s and 70s fared disastrously, not least because of an inflated estimate of the

revolutionary potential of the peasantry – as Che Guevara was to find to his cost in Bolivia. Draper's prediction that Cuba would integrate itself with Soviet Stalinism and that Castro's party was becoming increasingly monolithic has also held up better than the many apologies for Cuba's allegedly unique form of ‘revolutionary democracy’.

Theodore Draper (b.1912) is the elder brother of the late Hal Draper, a leading theoretician of the Shachtman tendency. According to his own account<sup>4</sup> he became a fellow traveller of the Communist Party in the United States as a student around 1930, and appears to have joined the party in 1934 when he became assistant foreign editor of the *Daily Worker*. He was subsequently foreign editor of the CP weekly *New Masses* until 1939. He became disillusioned after the fall of France in 1940, and drifted apart from the CP over the next two years to become, according to Tim Wohlforth, ‘a somewhat embittered anti-Communist’.<sup>5</sup> However, his two books on the early years of the American CP, *The Roots of American Communism* (1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (1960) remain the key works on the subject. Their scrupulous attention to fact and detail earned them wide praise, and reflected the co-operation of a number of early CP leaders, notably James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism. Cannon's correspondence with Draper formed the basis of his own book *The First Ten Years of American Communism*. Draper has written several other books, including *Abuse of Power*, a study of US foreign policy, and more recently a history of the American Revolution.

Richard Price

### Notes:

1. M. Lowy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, New Left Books, 1981, pp.143-144.
2. J. Hansen, *Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution*, Pathfinder, 1978, pp.267-291.
3. The crisis surrounding the ‘guerrilla turn’ of the United Secretariat is reflected in J. Hansen, *The Leninist Strategy of Party Building: The Debate on Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America*, Pathfinder, 1979.
4. See T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, Vintage, 1986, pp.ix-xv.
5. T. Wohlforth, *The Prophet's Children*, Humanities Press, 1994, p.26. **WA**

## From Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities

# Terror and counter-terror

To begin with, what truth is there in Castro's 'peasant revolution'? The core of the eighty-two men under Castro who invaded Cuba from Mexico in December 1956 and the twelve who found their way to the mountainous Sierra Maestra at the eastern end of the island came from the middle class. At first, the peasants were hostile, and the original twelve dwindled at one time to only nine. Then in March 1957, Frank País, the underground leader in Santiago de Cuba, sent fifty-eight recruits to the Sierra Maestra, many of them armed with weapons stolen from the US naval base at Guantánamo. These reinforcements, overwhelmingly middle class in character, gave Castro his second wind. Castro himself was their ideal representative – son of a rich landowner, university graduate, lawyer. The *guajiros*, or peasants, in the mountains were utterly alien to most of them. But they had to win the confidence of the peasants to obtain food, to protect themselves from dictator Fulgencio Batista's spies and soldiers, to gain new recruits. As the months passed, the relations between them and the peasants took on a new dimension. The crying poverty, illiteracy, disease, and primitivism of the outcast peasants appalled the young city-bred ex-students. Out of this experience, partly practical and partly emotional, came a determination to revolutionise Cuban society by raising the lowest and most neglected sector to a civilised level of well-being and human dignity.

But, for over a year, Castro's fighting force was so small that he did not expect to overthrow Batista from the mountains. Castro himself described his isolated and near-desperate situation in his letter of December 31, 1957, to the so-called Council of Liberation: 'For those who are fighting against an army incomparable in

number and in arms, without any support during a whole year other than the dignity with which we are fighting for a cause which we love sincerely and the conviction that it is worth while to die for it, bitterly forgotten by fellow-countrymen who, in spite of having all the ways and means, have systematically (not to say criminally) denied us their help . . .' Victory was foreseen through the vastly larger resistance movement in the cities, overwhelmingly middle class in composition. This calculation was behind the ill-fated general strike of April 9, 1958. Castro's manifesto of March 12, 1958, read in part: '2. That the strategy of the final stroke should be based on the general revolutionary strike, to be seconded by military action . . .' It failed because the middle class could not carry off a general strike. Only the workers and trade unions could do so, and they refused mainly for two reasons: They were doing too well under Batista to take the risk, and the official Cuban Communists deliberately sabotaged the strike because they had not been consulted

and no attempt was made to reach an agreement with them in advance. The National Committee of the Communist Party, known since the last war as the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), issued a statement on April 12, 1958, a copy of which I have seen, blaming the fiasco on the 'unilateral call' for the strike by the leadership of Castro's 26th of July Movement in Havana under Faustino Pérez.

In the mountains at this time, Mills<sup>1</sup> was told, the armed men under Castro numbered only about 300. Four months later, in August 1958, the two columns commanded by Majors Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, which had been entrusted with the mission of cutting the island in two – the biggest single rebel operation of the entire struggle – amounted, according to Guevara, to 220 men (*Verde Olivo*, October 8, 1960). Sartre<sup>2</sup> was told that the total number of *barbudos*<sup>3</sup> in Cuba during the whole campaign was only 3,000.<sup>4</sup> Castro's fighting force was until the end so minute that it hardly deserves to be called an army, let alone a 'peasant army', and even the influx of the last four or five months failed to give it anything like a mass character. In any case, the character of an army is established by its leadership and cadres, which remained almost exclusively middle class throughout, and not by its common soldiers – or every army in the world would similarly be an army of the peas-

### Notes:

1. C. Wright Mills, who in 1960 published a collection of interviews with Cuban revolutionary leaders under the title *Listen, Yankee!* (Editor's note)
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, whose series of newspaper articles about his visit to Cuba in March 1960 was later published as the book *Sartre on Cuba*. (Editor's note)
3. The *barbudos* (the 'bearded ones') were those who fought in the mountains. (Editor's note)
4. Even this figure may be vastly inflated. The true number was probably closer to 1,000 than to 3,000. But even Sartre's figure serves to make the point.
5. The cream of the jest is that Guevara is authority for the statement that the *campesinos* of the Sierra Maestra, from whom the rebel army was first recruited, 'came from that part of this social class which shows its love for the land and its possession most aggressively, that is, which shows most perfectly the petty-bourgeois spirit' (*Verde Olivo*, April 9, 1961). Thus, the rebel army was initially made up of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, at least in spirit! ■

antry and proletariat.<sup>5</sup>

How could such a small band 'defeat' Batista's army of over 40,000?

The answer is that it did not defeat Batista's army in any military sense. It succeeded in making Batista destroy himself. Until the spring of 1958, life in most of Cuba went on much as usual. But the fiasco of the April strike forced Castro to change his tactics. Disappointed in his hopes of a mass uprising, he shifted over to full-scale guerrilla warfare – bombings, sabotage, hit-and-run raids. Batista's answer to the terror was counter-terror. The army and secret police struck back blindly, indiscriminately, senselessly. The students, blamed as the main troublemakers, were their chief victims. It became safer for young men to take to the hills than to walk in the streets. The orgy of murders, tortures and brutalities sent tremors of fear and horror through the entire Cuban people and especially the middle-class parents of the middle-class students.

This universal revulsion in the last six months of Batista's rule penetrated and permeated his own army and made it incapable of carrying out the offensive it launched in May against Castro's hideout. As Mills's book says, Batista's army 'just evaporated'. The engagements between the two sides were so few and inconclusive that Batista's abdication caught Castro by surprise. The real victor in this struggle was not Castro's 'peasant army' but the entire Cuban people. The heaviest losses were suffered by the largely middle-class urban resistance movement, which secreted the political and psychological acids that ate into Batista's fighting force; Sartre was told that Batista's army and police killed 1,000 *barbudos* in the last clashes in the mountains and 19,000 in the urban resistance movement.

Castro's guerrilla tactics, then, aimed not so much at 'defeating' the enemy as at inducing him to lose his head, fight terror with counter-terror on the largest possible scale, and make life intolerable for the ordinary citizen. The same terror that Castro used against Batista has been used against Castro. And Castro has responded with counter-terror, just as Batista did. ■

## From Castroism: Theory and Practice

# An 'Agrarian Revolution'?

**G**uevara's theory, however, may be more useful for the problems it raises than for the problems it solves.

At best, and on its own terms, the theory of the 'agrarian revolution' applies to only a single phase of the Cuban revolutionary process. This process began, according to the official Castroite version, at least as early as 1953, with the attack on the Moncada army post. For the next three years, there was admittedly no contact with the peasantry at all. The first peasant officially to join the guerrilla force in the Sierra Maestra was Guillermo García, in December 1956.<sup>1</sup> The reinforcements sent from Santiago de Cuba to the Sierra Maestra in March 1957 were urban products, not peasants. Thereafter, for several more months, the peasant recruits increased slowly. According to Castro, the peasants 'made our victory certain' by March 1958, when the rebel force numbered 160 men with arms.<sup>2</sup> It may be assumed, then, that the peasant influx into the Rebel Army took place toward the end of 1957 or the beginning of 1958. But the influx was never very great. Castro has said that he had 300 men with arms in May 1958, and that the 'decisive battles' of the war were fought with 'fewer than 500 armed men'.<sup>3</sup> In his January 1959 talk, Guevara himself implied that the guerrilla fighters had not fully identified themselves with the peasants until after the April 1958 strike failure, only nine months from the end of the war.

In terms of the guerrilla force, then, the 'agrarian revolution' did not gather much momentum until 1958. And by the middle of 1960, according to Guevara, industrialisation had superseded agrarian reform as the main objective of the Castro regime, as a result of which 'the peasants have fully completed the first historic stage', giving way, in effect, to the proletariat as

the leading class in the revolution.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Guevara's 'agrarian revolution' on its own showing can account for only about two and a half or three years out of at least seven. It is so wedded to guerrilla warfare that it seems irrelevant for the period before and after. At best, it is a theory of a portion or a phase of the Cuban revolution, not of the whole.

But even in this modified form, its validity may be questioned.

There is clearly a vast difference between the proportion of peasants in Castro's guerrilla force and the proportion of guerrillas in the Cuban peasantry. Even if the proportion of peasants in his guerrilla force was relatively large, the proportion of guerrillas in the Cuban peasantry was extremely small. There were 50,000 peasants in the Sierra Maestra alone, and at least 500,000 agricultural workers in all of Cuba. Besides the 500 or so peasants that may have fought with the guerrillas in the very last stage, there were some thousands more who helped the guerrilla cause in one form or another. Still, Castro's active peasant backing was so limited in terms of the peasantry or agricultural population as a whole that it can hardly serve to support the theory of an 'agrarian revolution'. Much more to the point than the proportion of peasants among the revolutionists would be the proportion of revolutionists among the peasantry.

Moreover, most of the peasant recruits came from the Sierra Maestra region and were, therefore, atypical and unrepresentative of the agricultural population. The *montuno* was notoriously the poorest, the most backward, the most illiterate of the Cuban peasants. He knew almost nothing, wrote the Castroite geographer Antonio Núñez Jiménez, 'of the progress of the modern era: no radio, no newspapers, no television, no motor transportation, no

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### An 'Agrarian revolution'?

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electricity', and scraped out 'a backward and miserable life'.<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, the peasantry of the Sierra Maestra did not mean by 'agrarian reform' what it came to mean for Castro and Guevara. 'Co-operatives' and 'state farms' were the last things in these peasants' minds. They merely wanted to own the land that they worked on, no more and no less. Later, Guevara tried to set the record straight: 'The soldiers that made up our first rural guerrilla army came from that part of this social class which shows its love for the land and its possession most aggressively, that is, which shows most perfectly the petty-bourgeois spirit; the *campesino* fights because he wants land; for himself, for his sons, to manage it, to sell it, and to enrich himself through his work.'<sup>6</sup> Agrarian reform, Sierra Maestra-style, was little more than the primitive yearn-

ing of the peasantry for the land, hardly a world-shaking discovery. A true agrarian revolution would have been based not on the atypical minority of Sierra Maestra peasants but on the sugar and tobacco workers who constituted the much more numerous majority of the agricultural population.

A glance at the available statistics shows how atypical the Sierra Maestra peasantry was:

The agricultural population, according to the census of 1953, was divided into 596,800 farm labourers and 221,900 ranchers and farmers. Of the former, about 400,000 were sugar labourers, who worked for wages and were not attached to any particular piece of land. Of the latter, renters and sharecroppers accounted for 50-60 per cent and 'squatters' (*precaristas*) for 8-10 per cent. Ever since 1937, the renters had been protected by special legislation. But the 'squatters', without any title to the land which they occupied, were most vulnerable to evic-

tion, and agrarian reform in the sense of giving them title to 'their' lands, usually less than an acre, was most meaningful to them. Over four-fifths of all the 'squatters' in Cuba were located in Oriente Province, and they particularly abounded in the Sierra Maestra region. Yet they constituted a very small percentage of the total agricultural population and even of the farming population attached to an individual piece of land, however large or small.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, too, the social or political nature of a revolution does not derive solely from numbers, especially from the number of peasants in a guerrilla force that never amounted to more than a thousand. If numbers were all that mattered, Batista's army was also made up largely of peasants, and more of them. An agrarian revolution implies a peasant party, a peasant leadership, and a peasant ideology, none of which the Cuban revolution had. It had peasant participation and support for a limited time, mainly 1958, and in a limited place, mainly the Sierra Maestra and Sierra Cristal, in Oriente Province. There was no national peasant uprising. Outside the immediate vicinity of the guerrilla forces, revolutionary activity in the country as a whole was largely a middle-class phenomenon, with some working-class support but without working-class organisations.

By themselves, the 'magic words' agrarian reform could not determine the social nature of the revolution because there is more than one kind of agrarian reform. The nature of a system determines the nature of the agrarian reform, not vice versa. In the Cuban case, the type of agrarian reform put into effect was admittedly not the type the peasants of the Sierra Maestra wanted or had been promised. To the extent that the peasants supported the revolution in the struggle for power, they did so for what proved to be the 'wrong' reasons. Castro himself has told how he was riding in an aeroplane, after taking power, when it suddenly occurred to him that the Cuban agrarian reform should be based on 'co-operatives', not on an independent, land-owning peasantry.<sup>8</sup> Even some of his closest associates were not prepared for the abrupt change of line, but once Castro had made up his mind, the 'co-operatives' became the pride and proof of the 'agrarian revolu-

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tion'.

I saw the first of these co-operatives when I travelled in Oriente Province in March-April 1960. The two I visited were not yet in operation; only the housing had been built, and the little three-room houses seemed centuries removed from the traditional huts of the peasant *guajiros*. I wrote at that time that 'for the poor illiterate, landless, outcast *guajiros*, the co-operatives represent a jump of centuries in living standards'.<sup>9</sup>

These lines have been quoted again and again by pro-Castro writers, as if they were my last words on the subject. Since the co-operatives were not yet in operation, and it was still not even clear whether they would be real co-operatives or not, what I wrote about them in the spring of 1960 tells more about my state of mind than about the actual record of the co-operatives. I was more than willing, at first glance, to give the Castro regime the benefit of the doubt, even if events proved that I was, in this respect, too generous. I may have been at fault in judging the co-operatives too hastily, but it was surely not my fault that the peasants became 'allergic' to them by the end of 1961 and that they had to be transformed into 'state farms' by the summer of 1962.

In the end, the peasants helped Castro to make *his* revolution far more than he helped them to make *their* revolution. There was nothing comparable in Cuba to the classic peasant revolutionary movement led by Zapata in Mexico in 1910. Without a peasant party or leadership,

Castro could turn the Cuban 'agrarian revolution' on and off, or define it one way in 1958 and another way in 1959. On one occasion, however, Castro praised the peasantry in such a way as to reveal what he really thought of them: 'The peasant possesses a virgin mentality, free from an assortment of influences which poison the intellects of citizens in the city. The revolution works on these fertile intellects as it works on the soil.'<sup>10</sup> It was this 'virgin mentality', which could be 'worked on' and manipulated, not the peasants' active, driving political force, that made them most useful to Castro.

But it was not long before the Castro regime stopped paying even ceremonial compliments to the peasants' 'fertile intellects'. In the Second Declaration of Havana, a basic document promulgated by Castro in February 1962, the peasants were downgraded as follows:

'But the peasantry is a class which, because of the illiterate state in which it is kept and the isolation in which it lives, needs the revolutionary and political leadership of the working class and the revolutionary intellectuals, without which it could not alone engage in the struggle and gain the victory.'<sup>11</sup>

This was, in Castro's own words, the death knell of the theory of the 'agrarian revolution'. It was, of course, a product of the 'Marxist-Leninist' phase of the revolution, but if true, it applied to the earlier phases as much as to the later ones. ■

**Notes from "Marxism and the question of 'epoch' "**

*Continued from page 33*

6. This is also reflected in Trotsky's debate with Kondratiev over the latter's theory of long waves of economic development, which Trotsky criticises for minimising 'external' or political factors. See 'A Critique of Catastrophism' in *Workers Action* No.7, p.32.
7. For more on the 'Preface' see *ibid.*, pp.34-5.
8. L.D. Trotsky, 'A School of Revolutionary Strategy' in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol.2, New Park, 1974, p.1.
9. *Ibid.*
10. See 'A Critique of Catastrophism'.
11. Trotsky, 'Report on the World Economic Crisis', p.252.
12. *Ibid.*, p.253.
13. *Ibid.*, pp.253-4.
14. R. Day, *The 'Crisis' and the 'Crash'*, New Left Books, 1981, p.48.
15. Trotsky, *op.cit.*, p.233.
16. 'The New Imperialist "Peace" and the Building of the Parties of the Fourth International' in *Fourth International*, June 1946. See also 'Fighting against Catastrophism' in *Workers Action* No.6, pp.16-17.
17. Trotsky, *op.cit.*, p.263.
18. We are concentrating on Trotsky's understanding of imperialism. Of course there were other views that also continue to influence the left today. Among these is Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism which links stagnation to an underconsumptionist argument. This argues that workers cannot afford to buy back all of what they produce and that therefore, if the expanded reproduction of capitalism is to occur, a third market must be found. This market lies in non-capitalist economies. However, the scramble to capture these markets soon leads to a situation where no further room for expansion exists and capitalist crisis ensues. This theory flatly contradicts Marx and makes the exploitation of a 'third force' more significant than the extraction of surplus value.
19. Trotsky, 'A School of Revolutionary Strategy', p.4. For a further critique of this see 'Waiting for the Big One' in *Workers Action* No.5, p.30. ■ **WA**

**Notes:**

1. Juan Hidalgo, 'Guillermo García: El primer campesino que se unió a Fidel en la Sierra Maestra', *Hoy*, July 21, 1963.
2. *Revolución*, February 25, 1959.
3. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1963.
4. *Obra Revolucionaria*, June 16, 1960, p.4.
5. *Cuba con la mochila al hombro*, Ediciones Unión/Reportaje, Havana, 1963, pp.120-21.
6. *Verde Olivo*, April 9, 1961, p.25.
7. The estimates for the renters and squatters are based on the 1946 agricultural census; no later ones seem available. The different forms of Cuban land tenure are described in Lowry Nelson, *Rural Cuba*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1950, pp.162-68.
8. *Revolución*, December 22, 1961.
9. 'The Runaway Revolution', *The Reporter*, May 12, 1960.
10. *Obra Revolucionaria*, March 7, 1961, p.24.
11. *Cuba Socialista*, March 1962, p.23. ■

# Marxism and the question of 'epoch'

by Jonathan Joseph

'With the imperialist war we entered the epoch of revolution, that is, the epoch when the very mainstays of capitalist equilibrium are shaking and collapsing' – Leon Trotsky<sup>1</sup>

It is a commonly accepted view on the left that we live in what is described as the 'epoch of wars and revolutions'. This derives from the arguments of Lenin and Trotsky, most particularly Lenin's analysis of the phase of capitalism known as imperialism (with the associated notions of the dominance of finance capital, monopolisation and colonial rivalries) and Trotsky's arguments for the 'death agony of capitalism' which culminate in his rallying call for the Fourth International. The concept of the epoch of wars and revolutions therefore bears an important relation to our understanding of capitalist developments and the prospects for socialist revolution, and continues to play a vital role in the perspectives of all those groups claiming to be Trotskyist.

In particular, we can highlight the significance of the concept of the epoch of wars and revolutions by pointing to the various ways it is used to: a) explain developments in the world economy, b) explain political developments, c) maintain the viability of a revolutionary approach and, more specifically, d) justify the notion of the Fourth International while e) providing support for the continued validity of either the actual *Transitional Programme* of the Fourth International, or else the method of transitional demands.

Unfortunately, it is not at all clear what the notion of the epoch of wars and revolutions actually means. We may point to the ambiguities contained in the concept by raising a number of preliminary questions:

- When did it begin?
- Is it the 'highest' or last 'phase' of capitalism?
- What role or weight do different 'periods' have within the context of an

epoch?

- Is it an economic or a political conception?

On the first question, it seems that most on the left consider the epoch of wars and revolutions to have begun in 1914 with the First World War. Yet this does not tie up with other factors. The 'imperialist epoch' of capitalism is said, by Lenin, to begin in the 1890s. Is the imperialist epoch the same as the epoch of wars and revolutions? Meanwhile, other phases of capitalism have been located around the Second World War (e.g., Mandel's theory of Late Capitalism). Whatever the case, it is difficult to ascertain why the epoch of wars and revolutions should be pinned down to 1914. A clear break cannot be made in economic terms so we are forced to define the epoch on purely political grounds. This, however, poses more questions than it solves. Should the epoch be defined by 1914 or 1917? Can the events of 1914 and, say, the recent Balkans war be explained within the context of the same epoch/era/period? If the answer to this is yes, then why cannot the events of 1914 also be compared to the wars and revolutions of 1848 or 1870? At the very least, the First World War seems to have more in common with such events as the Franco-Prussian or Russo-Japanese wars than it does with the Gulf or Balkan conflicts. Despite the momentous nature of the First World War, 1914 seems a strange dividing point, even on political grounds.

From this follow the questions concerning the status of an epoch. As we shall explain, it is not clear what exactly distinguishes an epoch from a period or from an era or phase. Lenin's description of imperialism is of a phase beginning in the 1890s. But if the period from 1914 onwards is the epoch of wars and revolutions, how are we to understand the years from 1890 to 1914? Do they belong to an entirely different epoch? Are they a short period of expansion within the imperialist phase? This would surely create a strange situa-

tion where the most dynamic years of capitalism are said to last for just a few decades, while the imminent collapse of capitalism has dragged on longer than any other phase.

## Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*

One of the first references to the 'epoch of wars and revolutions' is Lenin's discussion of Kautsky's *Road to Power*:

'The (Basel) Manifesto is but the fruit of the great propaganda work carried on throughout the entire epoch of the Second International; it is but the summary of all that the socialists had disseminated among the masses in the hundreds of thousands of speeches, articles and manifestos in all languages. It merely reiterates what Jules Guesde, for example, wrote in 1899, when he castigated socialist ministerialism in the event of war: he wrote of war provoked by the "capitalist pirates" (En Garde!, p.175); it merely repeats what Kautsky wrote in 1909 in his *Road to Power*, where he admitted that the "peaceful" epoch was over and that the epoch of wars and revolutions was on.'<sup>2</sup>

More explicit is Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* which draws heavily but critically on the work of the Austro-Marxist Rudolf Hilferding and the bourgeois English economist J.A. Hobson. He draws together three fundamental developments – the displacement of free capitalist competition with monopoly, the merging of bank capital and industrial capital into finance capital and, flowing from this concentration of capital, the territorial division of the world by the large capitalist powers. But while this concentration of capital initially provides a new impetus for capitalist development, the territorial element of imperialism sows the seeds for its destruction. The outbreak of the First World War reflects, for Lenin, the contradiction between monopoly capitalism and the division of the world's

territory and confirms the end of the period of capitalist expansion.

We also find that Lenin condemns imperialism in narrower economic terms, too, as parasitic capitalism with strong anarchic tendencies where monopolies do not replace free competition but exist along side it in a state of antagonism and conflict. However, an important aspect of *Imperialism* is the more political element of colonial rivalry. The transition to monopoly capitalism and the dominance of finance capital is connected to the intensification of colonial struggle, thus providing the premise for Lenin's political perspectives.

It is possible to see, therefore, why Lenin considered the First World War to be such a defining point. If an intrinsic element of the imperialist phase of capitalism is the division of the world's territory and the consequent colonial struggles, then the world will be plunged into a number of such conflicts, offering no way out for capitalism. The only option for the great powers is further division and redivision of existing markets and territories. The First World War marks the fact that, under imperialism, economic growth is no longer possible and that only wars and revolutions can follow. Writing in 1916, Lenin reaches the optimistic conclusion that 'out of the universal ruin caused by the war a worldwide revolutionary crisis is arising which, however prolonged and arduous its stages may be, cannot end otherwise than in a proletarian revolution and in its victory'.<sup>3</sup> Such a view seemed to be justified by the events of the following year, 1917, but as time passed and the Soviet Union became increasingly isolated, further questions started to be raised. Perhaps most pertinent of all is the question posed in *Imperialism* itself which is intended to seal Lenin's argument for wars and revolutions, but which in fact poses the key theoretical problem facing early Marxist theories of imperialism:

'The question is: what means other than war could there be *under capitalism* to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the

other?''<sup>4</sup>

### Trotsky's theory of capitalist crisis

Lenin's basic argument is that the territorial division of the world makes further capitalist development impossible and results instead in a period of wars and revolutions. Trotsky repeats this argument, although he now poses it within the context of the dialectic of forces and relations of production. As he wrote in 1921:

'Why did the war occur? Because the productive forces found themselves too constricted within the frameworks of the most powerful capitalist states. The inner urge of imperialist capitalism was to eradicate the state boundaries and to seize the entire terrestrial globe, abolishing tariffs and other barriers which restrict the development of the productive forces. Herein are the economic foundations of imperialism and the root causes of the war.'<sup>5</sup>

Trotsky goes on to note that the consequences of the war were more states, boundaries and tariff walls than ever before. The contradictions of imperialism intensify.

Trotsky's argument, however, is complex. He attempts to back up his political perspectives with economic analysis, as is reflected in his reports to the congresses of the Communist International. The economic element of these reports is often, as we will argue, of a rather mechanical character. At the same time, he seeks to soften the effects of such economic determinism by emphasising political or external matters.<sup>6</sup> However, Trotsky allows political factors to play a decisive role only because they are historically ordained to do so. He thus adopts Marx's schema from the 1859 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*<sup>7</sup> and argues that:

'No social system departs from the arena until it has developed the productive forces to the maximum degree attainable under the given system; and no new social system appears on the scene unless the economic premises necessary for it have already been prepared by the old social system.'<sup>8</sup>

Underlying the argument that political factors are decisive is the rather more mechanical view that they are only decisive when allowed to be so. So 1914 opens up the epoch of wars and revolutions, but this is premised on the idea of the state of the productive forces: 'Marx says that a social system must leave the scene once the productive forces – technology, man's power over nature – can no longer develop within its framework.'<sup>9</sup> It seems that as long as the productive forces can develop, capitalism is safe. Conversely, once it is established that the productive forces can no longer develop, the epoch of wars and revolutions begins. In other words, Trotsky's notion of the epoch of wars and revolutions is premised on the idea of the stagnation of the productive forces.

The idea that revolution is dependent on the stagnation of the productive forces is highly contentious and owes more to neo-Hegelian schematics than it does to a critical dialectical analysis. However, we have criticised such an approach elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> the task for the moment is to explain the economic foundations of Trotsky's reasoning.

Trotsky argues that capitalism lives by booms and crises just as a human being inhales and exhales. These cycles of boom and slump last for a decade or so and 'so long as capitalism is not overthrown by the proletarian revolution, it will continue to live in cycles, swinging up and down'. However, 'to determine capitalism's age and its general condition – to establish whether it is still developing or whether it has matured or whether it is in decline – one must diagnose the character of the cycles'.<sup>11</sup>

Trotsky's argument is that underlying the normal capitalist cycles of booms and slumps, it is possible to determine longer-term phases, which he describes as curves of development. He applies this approach to a study of England. From 1781 to 1851 the development is very slow. After the revolution of 1848 the curve of development rises steeply. Then from 1873 until 1894 there is a period of stagnation. This is followed by another boom before the fifth period begins in 1914 – 'the period of the destruction of the capitalist economy'.<sup>12</sup>

*Continued next page*



### **Marxism and the question of 'epoch'**

*Continued from previous page*

What Trotsky does is to superimpose the fluctuations of boom and slump onto underlying phases. After 1914 these fluctuations are superimposed onto a downward curve. The state of the fluctuations indicates the nature of the curve so that:

'In periods of rapid capitalist development the crises are brief and superficial in character, while the booms are long-lasting and far-reaching. In periods of capitalist decline, the crises are of a prolonged character while the booms are fleeting, superficial and speculative.'<sup>13</sup>

But these arguments are not adequately backed up and lack a coherent theoretical model. Trotsky uses a notion of capitalist equilibrium which, as Richard Day notes, is unclear and suggests the arguments of Bukharin rather than Marx.<sup>14</sup> He is unable to remain on an economic terrain and soon suggests various levels of equilibrium including class equilibrium and political equilibrium.<sup>15</sup> Equilibrium is a complex affair combining the constant disruption of crises and booms with political factors like strikes and struggles, and international developments like military and economic war.

This approach reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of Trotsky's analysis of capitalist society. It is weak in that Trotsky's theory of capitalist equilibrium is unable to establish a coherent economic premise. Having argued for a period of economic stagnation, one might wonder why revolution should inevitably follow or why it should not be possible to return to economic expansion, just as the previous period of stagnation had led to a renewed expansion. But the fact that Trotsky is therefore forced to incorporate political factors into his theory of equilibrium allows for a less mechanical approach to history.

The irony is that after the Second World War, Cannon, Healy, Mandel and other followers of Trotsky emphasised the mechanical side of his analysis by insisting that the war had 'destroyed capitalist equilibrium on a world scale, thus opening up a long revolutionary period'.<sup>16</sup>

But Trotsky had argued that:

'If we grant . . . that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say, two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be established.'<sup>17</sup>

In hindsight this is still overly dramatic and Trotsky sees this new equilibrium as based on millions of workers suffering unemployment and malnutrition, something quite the opposite of the 'never had it so good' years of the post-war consensus. However, it does indicate that Trotsky was more willing to connect his economic perspectives to concrete political factors than most of his followers.

Having said this, we return again to the weakness of Trotsky, for it starts to become clear that rather than supplementing his economic theory with political analysis, Trotsky was in fact allowing political events to dictate his economic perspectives. And this provides the basis for the whole epoch of wars and revolutions argument. For Trotsky is attempting to justify this epoch on the basis of economic stagnation. But the indicators he uses tend to be the dramatic political events of the inter-war years. The events of this period are stretched out to define a whole epoch. Yet as this 'epoch' dragged on and on, the initial political events became more and more distant. The subsequent development from 1945 until the 1970s can in no way be defined as economic stagnation, and this covers a longer span than the inter-war period. Meanwhile the post-Trotsky Trotskyists, clinging faithfully to the formulation, were deprived of any ability to explain the post-war period in economic terms.

### **Revolutionary propaganda and scientific analysis**

Our argument, therefore, is that the notion of the epoch of wars and revolutions is drawn from the events of a specific *period* and that it is defined on a political rather than a purely economic basis. Attempts to characterise the epoch in economic terms fail. The epoch cannot

be defined on the basis of the stagnation of the productive forces as the phenomenal growth of the post-war period obviously contradicts this view. Nor is it clear that the epoch of wars and revolutions can be squared with the imperialist phase of capitalism. This phase clearly began before 1914 and was acknowledged, at least in its initial phase, to have been responsible for a massive economic expansion. The fact that imperialism should eventually lead to stagnation is based, not on economic arguments, but on the political theory of colonial rivalry and the idea that economic developments cannot overcome the territorial division of the world.<sup>18</sup> However, the post-war years show that this colonial form of rivalry can be transformed into something altogether different. There has been a shift away from direct colonialism while the role of multinationals has become more prominent. The major imperialist power, the United States, still asserts its imperial hegemony through military means. But the idea that imperialism would be unable to overcome the division of the world into national boundaries must be seriously questioned.

The particular form of imperialism where major wars and revolutions were common is characteristic of the period in which Lenin and Trotsky were writing, but is not necessarily a correct characterisation of an entire epoch spanning at least the next 80 years. If the notion of territorial division and colonial rivalries is a central feature of the epoch of wars and revolutions, then it is clear that we have to supplement this conception with a new analysis of recent imperialism. It seems correct to distinguish the inter-war years and the post-war years (and now the latest neo-liberal phase) as distinct periods of imperialism.

Nevertheless, the dramatic events of the period and the arguments they produced allowed the followers of Lenin and Trotsky to abrogate the need for further economic analysis by reference to the epochal analyses of the great revolutionaries (while anyone advocating a more critical approach could be written off as having abandoned a revolutionary perspective). By maintaining the view that this is an epoch of wars and revolutions, the post-war Trotskyists

were able to ignore the precise character of the period, even when it was clear to everyone else that post-war capitalist society had not only stabilised but entered a new phase of expansion. Even now, it is possible to find members of groups as diverse as the Healyites, the Socialist Party and Socialist Outlook predicting a return to the events of the 1930s, as if this specific period is somehow key to understanding the economic events of today.

But we do not *have* to read Lenin and Trotsky in a catastrophist way. Because they were describing the momentous events of the period in graphic detail, and attempting to rally the masses in revolutionary activity, this does not mean we have to characterise an entire epoch in this way. To read Lenin and Trotsky's arguments as gospel is to ignore both the specific and the temporal nature of their work.

Lenin's *Imperialism* has a dual role. It is not only a scientific investigation of the laws of capitalist development but also a propaganda pamphlet. For this reason it is necessarily going to be upbeat and optimistic in its declarations, combining 'scientific' Marxism with revolutionary 'ideology' designed to mobilise the masses into action.

This is not to make too rigid a separation, but it is necessary to make some distinction between analysis that is of a scientific nature and propaganda that has a more ideological function. This is, after all, why revolutionaries produce pamphlets and manifestos rather than turning up on demonstrations waving copies of *Capital*. Posed in these terms, Marxists have always recognised the distinction between propaganda and analysis. We merely wish to apply this distinction to the works of Lenin and Trotsky.

Works like *Imperialism* and *The Transitional Programme* cannot be understood without grasping their propaganda function. Does this mean we reject this function and become sterile 'scientific Marxists'? Absolutely not! On the contrary, it is necessary to reaffirm the central importance of socialist ideology or propaganda as a means to mobilise forces into action. Our point is in fact the opposite, that it is the post-Trotsky Trotskyists who have failed to

recognise this distinction, instead turning propaganda statements and clarion calls into scientific fact.

The trouble, we find, as is reflected in the various analyses of recent financial crises, is that the arguments put forward by the left groups lack any real explanatory power. We may still, if we wish, continue to use the phrase 'the epoch of wars and revolutions', but what does it mean? If it means that various wars and revolutions are occurring then it is formally correct, although most other periods of history could be described in such a way too. We can call this the epoch of wars and revolutions because wars and revolutions are occurring. But this does not say much more than the phrase 'it is raining' says when it is raining. Worse still, many Trotskyists like to make forecasts of further wars and revolutions in the manner of 'it will rain'. And when eventually it does rain (maybe twenty years later) they say, 'I told you so'.

What all this misses out is a specific analysis of the period. To describe 1914 onwards as the epoch of wars and revolutions does little to explain such things as the post-war boom, the new historic blocs, the role of social democracy, the welfare state, Fordist production, Keynesian policies, deregulation, neoliberalism, the European Union or anything else.

The harsh truth is that those who talk of the epoch of wars and revolutions without making an adequate analysis of this specific period are condemned to live in the past. They are trapped in the period so brilliantly described by Lenin and Trotsky but which has undergone considerable transformation since then. This was a period which Lenin and Trotsky saw as

culminating in socialist revolution. Trotsky posed this most clearly when he claimed:

'If the further development of productive forces was conceivable within the framework of bourgeois society, then revolution would generally be impossible. But since the further development of the productive forces within the framework of bourgeois society is inconceivable, the basic premise for the revolution is given.'<sup>19</sup>

The Healyites and many others still claim the validity of such statements. They have not noticed that the productive forces have continued to develop, never mind the logical question as to whether the possibility of socialist revolution is premised on the necessity of economic stagnation.

For those who have junked this mechanical baggage we must pose the question, what is left of the concept of the epoch? If the possibility of wars and revolutions is inextricably linked to the stagnation of the productive forces (or to the contradiction between forces and relations as represented by the colonial division of the world) then what precisely is left of the Trotskyist theory of the epoch once its main theoretical foundation has been rejected? Without the notions of fettering and stagnation the epoch of wars of revolutions is rendered virtually meaningless. We can still use the phrase if we think it maintains some propaganda value. But we cannot continue to premise the possibility of socialist revolution on the idea of imminent capitalist collapse. The sweeping generalisations associated with the notion of the epoch of wars and revolutions may be useful in maintaining morale. But they are of no use in the important task of developing a correct analysis of the present period. **WA**

#### Notes:

1. L.D. Trotsky, 'Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International' in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol.1, New Park, 1973, p.226.
2. V.I. Lenin, 'Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International' (January 1916) in *Collected Works*, Vol.22, pp.108-120.
3. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Progress, 1970, p.11.
4. *Ibid.*, p.95.
5. Trotsky, *op.cit.*, p.267.

## Optimism, pessimism and Marxist economic theory

by Richard Price

In October 1998, I wrote a short article ('Britain heads into recession', Workers Action No.4) arguing on the basis of the best evidence to hand that Britain would head into a medium sized recession in the course of 1999. That view now seems a little overdrawn. Unemployment has continued to fall, inflation and interest rates have remained very low compared with previous decades, and while some branches of manufacturing have struggled, others have had sustained growth.

At the time, however, the views I and others set out in Workers Action were widely scorned on the left as 'pessimistic'; there was a high degree of consensus across the far left that the world economy was headed into the abyss. This episode highlights the kind of shallow posturing which too often passes for Marxist economic analysis.

Jonathan Joseph's article 'A Critique of Catastrophism' (Workers Action No.7) took up the problem of catastrophism in the history of the Trotskyist movement. A related issue is the failure for much of its history, stretching over eight decades, to develop talented political economists.

For a movement based upon Marxism, such a weakness is surely significant, and cannot be attributed solely to subjective failings and relative isolation. After all, there must be a question mark over a movement which subscribes to a world view in which developments within the economic base of society are held to be the ultimately decisive factor in social development, and yet which fails to provide much in the way of useful analysis of world economy.

The belief among many who identify with Trotskyism that the Far Eastern crisis of 1998 was the big bang which would both bring international capitalism to its knees and ignite the global class struggle was only the latest in a long line of such Old Moore's Almanac-type predictions. But badly flawed analysis, combined with the vain hope that a big enough crisis will bring the capitalist edifice tumbling down and power will fall into the streets, is no

basis for 'optimism'! Constantly crying wolf actually disarms the working class vanguard. It is in fact a dangerous fatalism, which glosses over the social and historical tasks of revolutionary leadership, and detracts from the importance of studying the business cycle, to which Marx devoted a great deal of attention.

The one-sided emphasis upon capitalism's tendency to crisis ignores opposite forces which lead to the restoration of equilibrium. Crisis-mongering is therefore thoroughly undialectical – despite the fact that those on the left who most frequently predict global catastrophe are often those who most loudly proclaim their adherence to dialectics.

Of course, there will from time to time be situations in which state power and centralised authority in a given state will disintegrate in the face of war, famine or other catastrophic circumstances. In parts of Africa and Asia today, the choice between socialism and barbarism is not a slogan, but a desperate reality for millions. It is also the case that most of the few revolutionary or semi-revolutionary situations in metropolitan capitalist countries in the twentieth century took place under the pressure of shattering external stimuli. But the long wait for capitalist 'breakdown' has proved almost entirely illusory, and the attempt to buttress it theoretically has been largely worthless.

This state of affairs within the movement is not just the legacy of epigones who came after Trotsky. In Trotsky's lifetime, the movement he founded lacked many economic theoreticians of high calibre. The outstanding economist of the Russian Opposition, E.A. Preobrazhensky, wrote mainly about Russian conditions. The Socialist Workers Party (USA), which for many years was the theoretical flagship of the Fourth International, had hardly any economic writers of any standing.

Although he did frequently take up economic themes in terms of their impact upon the class struggle, Trotsky wrote comparatively little of a systematic nature about economics. (Lenin's political apprenticeship, in contrast, included one large-scale work, *The Development of Capitalism in*

*Russia*, and a number of important smaller studies.) One consequence was the tendency of the Left Opposition, and later the Fourth International, to develop economic perspectives *out of* Trotsky's political prognoses rather than making an independent study of world economy. Of course, in mitigation it should be remembered that Trotsky's supporters were mainly young and relatively inexperienced.

Nonetheless, the conviction that capitalism was self evidently doomed meant that phrases like 'the death agony of capitalism' and 'the stagnation of the productive forces' became articles of faith, rather than the outcome of systematic analysis – a method which Trotsky himself would have deplored in other fields.

In Trotsky's lifetime, Trotskyism fearlessly counterposed its *politics* to those of Stalinism on a host of principled questions – the struggle against bureaucracy and fascism, the Chinese Revolution, the workers' united front, the attitude to imperialist war, the support for colonial revolution, to name but a few.

But to a significant degree, Trotskyism and Stalinism shared a common *economic* frame of reference (at least until the politics of the Popular Front in the mid-1930s) of 'the decline of capitalism' and a 'general crisis' of the capitalist order. These in turn were rooted in the early Comintern's 'optimistic' perspective of short-term revolutionary victory on an international scale.

In his dispute with Kondratiev over the theory of long waves in 1923, Trotsky argued that underlying the continuing fluctuations of the business cycle was a historic downward spiral. The disputes over capitalist stabilisation between Trotsky and his Stalinist opponents in the mid-1920s (documented in *The Third International after Lenin*) were over matters of economic emphasis rather than substance, even though the political inferences both sides drew were much more significant. Of course, the extreme instability of the inter-war years tended to underscore the perspective that capitalism was in a death agony, prolonged only by the weakness of the subjective factor.

However, by the mid-1930s, the business cycle had reasserted itself, and there were definite signs of a revival, driven in part, admittedly, by rearmament in preparation for war. Ahead lay the carnage and mass destruction of the Second World War, out of which capitalism was able to reorganise itself and lay the basis for a new and prolonged period of extended capitalist reproduction.

But by the close of the Second World War, the Trotskyists were still prisoners of their pre-war perspective. It underlay the majority view that the restoration of bourgeois democracy was impossible in Western Europe, and that Bonapartism was inevitable; it led to the abandonment of transitional politics in favour of maximalist propaganda in the face of reviving illusions in bourgeois democracy; and it underscored the notion promoted in documents such as the SWP's 1946 'American Theses' that a boom was out of the question.

Finally, of course, there was little alternative but to acknowledge belatedly the existence of a boom. For the International Committee tradition, however, it was as if a gigantic (if rather successful!) con trick had been carried out at the end of the Second World War with the Bretton Woods agreement, involving lots of paper money, controlled inflation and treachery by all sorts of opponents. According to Healyite dogma, those who admitted the organic nature of the boom were revisionists capitulating to 'impressionism' – as if the largest expansion of productive forces in human history was a matter of surface phenomena.

Finally, after a quarter of a century of boom, the long predicted 'big one' appeared to have arrived with the oil crisis of 1973. But no more than the 1930s was this a 'final crisis'. Capitalism doesn't have a sell-by date, after which it is taken off the shelves of history. After a period of great turbulence in world economy, a new equilibrium emerged, albeit one with a radically different social and political agenda.

Understanding what *has* qualitatively changed in the last two decades – approximately the period coinciding with the rise of neo-liberalism – is the most important task of Marxists in relation to political economy today. There are strong grounds for considering that the sum total of developments such as globalisation, de-

regulation, the retreat from welfarism, structural adjustment, the collapse of the former workers' states, and the relocation of much primary industry from the old to the emerging capitalist economies constitutes a new period in the history of modern capitalism.

Necessarily, Marxists who want to retain a handle on reality will have to admit that the productive forces – not least of them the working class – have grown substantially during this period, albeit in an ever more uneven fashion. While the number of second division economies has grown considerably, for those at the bottom of the pile life has deteriorated substantially, even catastrophically.

There are Trotskyists who try to maintain the idea that the productive forces have stagnated by arguing that any upswing has 'only' been as a result of increased exploitation and misery. But when was it otherwise? Capitalism is no respecter of moral imperatives. It is only necessary to go back to the Industrial Revolution to see that advances under capitalism are always paid for by those it exploits. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels paid a barbed tribute to the role of the bourgeoisie in sweeping away the relics of feudalism and developing the productive forces. 'The bourgeoisie,' they wrote, 'historically, has played a most revolutionary part.' But this progressive role of the bourgeoisie was only possible by greatly increasing the productivity of labour and consequently the rate of exploitation of the working class. However, the working class did gain some tangible benefits. There is today a broad consensus among historians that the real wages of the working class in Britain, the first industrial nation, rose slowly in the Industrial Revolution, principally through prices falling, in spite of this increased exploitation.

Those who now contend that the productive forces have stagnated for much of this century point to global pollution as an example of the productive forces of capitalism 'turning into their opposite' – i.e., becoming transformed into forces of destruction. There is undoubtedly some limited truth in this proposition. But the growing depletion of the ozone layer is nonetheless testimony to the *growth* of capitalism's productive forces across the planet. This view can even lead to romanticising the 'progressive' period of capitalism's initial upswing. If you want to see an extreme example of pollution,

take a look at a nineteenth century lithograph of industrial Salford with its dozens of chimneys belching smoke.

There is also a pervasive confusion that to acknowledge the growth of the productive forces is somehow to credit capitalism with doing a good job. On the contrary! As Marxists, we argue that socialised production under the control of the working class would develop the productive forces beyond anything capitalism can achieve, and at a fraction of the human cost. Capitalism continues to develop the productive forces in its own lawless and brutish fashion in the interests of a tiny minority of humanity. As Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society... Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.'

If we go back to the first two decades of the twentieth century, there was enormous vitality in Marxist political economy. Theorists such as Hilferding, Parvus, Kautsky, Lenin, Luxemburg and Bukharin all strove to develop theories of imperialism which would fit the rapid changes within capitalism. But the combined effect of the victory of the Russian Revolution, the untimely death of Lenin and the Stalinist counter-revolution resulted in paralysis. Lenin's short pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* passed from being a useful summary of developments to being a biblical text, which couldn't be questioned by the faithful.

To develop Marxist economic theory requires the ditching of many of the old ingrained habits of the revolutionary left, among them the tendency to flag up empirical data to demonstrate looming disaster, while suppressing those indicating the opposite. Proper weight must be given to the study of the business cycle – instead of scanning the heavens for confirmation of a pre-ordained outcome. Central to renovating Marxism must be the development of a theory of imperialism consistent with the rapacious yet non-colonial global capitalism of the twenty-first century. **WA**

## From post-war consensus to neo-liberal offensive

# Fighting under new conditions

In a period characterised by defeats for the working class, capitalist advance and the decline of the left, **Nick Davies** argues that Marxists must begin the vital task of renovating their theory – while maintaining a fighting presence in the labour movement – or risk becoming an endangered species

**T**he cosy world we thought would go on forever, where full employment would be guaranteed by a stroke of the Chancellor's pen, cutting taxes, deficit spending – that cosy world is gone. . . . what is the cause of unemployment? Quite simply and unequivocally it is caused by paying ourselves more than the value of what we produce. . . . We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists.' (James Callaghan, 'Speech to Labour Party Conference', September 28, 1976.)<sup>1</sup>

If the recession and oil crisis of 1973-74 were a brutal reminder that the post-war capitalist boom had run into the sand, then this speech, made by the then Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, indicated that the array of political and economic assumptions predicated by that boom were also to be done away with. In other words: 'You can't spend your way out of a crisis.' Hard times were back. Hard times, in the form of long-term mass unemployment, harassment from the dole office, and poverty-related diseases that an older generation hoped they would never see again.

The post-war boom and its 20-year, crisis-ridden aftermath is *the* central reference point, not to say battleground, in British politics over the past 50 years. Liberal Tories such as Macmillan and Heath saw consumerism and the welfare state as one-nation Conservatism in ac-

tion. Right-wing Tories such as Thatcher and Enoch Powell saw it as a betrayal: an inflationary boom accompanied by an increase in state power, a collapse in moral standards (sic) and a decline in imperial power. The Labour Party saw it as proof that capitalism could be reformed, or at least managed in a way that satisfied its working class base while marginalising those forces to its left. The trade union leadership saw the boom as legitimising its role as mediator between capital and labour. For millions of working class people, and many middle class people as well, the boom meant better, and free, medical care, a welfare state, an end to slum housing, and the chance for further and higher education. These advances, while beset by underfunding and bureaucratism, meant that millions could enjoy living standards beyond the dreams of their grandparents. For the past two decades, until the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader, the contending political forces have sought to return to this golden age, or to disavow it as a golden age that never was.

The policies forced on Callaghan and his Chancellor, Denis Healey, by the Treasury, the banks, the IMF and, by extension, the US Treasury in 1976 are seen as the earliest form of what became known, broadly, as Thatcherism, the latest version of neo-liberal supply side economics, based on the primacy of the free market. Callaghan and Healey stood firmly on the right wing of the Labour Party, but they were not reliable. They were still attempting to pursue the policy of containing wages by agreement with the trade union leaders, and their party

was divided, with a hostile and growing left wing. So they had to be replaced – hence the Thatcher-led *tsunami* of the 'free' economy and strong state.

It is important to realise that this onslaught was not simply a change of policy by the ruling class; it was a change in the *way* that it ruled. Since the end of the Second World War it had maintained its hegemony by constructing a bloc, involving, in Britain, finance and industrial capital, social-democracy and the trade union leadership. This hegemonic bloc was not an arbitrary set of choices, or simply a set of alliances. The post-war bloc reflected the material reality of capitalist rule in Western Europe between, roughly, 1947 and 1970, which was based on a consensus around welfarism, a degree of economic planning and intervention, participation by trade unions in pay bargaining, and consumerism. This in turn was not purely a sign of liberalisation on the part of the ruling class, although it generally involved the predominance of social democrats, Christian democrats and, in Britain, Tories such as Macmillan, Butler and Heath. The post-war boom was based on the destruction of fixed and variable capital by the Second World War, a labour shortage, the massive dominance of US capitalism and the need to create markets for the US in Western Europe. The creation of welfare states was also, of course, a result of the cold war and the bourgeoisie's fear of communism. But once the boom had run its course the conditions for the post-war hegemonic bloc were no more. It was time to dissolve that bloc and create an-

other, one which would reflect the new realities of capitalist rule. The Tory Party, the principal party of British capitalism, had reinvented itself as a party of welfare and returned to power in 1951. It reinvented itself once more under Thatcher, who made obvious her contempt for the post-war consensus-mongers in her own party.

It is worth looking at how this shift occurred. Its origins lie in the century-long conflict within the British ruling class between what can be described, in shorthand, as the domestic economy on the one hand, and on the other the banks and other financial institutions whose wealth is invested abroad: the overseas lobby, sometimes described as the City plus the Foreign Office. During the Second World War this conflict was suspended when trade and capital movements were centrally controlled. After the war these controls remained for a time, and since the early 1950s there had been a piecemeal attempt to wrest the City free from any kind of government control. This achieved partial success in the Heath government, resulting in a credit boom, the inflationary tab for which was picked up by the next Labour government. This government was beset with troubles, not all of its own making. The City, Treasury and Bank of England demanded wage controls and cuts in public spending to reduce the 27 per cent inflation inherited from Heath. In alliance with certain Tory politicians and members of the secret state, this involved an unprecedented campaign of conspiracy, intrigue, 'psy-ops' and destabilisation. This was a time when retired generals were setting up private armies of would-be strikebreakers and Tony Benn had his rubbish searched. (It is important to point out, however, that these attempts to discredit an elected government did not justify the bizarre military coup paranoia of Gerry Healy's WRP.) Tory politicians and City and Treasury representatives attempted to influence the US government against any further IMF loans to Britain. The size of any IMF loans depended on the extent to which Labour was prepared to cut the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) – the gap between government spending and revenues from taxation. It seems that the Treasury, in February

1976, deliberately whipped up a sense of crisis, rigging its figures by double-counting certain items to show that the PSBR was eating up 60 per cent of Britain's Gross Domestic Product, whereas the true figure was 46 per cent. The famous IMF loan of 1976 has entered contemporary British mythology, accepted by the Tories and New Labour as the bailing out of a spendthrift Labour government by the IMF – a national humiliation which, together with the so-called Winter of Discontent, paved the way for Thatcher to come to the rescue. The reality was more interesting. The cuts demanded by the IMF were all restored the following year and only half the IMF loan was used, the rest being repaid. The IMF's deflationary prescription for the Callaghan government was keeping the pound competitive (i.e., cheap) and controlling Domestic Credit Expansion (in other words, imposing controls on bank lending). Of course, both these were against the interests of the City, which wanted a strong pound to attract money into London and total freedom for the banking sector. The Treasury and the City's preferred monetary indicator was M3<sup>2</sup>, and by 1977 they had succeeded, by a series of manoeuvres, in getting the government to ditch the IMF prescription and adopt M3. Behind this arcane economic argument lay a power struggle. The City liked M3 because it gave it control over economic policy. The City could buy gilts (government debt), but if it chose not to M3 would rise, and so the City would demand, in return for buying more gilts, a tightening of monetary policy – i.e., higher rates of interest, meaning that the banks could charge more for lending. If this looks like a racket, that's because it was one. The Treasury liked M3 because it included the PSBR. Therefore, as well as making the City rich, M3 fulfilled the Treasury's aim of cutting spending and borrowing. The cuts started here.

The other factor was North Sea oil. In the 1970s some Labour politicians had looked forward to the oil revenues as a foolproof way of expanding the domestic economy. But this is not what the City had in mind. The City wanted to use the oil to create a strong pound (Sterling would now be a petrocurrency). It advocated the abolition of exchange controls,

so that money could leave the City to balance the oil money coming in. And so it was. By the third year of Thatcher's first government the Tories had abolished exchange controls; abolished restrictions on bank lending; abolished restrictions on building society lending, and abolished the Reserve Assets Ratio, which had made banks hold at least 12.5 per cent of their deposits in some form of liquid assets. The effect of this was the vast and destructive credit boom of the 1980s, a flood of investment into the City and its expansion into Docklands, and a corresponding flood of investment overseas.<sup>3</sup> The high pound and the high interest rates used to attain the Tories' money supply targets resulted in the recession of 1980-81. Manufacturing output fell by 25 per cent and cuts in housing, health and social security cast millions into poverty. As Victor Keegan pointed out in the *Guardian*, 'Most of it [the North Sea oil revenue], in the supreme irony of economic history, has gone to pay out unemployment benefit to those who would not have lost their jobs if we had not discovered it in the first place.'<sup>4</sup>

As an economic theory, Thatcher's 'monetarism' was a primitive notion that controlling inflation was reducible to controlling the money supply. In practice, it was austerity for the poor and Keynesianism for the rich. Supposed control of the money supply meant letting the money suppliers off the lead. It does not mean there are 'good' domestic capitalists and 'wicked' overseas capitalists, whatever the disquiet of the CBI during this recession, or that these struggles and manoeuvres took place in a vacuum. This was the nuts and bolts of the dissolution of the previous hegemonic bloc. It should not be seen as a cunning plan by the ruling class to dismantle the existing hegemonic bloc and build a new one from scratch, but as a process of realignment and transformation which corresponded to the need for British capitalism to restructure. This involved a series of legal controls on trade union activity; attacks on the trade union base in industry and the public sector; the dismantling of hard-won gains in health, education and welfare; the use of mass unemployment to undermine union mili-

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### Fighting under new conditions

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tancy and demobilise the working class; and a strengthening of the state apparatus to deal with the inevitable results of these attacks. The aim was to restore profitability to British capitalism, partly by simply shedding much of the industrial sector and increasing the rate of exploitation in that which remained, partly by the looting and asset stripping of former nationalised industries and services. It has to be said that this project was remarkably unsuccessful even by its own standards. The problems that dogged British capitalism in the 1950s and 60s are still there: underinvestment, low productivity of labour, and a short-termist, pocket-lining *rentier* culture.

A new hegemonic bloc has been created. It is based on the absolute supremacy of the City – the banking sector, dominated by the overseas lobby – which operates virtually free of any legal or political sanction, and is arrogantly independent of the rest of civil society. Its creed is the absolute primacy of the market, and an authoritarian, unaccountable state machine. It was built on the wreckage of mining communities, steel towns, shipyards and the engineering industry. Under its wheels are hospitals, schools, and public transport.

Industrial capitalism is of course present in the new bloc, but in a subordinate position. Much of Britain's former industrial base has never recovered from 1980-81. The British ruling class, it appears, is happy to see the huge profits roll into the City, even if in Scotland, Wales and the north of England nothing much is produced at all. Eddie George, the governor of the Bank of England, was rather more honest than he meant to be when he admitted the political necessity of using higher interest rates to reduce inflation in the south, which at the same time increased unemployment elsewhere. Also included, but subordinate, in this new bloc is that layer known by the convenient shorthand of 'middle England', many of whom travel to the City every day from the ring of counties that service it, and the skilled workers won to Thatcher in the 1980s, and to Blair in the 1990s. The latter were crucial to the success of the Thatcher and

Blair projects. Tax cuts have left them relatively better off than they were 20 years ago. They still describe themselves as working class, but identify less than before with the labour movement, and even less with union militancy. It was this cleavage in the labour movement that enabled Thatcher to launch her assault on the living standards of the poorest sections of the working class, the result of which has been a marked increase in poverty, homelessness and poor health.

The trade union leaders, who once sat on boards for this and that, were cowed and marginalised under Thatcher. Blair and his lackeys Mandelson and Byers treat them with almost open contempt, consulting them as little as possible, except when they absolutely need to enlist their help in selling yet another betrayal to trade unionists and Labour Party members. It is difficult to know where defeat ends and collaboration begins with the TUC leaders. It was their failure, or refusal, to defend their members against the employers and the Tories which led to their own eclipse. While there is plenty of huffing and puffing from Edmonds and Bickerstaffe, TUC general secretary John Monks greeted the news that strikes were at their lowest level since 1891, and that recognition deals were on the increase, as proof that unions are 'responsible' – as opposed, presumably, to being 'effective'. But despite the best intentions of the TUC leadership, there will be tensions. A straw in the wind was the number of anti-government motions on privatisation at last year's TUC congress, suggesting a more open conflict between Blair's allies and those sections of the bureaucracy feeling the pressure from their rank and file. The AEEU's Ken Jackson had barely finished a wistful speech about an end to strikes altogether when his own members organised an unofficial walkout over their annual pay deal.

The most significant factor is social-democracy because, in Britain, it is reinventing itself out of existence. New Labour is now the principal political expression of the new bloc. Blair glories in his worship of the free market and his admiration for the rich, mirrored by his contempt for trade unionists and the public sector. Gone is the talk of a modern,

'stakeholder' capitalism. Now it is just capitalism. New Labour has put the Bank of England outside democratic control. It is extending privatisation. It has retained that corporate welfare scheme, the Private Finance Initiative, and there are other private sector attacks on education (Education Action Zones) and local government (Best Value). The anti-union laws are almost all intact, the so-called Freedom of Information Bill defers to the Whitehall secrecy culture, and the Asylum Bill could have been written by Norman Tebbit. The attacks on what remains of the welfare state are continuing. Previous Labour governments had been right wing; they were defenders of capital, but they had a working class base. It was the electoral considerations arising from this base that provoked, from time to time, differences with the City and the Treasury. Usually, they backed down, but at least they argued with them in the first place. However, the policies and project of New Labour are of a different character altogether: a sustained and systematic assault on the post-war settlement. This involved accepting and perpetuating the lie that a high spending Labour government caused the inflation of the 1970s, although this was not enough on its own to win the 1992 election. The catalyst was the election of Blair as Labour leader after the death of John Smith, the City's support for greater European monetary union, and the Tories' implosion over this same question. In an ironic reversal of the 1976-79 period, the Tories' incompetence, exhaustion and seemingly insoluble differences over Europe have made them unreliable, not to say unelectable. On the other hand, the pro-Euro City now knows that it can trust Blair and Brown with its interests, not to mention its money. Under Blair and his coterie, Labour is in a process of transition to being a bourgeois party with working class support, like the US Democrats. This process is not yet complete. The defeat and marginalisation of the Labour left suggests that it will be completed, though not without opposition. The process of reinvention will involve tensions, and the outcome will be determined by the class struggle, and structural changes within the working class. It is the interaction between all these factors that will build

and consolidate the hegemonic bloc.

New Labour's project to demobilise the labour movement, building on the successes of Thatcher, is based in part on a professed 'non-ideology'. For New Labour, to be 'ideological', in other words, to believe in trying to change society, is to be cranky and old-fashioned. The basic arguments have been settled and politics is now reducible to a series of managerial problems, to be 'sorted out' by 'experts' and technocrats. This explains Blair's bringing into positions of influence all sorts of unelected academics, business people and politicians from other parties. But while Tories and Liberal Democrats are brought into the political 'big tent', socialists are an embarrassment, to be left outside in the cold at all costs.

Blair is in the vanguard, internationally, in forging this new hegemonic bloc, with the other Anglo-Saxon countries, principally the USA and New Zealand. Elsewhere in Western Europe, the process of creating a new basis for capitalist hegemony is less well advanced. The weaknesses and crises in British capitalism meant that the attacks started earlier than elsewhere. The attacks on the welfare state, initiated in Britain by the Tories in the 1980s, did not begin until the 1990s in France. Germany, Italy and the Scandinavian countries, where an additional ingredient is the convergence criteria in the Maastricht Treaty. Blair and his ally Gerhard Schröder are busy preaching the free market gospel to the dinosaurs of European social democracy, with their quaintly outdated ideas about full employment and government intervention in industry.

Regardless of the various national peculiarities, the overarching features of this present period are the collapse of the USSR, and with it the perception among many workers that society could, whatever the faults of the USSR, be organised differently, and the dominance of the international free trade regime – at the centre of which is the World Trade Organisation – which means that trans-national companies are above any real legal or political control and that governments

can use the threat of punitive sanctions by the WTO as a reason not to introduce domestic legislation contrary to their interests.

Turning to specifics, in Britain we have about five million union members less than 20 years ago, some of the most repressive anti-union laws in Europe – which most of the union leaders won't oppose – and a minuscule level of strike action. We have 'flexibility', team-working and casualisation. We have workers pushing 30 who have never been in a union. The average age of a worker is 34, while the average age of a trade unionist is 46. Centres of working class militancy have been broken up, and the majority of new jobs created appear to be in call centres. Electricians, builders and fitters from the engineering industry or local authority DLOs are forced into self-employment. While once they were in union meetings, they are now chasing jobs or working out their VAT. We have local councils with no power, and a Labour Party with a rapidly diminishing internal democracy which is intent on replacing the frequently tedious and exasperating culture of meetings and political discussion with something far worse: the stifflingly authoritarian and conformist culture of mailshots and plebiscites. The left groups have an ageing and declining membership, and some are collapsing amid factionalism and recrimination.

Our symbols and language have been stolen from us by Stalinism, and then appropriated as fashion accessories or advertising slogans. Even liberal newspapers talk about the 'collapse of Marxism', and younger journalists and academics regard it as quaintly old-fashioned. In Eastern Europe and in the Labour Party to be 'modern' means to be pro-market. This is unnerving to some, who are used to thinking of themselves as progressive and the opposition as reactionary. Many former activists have resorted to internal emigration – they cannot or will not put their heads above the parapet, but will moan in the pub or shout at the TV.

Almost as a direct response to the weakness and crisis of the labour

movement is the dramatic growth in direct action. These days, impatient young people who despise the status quo won't join a semi-moribund, authoritarian, conservative Trotskyist sect. Many of those involved in direct action campaigns distrust structures and apparatuses, and would run a mile from anything resembling a 'Leninist' party, but are still able to organise more people, more efficiently, than any number of 'democratic centralist' organisations. The J18 and Euston actions show that they have nothing but hatred and contempt for capitalism and its representatives. With some, there is a distrust of all things 'political', right *and* left. However, many of the issues they raise are, or should be, labour movement concerns. Whilst the J18/Euston organisers made enterprising use of the internet, there are some elements of Luddism – a distrust of technological progress, which is seen as intrinsically bound up with the alienating rule of capital rather than as something to be fought over, something which socialists could utilise and make accountable. An effective labour movement, with a strong left wing, could work with them, harnessing their energy and talents and challenging their anti-political ethos, as well as their strategy and tactics.

Much of this account of the post-war boom and its aftermath might seem laboured and uncontroversial, and, to militants who have spent the past 20 years fighting a desperate rear-guard action, unnecessary. Isn't it blindingly obvious that there was a colossal economic boom and that the last 20 years have been a disaster for the labour movement? Nevertheless, any serious political analysis has to start with a consideration of the period, and that means not just where we are, but how we got here. The tragedy is that much of the revolutionary left never got their heads round the *last* period. During the greatest increase in the productive forces the world has ever seen, many of the followers of Leon Trotsky appeared to be locked in a time-warp of imminent global economic catastrophe, apparently unable to develop revolutionary Marxism be-

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### Fighting under new conditions

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yond Trotsky's somewhat apocalyptic perspectives of the late 1930s. They might have observed the effects of the boom in the high street, at home, or in the pub, but they did not feel the need to incorporate these observations into their political perspectives. In his book *Reluctant Revolutionary*, Harry Ratner tells a cracking story about how, at a meeting in 1957 or '58, shortly before a third successive Tory election victory, he was advised by Gerry Healy, Bill Hunter and the Banda brothers – the leadership of what was soon to become the Socialist Labour League (later the Workers Revolutionary Party) – that 'soon, in the revolution, we shall be shooting Pabloites'.<sup>5</sup> These Wolfie Smith prototypes were so adrift of the real world that they were beyond parody. Such a monumental failure to grasp the political realities of the last period hardly augured well for the following one. And so it proved. Healy's military coup paranoia of the early 1970s was followed, after his expulsion, by a belief in his former organisation that the 1984-85 miners' strike, the most catastrophic defeat for the British working class since 1926, represented a victory for the NUM! Militant's millenarianism was accompanied by the belief that, 'objectively', millions of workers would be 'forced' into the Labour Party, while the SWP, for reasons known only to Tony Cliff, declared that the period before the defeat of the miners' strike was a 'downturn, while the period following the defeat of that strike was an 'upturn'! Of course, many on the far left refused to peddle such gobbledegook and attempted to grapple with the real world, although, for the most part, they did not analyse the changes of the past 25 years in terms of hegemonic blocs. This is largely because they had been walled off from the thought, and its basic categories, of the best-known Marxist theorist of hegemony, Antonio Gramsci, by the sectarianism and narrow philistinism of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. However, without necessarily accepting *in toto* Gramsci's understanding of hegemony (or indeed

any other question), it is in these terms that the period following the Second World War can best be analysed. Capitalist rule should be recognised as being based not just on coercion (the 'armed bodies of men'), but on consent exercised through the construction of historic or hegemonic blocs.<sup>6</sup>

Having analysed the nature of the period we are in, it is then necessary for us to establish two separate, but related, propositions. The first of these is that the present period of capitalist rule, despite the triumphalism, is fundamentally less stable than the post-war boom. It was, of course, the instability following the end of the boom that resulted in the attempts to restore profitability and, therefore, the attacks on the working class. In 25 years there have been three world recessions, together with the local economic collapse in South East Asia. But, as we have already stated in *Workers Action*, this instability does not necessarily advance the cause of socialism. Gramsci pointed out the problems with the belief that it does:

'It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life.'<sup>7</sup>

Gramsci criticised Rosa Luxemburg's view that an economic crisis could precipitate a general crisis leading to revolution as 'economistic' and 'spontaneist'. According to Luxemburg, he wrote, economic crises had the following effects:

1. they breach the enemy's defences, after throwing him into disarray and causing him to lose faith in himself, his forces, and his future;
2. in a flash they organise one's own troops and create the necessary cadres – or at least in a flash they put the existing cadres (formed, until that moment, by the general historical process) in positions which enable them to encadre one's scattered forces;
3. in a flash they bring about the necessary ideological con-

centration on the common objective to be achieved. This view was a form of iron economic determinism, with the aggravating factor that it was conceived of as operating with lightning speed in time and in space. It was thus out and out historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Gramsci was not saying that economic crises cannot result in opportunities for revolutionaries. The first of the above quotes makes that clear. Moreover, he distinguished between 'conjunctural' crises – occasional or immediate – and 'organic' crises – fundamental, involving a rupture between structure and superstructure and therefore a crisis in hegemony in the ruling class.

This leads on to the second proposition: that whether or not it would advance the cause of socialist revolution, a wholesale capitalist collapse involving the impossibility of further developing the productive forces is unlikely to occur. Events in the past 60 years have already made a mockery of some of Trotsky's more apocalyptic assessments in the *Transitional Programme*. Those who premise the socialist revolutionary project on such a collapse are barking up the wrong tree. This is not to say that there will not continue to be troughs as well as peaks, as capitalism goes through its convulsive, periodic crises. Of course, capitalism has inherent tendencies towards crisis, such as the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. The point here is that these are *tendencies*. The problem is that many on the left treat them as iron laws. We argue in 'A Critique of Catastrophism' in *Workers Action* No.7 that if capitalism is to survive, it cannot allow the productive forces to stagnate, or, more precisely, it has to counter the stagnating tendencies that undoubtedly exist within capitalism. Unlike feudalism, for instance, it is a dynamic system. To survive, it must constantly revolutionise the instruments of production, and therefore the relations of production and of society. This article also refers to the determinism of Marx's 1859 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*', which separates the devel-

opment of the productive forces from the social relations in which they are developed, ascribing to the productive forces an autonomy which they cannot have. This idea, heavy with neo-Hegelianism, has been seized on by Stalinist and Trotskyist alike. The end-of-the-worldism of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists amounts to an abdication from thought and from leadership. It prevents them from asking why, despite instability, recession and crisis, capitalism survives, how it is able to legitimate itself, and how this legitimation can be combated.

Our critique begs one very obvious question: if socialist revolution is not premised by a failure of capitalism to develop the productive forces any further, and if the edifice of bourgeois power cannot be kicked in like a rotten door, then what is the premise of socialist revolution? How can it be achieved, here in Western Europe? Revolutionary Marxists need to look at how, despite a succession of crises, capitalism is able to legitimate itself through its structures and ideology. This involves looking at reformism. We must reject the crude conception that reformism is simply a trick, a swindle. Its basis is surely more than the narrowly conceived ability to provide concessions when the economy is doing well. Otherwise, how is reformism able to sustain itself when there is, apparently, no basis for reforms? Looking at reformism involves looking at how capitalism is able to maintain its hegemony, how the ideology of capitalism (e.g., its bureaucratic and technical rationalism, the right to own and dispose of means of production, to exploit, to 'manage', the notion of a fair wage, the role of the family in reproducing labour power, etc) is so thoroughly diffused that it becomes 'common sense', and the interests of the capitalist class can be represented as the interests of society as a whole:

'The "normal" exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of

the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion — newspapers and associations — which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied.'

The process of analysing and confronting bourgeois hegemony is inseparable from at least considering how the working class can establish its own hegemony. For the working class, this is a long-term perspective, but there is nothing wrong with revolutionary Marxists devoting some theoretical material and propaganda to the question, arguing for the ideological and cultural struggle which must accompany that for state power, for the need to establish a counter-culture which can challenge the hegemony of the bourgeoisie at all levels of 'civil society' (i.e., what in Marxist vocabulary is usually termed the superstructure), and for the development of a revolutionary strategy. Any such project remains in the realm of speculation and propaganda while the working class is as weak as it is now. A strong working class will attract allies, and can assume leadership. There is a relationship between the prevalence of Marxists in university departments in the 1960s and '70s and the relative strength of the working class then, as well as, of course, the existence of the USSR. By the same token we have a weak working class, a lack of confidence in other conceptions of how society can be organised, and, largely by courtesy of disillusioned Marxist academics, the intellectual fashion of post-modernism, an approach so pessimistic and abstract (not to say downright reactionary) that it makes the most library-bound Marxist of the 1960s look like a miserable workerist.

So we must start with the labour movement. Despite the terrible mood of defeat and demobilisation, the situation could be worse. The basic structures of the trade unions are still intact, and trade union membership has actually seen a slight rise. Unlike France, for example, we have a single, united trade union body. In electoral terms fascist parties are tiny.

The fightback against the Blair regime is not going to develop in a hurry, although we are now halfway through

New Labour's first term. There are signs of discontent, but these are in the electoral field. So far, we have seen only relatively short actions, threats of action that came to nothing, special cases like the Jubilee line electricians' strike, and long drawn-out disputes such as Critchley Labels which are small in scale and easy for the government to ignore. The real fightback will be in the public sector. Initially it may be tentative and localised, against Compulsory Competitive Tendering or 'Best Value' in a particular council, for example. Obviously it will be necessary to try to link any such struggles up. What will worry Blair more is widespread discontent in health and education around pay and conditions, related to government fiscal policy, and possibly against divisive policies such as performance related pay for teachers.

We need to raise transitional demands. In the present period, these will be almost entirely minimal or basic demands. What is important is that for their realisation they will require some form of *action*: reversal of privatisation of utilities and transport, no privatisation of the London underground, a living minimum wage, full employment, for example. This does not mean we should tail the left wing of the TUC, but involves continually pushing demands forward, beyond the limitations of single issues, to relate them to other issues. At present, it would be ultra-left to adopt the traditional schema that a set of transitional demands in itself forms a 'bridge' to the taking of power. What we can work towards right now is for working class organisations to be able to recover some of their combativity in the fight for immediate demands, which would of course be a great step forward. Transitional demands in this period should be treated as a 'bridge to a bridge', therefore, or possibly the start of a very long bridge.

This perspective will, of course, involve a conflict with the new realists in the union leaderships, and a fight against the anti-union laws, which have been crucial in intimidating and demobilising militants. Defiance of these laws, as in the Pentonville Dockers' struggle in the

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### Fighting under new conditions

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early 1970s, requires a massive advance in political consciousness from where we are now. It won't happen next week.

This perspective will disappoint some, who will think it overly cautious. But to kid ourselves that the election of a Labour government, especially *this* Labour government, means that we can pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and resume where we left off in about 1980 means living in a fool's paradise. Even limited, modest remobilisation and combativity around certain basic aims and objectives is worth millions of words of 'revolutionary' phrasemongering.

Any fightback in the trade unions will inevitably have some bearing on developments in the Labour Party, or, to put it another way, it is unlikely that any significant fightback will occur in the Labour Party without something happening in the unions first. There is discontent in the Labour ranks. This is clear from the votes for the Grassroots Alliance candidates in the NEC election over the last two years, and the low turn-out of Labour supporters at elections in 1999, caused in some areas such as Wales, at least, by disgruntled activists virtually refusing to campaign for an imposed candidate. How that discontent will take shape we cannot say. What may happen, of course, is that Blair will completely shut down the remaining democratic structures of the Labour Party, atomising the membership completely. This, and the possibility of an end to the relationship with the trade unions as it now exists (involving state funding for political parties), would force revolutionary Marxists to reassess their orientation to Labour – an orientation which, up to now, should have had a long-term, quasi-strategic character. Then, and only then, should we look at the possibilities for something like a Movement for a Socialist Party, for example. To be viable, such a project would require large numbers of activists to reach the conclusion that their beloved party was no more, and they haven't done that yet. How many will, and when, only the struggle will decide. Again, it largely depends on how the

incipient conflict between New Labour and its TUC allies and some sections of the trade union leadership works itself out. The fiasco of the far left's intervention into the European and Welsh Assembly election campaign, and the pathetic votes obtained by the candidates, tell us – if we did not already know – that at this stage an attempt to establish an electoral force independent of the Labour Party is the stuff of fantasy. Whether the build-your-own-Labour movement merchants have noticed or not, in the 1999 council elections the discontented Labour vote in Sheffield and Barnsley went to the petty-bourgeois radicals of the Liberal Democrats (who always talk more left when they're trying to pick up Labour votes in Yorkshire than when they're wooing Tory voters in Devon). Scargill's SLP picked up a derisory vote, less than a hundred in some Barnsley council seats, despite the fact that many of its members live there and the Labour leadership was facing a backlash due to its 'deselecting' some

popular councillors. In South Wales, the position was very similar, with Plaid Cymru being the beneficiary of apathy and disillusion with Labour, and the independent left vote being of telephone box dimensions. Even if the SLP had not been an unpleasant little Stalinist sect, it would have withered on the vine, because of the conditions under which it was launched. Any other new 'party' launched at this time will go the same way.

The far left seems to be polarising into two camps: on the one hand there is the stupidly desperate voluntarism which sets up 'parties' of a few hundred, or engages in kamikaze electoralism. On the other, there is a recoiling from this nonsense, and a desire for serious work to try to revive and revitalise the labour movement, starting from where it is now. This fault line passes right down the middle of some organisations, threatening to blow them apart. Revolutionary Marxists need to decide whether they want to be part of the problem or part of the solution.

**WA**

#### Notes:

1. Quoted in J. Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, Collins, London, p.426.
2. One (very wide) definition of the money supply.
3. *Guardian*, September 21, 1983 (Victor Keegan): 'Figures published last week by the Bank of England show that pension funds are now investing 25 per cent of their money abroad (compared with almost nothing a few years ago) and there has been no investment at all (net) by unit trusts in the UK since exchange controls were abolished.' Quoted in Robin Ramsay, *The Prawn Cocktail Party*, Vision, 1998, p.59.
4. *Guardian*, May 16, 1983.
5. The supporters of Michel Raptis, alias Pablo, one-time leader of the Fourth International, against which Healy set up a rival faction, the International Committee of the Fourth International, in 1953. Despite or, more accurately, because of the lack of any discernible political difference, 'Pabloite' became a favourite term of abuse for Healy's opponents.
6. Gramsci defined the phenomenon of historic blocs in this way: '... the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e., stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest.' (Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1982, p.182.)
7. *Ibid.*, p.184, our emphasis.
8. *Ibid.*, p.233.
9. *Ibid.*, p.80.

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