

US/Britain hands off Syria!

Lebanon: Imperialist intrigues and the spectre of civil war

For a socialist federation of the Near East!

Since the assassination of former prime minister Rafik al-Hariri in a massive explosion on the streets of Beirut on 14 February, Lebanon has been in the grip of political turmoil. American imperialists and the anti-Syrian "opposition" in Lebanon immediately pointed fingers at Syria. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw as well as French imperialism, Syria and Lebanon's former colonial ruler, joined in to call for withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. In September of last year, France and the US jointly sponsored a UN resolution (1559) demanding the disarming of the Hezbollah militia and the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Seizing upon al-Hariri's assassination, the so-called opposition, led by factions of the Christian Maronites, Druze and Sunni Muslims, organised demonstrations protesting the presence of Syrian forces. The Shi'ite Hezbollah countered with its own demonstrations that denounced US meddling in Lebanon and expressed "gratitude" for Syrian troops in the country (though, notably, they did not call for the Syrian troops to stay).

In a false, made-for-television display of "national unity", both pro- and anti-Syrian demonstrators wrapped themselves in the Lebanese flag, abandoned their distinctive sectarian military fatigues and sang the national anthem. However, behind the thin facade of unity lie deep communal fissures fuelled by centuries-old mutual hatred. In Lebanon, which has never been an integrated, united country, allegiance is first and foremost to the communal or religious sect. On Martyrs' Square, where the opposition pitched a tent city, each group kept to its own tent. As Moustafa Bayoumi wrote (*London Review of Books*, 5 May): "Unity is called for over and over again at the camp, but its geography demonstrates the confessional divisions that exist in the country itself." It was no accident that the Christians kept to the east of the square and Muslims to the west. "The crowds were meeting on the front lines that had separated the Lebanese during the civil war", wrote Robert Fisk, "indeed, on the very location of the Christian-Muslim trenches of that conflict" (*Independent*, 9 March).

Syria's troops have pulled out. And now, with legislative elections under way, the opposition is breaking apart



Reuters



AP

Left: Syrian army troops withdrawing from Lebanon in April. Right: At 8 March protest organised by Hezbollah, demonstrators carry picture of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, denounce US meddling in Lebanon.

and a new lineup is forming of various Muslim groupings on one side and Christians on the other. Behind everything happening in Lebanon today stands the ghost of the brutal civil war that haunted that country for 15 years beginning in 1975. More than 150,000 people were killed and at least another 100,000 were wounded. Beirut, one of the most beautiful cities in the Near East, was turned into a pile of rubble.

The opposition's campaign against Syria has fomented chauvinist attacks against the estimated half million migrant Syrian workers in the country. According to Amnesty International, dozens of Syrian workers have been killed and scores of others beaten, shot, threatened or robbed in Lebanon since the assassination of al-Hariri. Thousands have left the country. Tents and temporary housings were set on fire. The aftermath of the assassination also saw a series of criminal bombings in predominantly Christian neighbourhoods and shopping areas, evoking the memory of the civil war.

Bubbling with glee over the anti-Syrian demonstrations, Western bourgeois media hailed them with such grandiose names as "cedar revolution", "people power", "mini Ukraine", etc. Some Beirut residents aptly called them the "Gucci revolution" because so "many of those waving the Lebanese flag on the street are really very unlikely protesters", a BBC correspondent reported. He went on:

"There are girls in tight skirts and high heels, carrying expensive leather bags, as well as men in business suits or trendy tennis shoes. And in one unforgettable scene an elderly lady, her hair all done up, was demonstrating alongside her Sri Lankan domestic helper, telling her to wave the flag and teaching her the Arabic words of the slogans."

What is taking place in Lebanon is a falling-out among equally corrupt

gangs of warlords and robber barons. Those who call themselves the opposition today, for years worked hand in glove with the brutal Syrian regime. The leaders of the myriad religious and communal groups have every one of them been in treacherous, murderous shifting alliances against every other one. The essence of Lebanon's political scene was aptly captured by the Levant correspondent for the *Economist* (5 November 1983). Reporting on the "national reconciliation" conference held in Geneva in the autumn of 1983 in the midst of the civil war, he wrote:

"To compare this week's conference of Lebanese faction bosses in Geneva with a gathering of Mafia godfathers might be unfair to the Mafia, because it has never eliminated several hundred victims in a single day. There can seldom have been so many delegates around a table who were directly and personally responsible for killing the followers of fellow delegates."

The bourgeois press declares that al-Hariri had a "vision of prosperous Lebanon". However, the wealth generated by his opulent downtown Beirut construction projects following the civil war did not trickle down to the desperately impoverished Shi'ites in the south, the slum dwellers of Beirut's Belt of Misery, the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and Syrian migrant workers whom he exploited. Nor did it reach the mass of Lebanese working people, down whose throats al-Hariri shoved IMF-imposed austerity measures. When workers went on strike and took to the streets protesting high prices and demanding wage increases, al-Hariri unleashed his gendarmes on them. In May of last year, his troops shot at striking workers in the Shi'ite suburb of Hay al-Sellom, killing five people. It was not the first time that al-Hariri's security forces attacked demonstrators. In 1993, the army shot at

demonstrators protesting the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, killing more than a dozen.

The real estate magnate al-Hariri built his fortune through shady connections with the parasitic Saudi royal family, which rules on the basis of Wahabism, an extreme version of Sunni Islam. The Saudis granted al-Hariri citizenship, a privilege denied millions of Arabs and Asians toiling in the kingdom for decades. He maintained long-time close friendships with the likes of Iyad Allawi, the American puppet in Baghdad, and French imperialist president Jacques Chirac.

Whoever was behind the assassination of al-Hariri (whether the CIA, the Israeli Mossad, Syrian intelligence or disgruntled business rivals), American imperialists wasted no time exploiting his death to push "regime change" in Damascus. In an attempt to sell his sham "elections" in Iraq, which enshrined sectarianism in every government seat, Bush declared: "In the Middle East and throughout the world, freedom is on the march." It is not freedom that is on the march in the Near East, but rather the imperialists with their blueprint for the remaking of the region. In addition to occupied Iraq, the US now maintains a military presence in six other countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. In addition, Jordan has been used as a staging ground for US military activities in the region, including in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The current belligerence against Syria has long been a policy of the neocons' Project for the New American Century (PNAC) which, in a 20 September 2001 letter to Bush, demanded that the "administration should consider appropriate measures of retaliation against" Iran and Syria, which were deemed to be "known

continued on page 2

Lebanon...

(Continued from page 1)

state sponsors of terrorism". In November 2003, Congress, with the support of both Democrats and Republicans, passed the "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act" and in May 2004 Bush imposed sanctions against Syria, lobbying at its rulers the usual litany of accusations, which included "support for terrorist groups", "pursuit of weapons of mass destruction" and providing a "transit point for foreign fighters into Iraq".

President Bush trotted out the same threats in his State of the Union address this February. It didn't matter that the US regularly sends suspected "terrorists" to Syria, knowing they will be tortured. It didn't matter that Syria joined the imperialist coalition in their first Iraq war or organised polling stations for expatriates to vote in the recent Iraq "elections". The Syrian leadership's real crime in the eyes of both the neocons and their Democratic allies is its

hostility to Israel, which the US seeks to surround with a cordon sanitaire.

The international working class has no side in the current squalid power play taking place in Lebanon, but, as proletarian internationalists who called for the military defence of Iraq without giving any political support to the regime of Saddam Hussein, we say: *US/Britain keep your bloody hands off Syria! Down with the colonial occupation of Iraq! All US/British troops out of Iraq and the Near East now! Israel out of the Occupied Territories!*

A harvest of blood

The violence and intercommunal bloodletting that marked much of Lebanon's history is a legacy of Ottoman and French imperial domination and the interpenetration of myriad religious and ethnic communities, combining to retard capitalist development and prevent the consolidation of a modern state. Lebanon is divided into various sectarian fiefdoms, lorded over by tribal chieftains with private militias. Its political structures are built along sec-

tarian confessional lines. Contrary to the myth of "Switzerland of the Near East" touted by the bourgeois press, Lebanon is not so much a bourgeois democracy as a pluralistic theocracy with Christian Maronite domination. To ensure this domination, the Maronites deny citizenship to most of the hundreds of thousands of Muslim Kurds and Palestinian refugees who have been living in the country for over 50 years. Each of the officially recognised 18 religious communities may have its own political party, its own members of parliament, its own health and social services, its own schools with an educational orientation often hostile to other communities, and its own laws governing marriage and inheritance and other matters of personal status.

To maintain the clannishness of the sects, civil marriage is illegal and the personal status laws of various communities prohibit interfaith marriages. While women were granted the right to vote in the 1950s, medieval practices like arranged and forced marriages are still in place. Honour killing is rampant, especially in the southern rural areas. It is estimated that an average of one woman is killed each month.

In the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement France was given mandate for both Lebanon and Syria. The carving up of the Near East following World War I represented the balkanisation of the region by the imperialist powers. Populations that wanted to be united were separated; those that wanted to be separated were forcibly united (as in the case of Iraq, for example). The point was to carve up the region in such a way that ethnic and religious strife would perpetually plague it. Lebanon provides a vivid example of this.

In 1920, seeking to fashion a pro-Western enclave in the Levant, France created the entity that it called "Grand Liban" or "Greater Lebanon" by annexing Muslim regions of Syria to Mount Lebanon. To divide and better rule, the French combined the Muslims, among whom nascent Arab nationalism was growing, with the Christian majority, among whom they nourished a myth of Phoenician origin and a non-Arab heritage, and who would look to France for protection. Thus, the French knowingly created a state constructed to ensure plenty of intercommunal strife to justify their imperial "peacekeeping" presence.

The French colonial system of Maronite privileges was preserved after the country became independent in 1943. Under the unwritten deal between the French colonialists and the various Christian and Muslim clan chiefs, known as the National Covenant, the president would always be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the head of the Chamber of Deputies a Shi'ite Muslim. The Christians were allocated a six-to-five majority in parliament and the army officer corps was drawn predominantly from the Maronite elite.

The National Covenant was based on a dubious 1932 census. No census has been taken since, as such would reveal that the Muslim population has grown much faster than the Christian and now outnumber the latter three to two. Maronite Christian domination increasingly came into conflict with these demographic developments. The first challenge to the National Covenant took place in 1958 when a Muslim uprising was sparked by an attempt of Maronite president Camille Chamoun to extend his term in office. However, Chamoun was able to suppress the uprising, as some 15,000 American Marines waded ashore Beirut's beaches in July 1958.

Lebanon was not the real target of the

Marine landing. The imperialist powers were alarmed by the social upheavals that swept the region in the 1950s. They viewed the rise of Nasser to power in Egypt and his nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the intensification of the Algerian War of independence, the declaration of union between Egypt and Syria with the proclamation of the United Arab Republic as threats to their imperialist domination. US president Dwight Eisenhower warned that leftist uprisings could "result in the complete elimination of Western influence in the Middle East". But the immediate reason behind the Marines' landing in Lebanon was the eruption of revolution in Iraq and the overthrow of the British-installed Hashemite monarchy in July 1958. The Iraqi Communist Party stood at the threshold of power in the mass upsurge that followed. The Stalinist leadership, however, under direct orders from the Kremlin, betrayed the revolution for the sake of "peaceful coexistence" with world imperialism. In Lebanon, under US Marine guns, a deal was worked out to preserve the sectarian political structure along with Maronite predominance.

1975-76: Revolutionary upheaval channelled into communal bloodletting

The steady growth of the Muslim population, concentrated in the lower classes, increasingly challenged the National Covenant. By the early 1970s, the mass of impoverished Shi'ites had become the largest religious communal grouping. Led by Imam Musa Sadr's Movement of the Disinherited, they demanded constitutional changes to redress the balance of political and economic power in their favour. Further, the OPEC oil boom of the early 1970s, which Lebanon shared as the main financial centre and entrepôt for the Arab East, widened the social disparities between rich and poor. Shi'ite peasants from the countryside and migrant workers from Syria streamed into Beirut and other port cities looking for work, producing a class of desperate slum dwellers. The Beirut slums, known as the Belt of Misery, exist but a few miles from exclusive neighbourhoods resembling the French Riviera.

The early 1970s also witnessed social ferment in the form of peasant revolts, labour and student strikes that shook the foundations of the sectarian system. The General Council of Labor (GCL), formed in 1970 by the union of nine trade-union federations, led a series of strikes demanding wage increases and price controls. Students waged strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations demanding a national educational system open to all, as opposed to the private and sectarian schools.

The forces potentially arrayed against the Maronite elite found an ally in the Palestinian commandos. Forced out of Jordan after the Black September massacres in 1970, Palestinians were concentrated in Lebanon where they could operate with some degree of freedom. The armed commandos, especially in the south, provided protection against the militias of the landlords and *za'ims* (Mafia-like urban bosses).

In early 1975, Lebanon stood on the brink of a revolutionary upheaval that could have radically altered the political situation in the entire region, most immediately by extending to neighbouring Syria. A proletarian insurrection would have shaken the colonels of Damascus, the Hashemite monarchy and, not least, the Zionist rulers.

Underlying the conflict between the Maronite Christians on one side, and the Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians on the other, was a deep social conflict.

continued on page 9



TROTSKY

Imperialism and "globalisation"

Numerous liberals and reformists today argue that "globalisation" of production, extending particularly to the neo-colonial countries, represents a profound change in the world capitalist economy. In fact "globalisation" is simply the most recent example of the workings of imperialism, the world system of capitalism. For Marxists this stage of capitalist development was described by Lenin as early as 1916 in his pamphlet, *Imperialism, The Highest*

Stage of Capitalism. Under imperialism, a small number of super-rich countries such as today's "G8" necessarily impoverish the poorer countries and subjugate them, by force if necessary. Thus the only solution to world poverty lies in building an international revolutionary party to lead the proletariat to power, uprooting the decaying capitalist system.

It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production.... Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions....

On the threshold of the twentieth century we see the formation of a new type of monopoly: firstly, monopolist associations of capitalists in all capitalistically developed countries; secondly, the monopolist position of a few very rich countries, in which the accumulation of capital has reached gigantic proportions. An enormous "surplus of capital" has arisen in the advanced countries.

It goes without saying that if capitalism could develop agriculture, which today is everywhere lagging terribly behind industry, if it could raise the living standards of the masses, who in spite of the amazing technical progress are everywhere still half-starved and poverty-stricken, there could be no question of a surplus of capital. This "argument" is very often advanced by the petty-bourgeois critics of capitalism. But if capitalism did these things it would not be capitalism; for both uneven development and a semi-starvation level of existence of the masses are fundamental and inevitable conditions and constitute premises of this mode of production. As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries. In these backward countries profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap.

— VI Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)



LENIN

WORKERS HAMMER

Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain

For a federation of workers republics in the British Isles!
For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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From Berlin to Moscow:

The ICL's fight against capitalist counterrevolution

The Spartacist League/Britain held a dayschool in London on 21 May to celebrate the International Communist League's fight against capitalist counterrevolution in East Germany and the former Soviet Union in 1989-92. We reprint below a slightly edited version of the presentation given by comrade Jane Clancy.

1989 was quite a year. The events that erupted then would come to fundamentally change the entire political landscape of the world. I will give you some snapshots of what took place. In February, the last Red Army troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan. These troops had been fighting against a reactionary cabal of Islamic fundamentalists, tribal chiefs and landowners committed to the enslavement of women and the elimination of any scintilla of social progress and who were armed and bankrolled to the tune of billions of dollars by US imperialism. The withdrawal was not because the Soviet troops were losing; this was not "Russia's Vietnam" as it was portrayed at the time. Rather, the troops were withdrawn as part of a Kremlin bid to try to appease the imperialists.

In May, hundreds of thousands of students and workers rallied in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Singing the revolutionary workers anthem, the *Internationale*, they had come out in opposition to the corruption of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucrats and the devastation wrought by their introduction of "market reforms". In June, counterrevolutionary Solidarność — the only "union" that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan ever supported — swept the elections in Poland. The same month, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping drowned the nascent political revolution in Tiananmen Square in blood. In July, the Soviet Union was shaken by the first ever nation-wide miners strike. Provoked by the impact of market reforms on their lives and livelihoods, the miners quickly generated organisational forms of proletarian power: strike committees and workers militias.

In October, coincident with the official celebration of the 40th anniversary of the East German deformed workers state, the DDR, that country was erupting in increasingly massive protests against the Stalinist regime of Erich Honecker. On 4 November, the largest demonstration in the country's history took place as half a million people rallied in East Berlin under banners reading "For communist ideals — No privileges", "For a German Soviet Republic — Build Soviets!" On 9 November, the Berlin Wall was opened.

The other speakers at today's dayschool will provide accounts of the intervention of our international tendency — the International Communist

For new October Revolutions!



Berlin 1990

Spartacist



Moscow 1991

Spartacist

Top: Treptow, Berlin, 3 January 1990: Spartacists initiated 250,000-strong rally against fascist desecration of Treptow memorial to Red Army. Above: International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) banner raised in Moscow 1991 demonstration on anniversary of October Revolution.

League — into these momentous events. We fought for the defeat of the forces of capitalist counterrevolution and for the defence of the gains for the working class and oppressed of the world that were embodied in the collectivised industry and planned economy of these countries, however warped and distorted by Stalinist bureaucratic mismanagement. We fought for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist traitors, whose bureaucratic stranglehold over economic, political and cultural life and

betrayals of revolutionary struggles internationally in the name of "peaceful co-existence" with imperialism undermined and, in the end, paved the road to the destruction of these workers states. We fought for the revolutionary, internationalist programme that animated Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party which led the first and so far only successful workers revolution in history in October 1917. We did not prevail, but we fought!

By 1990 the forces of capitalist

counterrevolution were sweeping Eastern Europe. In 1991-1992 these forces would devour the Soviet Union, the homeland of the Russian Revolution. The world we live in today is the product of that world-historic defeat for the workers and oppressed of the world out of which US imperialism emerged as the world's unrivalled "only superpower". It is common coin now for outfits like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and other so-called leftists to decry the deranged nuclear cowboys in the White House as the "world's biggest terrorists". True enough. But these self-proclaimed socialists, who cheered the forces of counterrevolution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, made their own small contribution to this outcome. Now where do they turn? To the European imperialist rulers! On the eve of the one-sided slaughter in Iraq, they appealed to the European heads of state to "give peace a chance" and stay the hand of US imperialism. Now they raise the call for a "social Europe" as a counterweight to US imperialism. The European rulers want a counterweight all right. They are out to increase their competitive edge, economic and military, against the US. To do so they are taking it out of the hides of the working class and oppressed, savaging what remains of the so-called welfare state. The reforms collectively known as the welfare state were themselves introduced to try to piece off a combative and politically conscious proletariat and to ward off the "spectre of communism" as the Soviet Union's authority was renewed with its defeat of Hitler's Nazis in World War II.

Now you have this "Make Poverty History" campaign appealing to none other than the G8 to come to the aid of the impoverished masses of the so-called "Third World". This is revealed as such a fraud by the fact that even Gordon Brown has called on people to join the demonstration in Edinburgh this July coincident with the G8 meeting at Gleneagles. The SWP thinks this is great, as long as Brown puts his money where his mouth is, which is exactly what he intends to do. Brown's tour of Africa earlier this year made clear that "Make Poverty History" is simply a cynical cover for increasing "free trade" — that is the increased pillage and exploitation of sub-Saharan Africa. Declaring that it is time to stop apologising for the British Empire — not that I've noticed too many people apologising for the crimes of the empire — he saluted it as "open, outward looking and international". I believe he made these remarks in Kenya! One need look no further than the mass graves of the tens of thousands killed by British forces during the Mau Mau rebellion in

continued on page 4

ICL's fight...

(Continued from page 3)

the 1950s for a taste of Britain's bloody and brutal colonial heritage.

When the Soviet Union existed, the nominally independent former colonies had the breathing space to at least manoeuvre between the Soviets on one side and the imperialists on the other. No more. Now the imperialists think it's open season. Together with the total devastation and fratricidal wars that erupted in the wake of counterrevolution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, increasing imperialist depredations and military repression from Africa to Central America to Asia have forced many thousands of people to leave their homes in order to seek a better life for themselves and their families (often just to stay alive) in the advanced capitalist countries. They have been met with a backlash of racist and chauvinist reaction fomented by the capitalist rulers—as the recent electoral contest between the Tories and Labour is testament to. The capitalists are happy to use these immigrants to do the dirtiest, the most gruelling and lowest paid jobs. The purpose of their anti-immigrant campaign is to keep the working class divided, pitting one against the other and all against the “foreigner”.

To this is added the “war on terror”. Here the Islamic fundamentalists who were yesterday's allies in the imperialists' war against “godless communism” are today's enemies. Of course this is no war at all in any military sense. Rather it is a political construct aimed at strengthening the capitalist state's machinery of repression against any perceived challenge to its rule.

All of the imperialist powers are jockeying both through economic and military means to reconquer China for imperialist exploitation.

The Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy has opened the door in whole areas of the country, the free-trade zones, to the imperialists and off-shore Chinese bourgeoisie. Their increasingly aggressive introduction of market reforms, or as they call it “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, has eroded the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Organisations like the Socialist Party and Workers Power, who joined in the chorus of Cold War anti-Communism against the Soviet Union, now simply write off China as capitalist. But that verdict has yet to be decided. It is not a question to be observed like a bug under a glass but one of real living social struggles. And there have been a lot of such struggles by the workers and peasants of China, and increasingly so.

We are not passive observers. The lessons of our interventions against the forces of capitalist counterrevolution from East Germany to the Soviet Union arm us for the fight to defend the remaining gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution against the forces of capitalism and for political revolution and the institution of the rule of workers and peasants soviets, based on proletarian democracy and revolutionary internationalism. The latter is the key, for the defence of the Chinese deformed workers state is an international one, linked to the fight for new October Revolutions in the imperialist centres.

Today we want to give you a picture of the revolutionary opportunities that existed, before the defeats that followed, and how we fought to seize on them to advance the cause of working



Friends of Afghanistan Society

Afghan women determined to defend social emancipation brought about by Red Army presence volunteered for women's militia organised by Kabul government.

social power and historic interest to bury the capitalist system, is considered some kind of antiquated Marxist notion. This is encouraged by endless gobbledegook churned out by the ideologues of the “anti-globalisation” movement who simply seek to give capitalism a more “democratic” and “humane” face-lift. And the putative “socialist” left has followed suit.

The SWP dares not breathe the word “socialism” in its Respect electoral coalition for fear of alienating its allies in the mosques. Even the mention of “secularism” is *verboten*. The Socialist Party, for whom the Labour Party's Clause IV, translated into “nationalising the commanding heights of the economy”, was long presented as the epitome of “socialism”, can barely even choke that out these days. It's reserved for what they used to call Sunday “speechifying”, that is, when you present your “maximum” programme. Then there is Workers Power. In 1979 they saw Khomeini's mullahs as the ticket to a revolutionary mass movement. In the early 1980s, they saw Solidarność as such a vehicle, even while allowing that its aims were counterrevolutionary. Needless to say, their previous mass movements didn't work out too well. Now they look to the European and World Social Forums as the vehicle for building a new “revolutionary” international. This has all the promise of their previous endeavours. These social forums are nothing other than the vehicles for class collaboration and for various out-of-power popular frontists to get back into the business of ruling with and for the capitalist class.

The impact of the 1917 Russian Revolution

In preparing for this presentation I went back and re-read a speech by James P Cannon, a founding leader of American Trotskyism, given on the 25th anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1942, amidst the carnage of World War II and following the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler's war machine. He spoke to the impact of the Russian Revolution amidst another period of reaction brought on by World War I:

“I can remember the dark days of the First World War, 1914-1918. Then as now, all the hopes for humanity's progress seemed to be drowned in the blood of the war. Reaction seemed to be triumphant everywhere. The enemies of the proletariat gloated over the treachery and capitulation of the socialist parties [which had lined up behind their “own” capitalist rulers in the war]; and to many—to the great majority, I venture to say—the theory and the hope of socialism seemed vanished like a utopian dream. And then, as now... faint hearts and deserters mocked at those who

continued the stubborn struggle and held on to the revolutionary faith. The whole world labor movement was overcome with depression and despair in 1914-1917.

“But the Russian Revolution of November 7 changed all that overnight. At one blow, the revolution lifted the proletariat of Europe to its feet again. It stirred the hundreds of millions of colonial slaves who had never known political aspiration before, who had never dared to hope before. The Russian Revolution awakened them to the promise of a new life.”

—“The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution”, *Speeches for Socialism* (1971)

The October Revolution created a workers state based on workers councils (soviets). The Soviet government expropriated both the Russian capitalist and imperialist holdings and repudiated outright Russia's massive debt to foreign bankers. It gave land to the peasants and self-determination to the many oppressed nations of the former tsarist empire. Laws discriminating against ethnic and national minorities, against women and homosexuals were eliminated. The revolutionary government declared that the state had no business interfering in the consensual sexual relations of the population whatever form they took. This statement would have the “no sex please we're British” left in this country—who go into a frenzy over our defence of Michael Jackson against the American state's anti-sex, racist witch hunters—in an uproar.

The Soviet government proclaimed the right of working people to jobs, health, housing and education, and took the first steps to building a socialist society. But as Marx put it, “right can never stand any higher than the material conditions on which it is based”. Today there are all sorts of new “theories” that you can win without taking power, or that the road to liberation lies through the utopia of building “autonomous” zones which somehow will be free of capitalist exploitation. But the fight for the emancipation of humanity is not some kind of mental act by good-willed, right-thinking people. Nor can it be achieved while scarcity remains, which simply perpetuates the fight for survival. As Marx understood, the eradication of the exploitation of man by man must necessarily be based on conditions of material plenty.

There is great material abundance in the world, particularly in the advanced capitalist countries. Our job is to seize that wealth, overwhelmingly created through the labour of the masses of working people, from the hands of capitalist owners who expropriate the fruits of this labour for their own profit. Only the working class has the social power—deriving from its role in production,



Yevgeni Khaldei

May Day 1945: Soldiers of the Red Army raise the red flag over the Reichstag of defeated Nazi Germany.

It is surely not the case that the Soviet Union in its Stalinist degeneration was the beacon for world revolution that it was under Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks. Nonetheless it was a counterweight to the untrammelled ambitions of the world's imperialists. Economically it not only demonstrated an alternative to capitalist exploitation but the superiority of a planned economy. Militarily it stayed the hand of the imperialist rulers, particularly the US, in the nuclear eradication of any perceived enemies. It was the military and industrial powerhouse of the states where capitalism had been eradicated. And now that it no longer exists, the imperialists have their sights aimed at the destruction of the remaining workers states—Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea; China, the largest and strongest of these states, is the big prize.

people internationally. Looking back at these past fights is preparation for future struggles. This is particularly important today when the idea of the proletarian socialist liberation of humanity is at best considered some kind of idealist utopia. This too reflects the impact of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, which unleashed an ideological offensive by the imperialist rulers that “communism is dead” and that the destruction of the Soviet Union simply proved Marxism to be a “failed experiment”.

Consciousness has been thrown back to the extent that today there is little identification among workers between their struggles and “socialism”, however that was previously understood. For most youth, the idea that there even is a working class, much less the understanding that the proletariat has the

its numbers and organisation—and the clear objective interest to eradicate the capitalist system. What it lacks is the political consciousness and revolutionary leadership to wage such a struggle. It is that critical element that the Bolshevik Party brought to the workers of Russia.

But the material conditions for the actual development of a socialist society did not exist in backward Russia, nor do they exist within the confines of any one country. From the beginning the Bolsheviks understood that the fledgling Soviet workers state would not survive unless the revolution was extended internationally to more advanced capitalist countries. They saw the October Revolution as the opening of a Europe-wide workers revolution and indeed at the end of the war a wave of revolutionary upheavals swept Europe. The social democrats—who had gone over to the side of “their own” imperialist rulers during the war—acted to save the rule of the bourgeoisie from the working class. The newly founded communist parties, which had been formed in response to the example of the Russian Revolution, were too weak and inexperienced to lead these revolutionary upsurges to victory.

The capitalist world surrounded and isolated the Soviet Union. From 1918 to 1920 the revolution had to fight for its very survival in a civil war, when the forces of every major imperialist power intervened on the side of the counterrevolutionary White Guards. The already backward economy was almost completely devastated through World War I and the ensuing civil war. The vibrant proletariat which had accomplished the 1917 Revolution had practically ceased to exist as a class and famine ravished the countryside. But even under these conditions, in 1923 when an extraordinary revolutionary crisis shook Germany, the workers of the Soviet Union rallied to its cause. The German workers looked to the German Communist Party, the KPD, to lead them. But the leadership of the KPD looked to the left wing of the Social Democracy as an “ally” and they let the opportunity for proletarian insurrection pass.

This defeat had an enormous impact in the Soviet Union, leading to a wave of demoralisation among the already ravaged proletariat. Out of these conditions of scarcity and backwardness, and the isolation of the Soviet workers state, arose a conservative, nationalist bureaucracy headed by Stalin. At the beginning of 1924 this bureaucracy seized political power out of the hands of the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard. Repudiating the very programme of revolutionary proletarian internationalism which had led to the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, and which continued to be defended by Trotsky’s Left Opposition, the bureaucracy came up with the anti-Marxist “theory” of “socialism in one country” as the ideological justification for its rule. The bureaucracy consolidated its power by destroying the entire leadership of the Bolshevik Party through the blood purges of the infamous Moscow Trials. The Communist International was turned from an instrument for world revolution into the foot soldiers of the Kremlin’s efforts to seek “peaceful co-existence” with imperialism in the name of “building socialism in one country”.

As we wrote in “When Was the Soviet Thermidor?”—one of the early articles that we translated into Russian for our intervention into the Soviet Union—“After January 1924, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the

USSR was ruled and the purposes for which the USSR was ruled had all changed” (*Spartacist* no 43-44, Summer 1989). But this was a political not a social counterrevolution. The collectivised property forms created by the October Revolution were not destroyed but remained as gains for the workers of



Beijing, May 1989: Workers and students fraternise with troops called in to suppress uprising which marked incipient proletarian political revolution.

the world. While waging a relentless struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Trotskyists fought unstintingly for the defence of these gains against world imperialism and counter-revolution.

At the same time the situation was very unstable. The rule and privileges of the Stalinist bureaucracy derived from their position on top of the Soviet workers state. But they simultaneously acted as the transmission belt for the relentless and hostile pressures of world imperialism which was committed to the destruction of the workers state. The 1938 “Transitional

dictory situation continued on for over another 50 years. Why was that? The answer lies in the outcome of World War II.

The aftermath of World War II

During World War II and ever since, the lie has been peddled—as it was

again at this year’s VE day celebrations—that World War II was the “great democratic war against fascism”. In fact, like World War I, it was an inter-imperialist war, a battle for markets and greater spheres of influence and domination by the imperialist powers. Like the Bolsheviks in World War I, the Trotskyists’ policy was one of intransigent defeatism towards all the imperialist bourgeoisies. This meant fighting to transform the imperialist war into a civil war—into proletarian revolutionary struggle against all of the imperialist combatants. At the same time, the Trotskyists fought for the world’s work-



Iraq 2003: Brutal occupation by US and British imperialism shows that, since counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, US runs rampant around the globe.

Programme”, the founding document of Trotsky’s Fourth International, defined the Soviet Union as a bureaucratically degenerated workers state and laid out two basic historical alternatives confronting it:

“The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers’ state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.”

Yet this very unstable and very contra-

ing class to come to the defence of the Soviet Union from the blows of the capitalist enemies of whatever camp.

Trotsky had predicted, and with great justification, that World War II would shatter the bureaucracy and would provoke revolutionary upsurges of the proletariat, just as had been the outcome of World War I. Stalin did bring the Soviet Union to the brink of disaster: he beheaded the Red Army and ignored repeated and desperate warnings from heroic Soviet spies like Leopold Trepper in Nazi Germany and Richard Sorge in Japan of the imminent invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler’s Nazis. Nonetheless it was the Soviet Union that defeated the Nazis, at the cost of

well over 20 million dead. As Cannon remarked in his 1942 speech:

“[The] economic strength of the Soviet regime, and the strength of the revolutionary tradition, are being reflected now in the military field. The whole world has been surprised and astounded by the military prowess of the Red Army. All the military experts counted upon a defeat of the Russian armies in the space of a few weeks or months.... The Trotskyists were not taken by surprise. Trotsky predicted that imperialist attack on the Soviet Union would unleash marvels of proletarian enthusiasm and fighting capacity in the Red Army. He could do that because he, better than others, understood that the great motive power of the victorious revolution had not all been expended. The Red Army that the world hails is an army created by a proletarian revolution. This revolution lives in the memory of the Soviet people. That and the basic conquests, which they still retain and upon which they stand, constitute the basis upon which the Red Army has unfolded such unparalleled capacity for defense and resistance and heroic sacrifice.”

Defeating the Nazi forces in the battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army swept through Eastern Europe and straight into Berlin, and smashed the Third Reich. The other regimes in Eastern Europe—overwhelmingly collaborators with the Nazis—fled to the nearest American headquarters, leaving behind a power vacuum. In the aftermath of the war, the imperialists turned on their erstwhile Soviet “allies” with the launch of Cold War I, aimed at the “containment” and destruction of the Soviet Union. In the face of this renewed imperialist offensive, the Stalinists moved to establish deformed workers states throughout Eastern Europe and in the Soviet-occupied East Germany as a “buffer zone”. The ruling classes, whose power had been smashed, were expropriated. However, with the exception of Yugoslavia, where Tito’s partisans prevailed in a peasant guerrilla war, these expropriations took place from without, through cold social transformations from the top down. The workers states were deformed from the outset—the mirror image of the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union—as collectivised property forms predominated under the political rule of nationalist bureaucracies. The Soviet military forces were effectively the state power, and nowhere was this more true than in East Germany, which was the frontline state directly facing the imperialist West.

The expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the creation of deformed workers states represented tremendous gains, which we defended. But as Trotsky wrote of the earlier Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland, the central question was the impact of these social transformations on “the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones”. There was no such consciousness and organisation of the proletariat leading to the social transformations in Eastern Europe. While the Soviet victory over Hitler’s Nazis was testimony to the continued impact of the memory of the October Revolution, this was increasingly supplanted by the Stalinist bureaucracy with a defencist national patriotism. Coming out of the war there were revolutionary situations in Italy and Greece and massive strikes in France, Belgium and other countries. But these struggles were disarmed, in some cases literally, and overall politically, by the Stalinist parties. These parties wielded the renewed authority which had accrued to them coming out of the Soviet victory to push the

continued on page 8



Origins of the Spartacist Group Poland

“In the spirit of Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht”

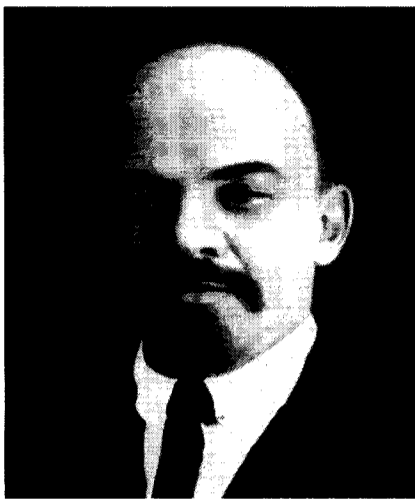
The article below is based on the presentation given at the 21 May dayschool on the origins of the Spartacist Group Poland by comrade Jan Jedrzejewski.

I'd like to tell you about my political background and experience of living in the Polish deformed workers state, and about how the Spartacist Group Poland (SGP) was established. I'm pleased to see in this room four former members of the SGP who have done their internationalist duty in Warsaw. I produced a map to show you where the city of Wroclaw is, where I come from, and how the borders of Poland were moved westward after World War II. Wroclaw is the city where Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned during World War I.

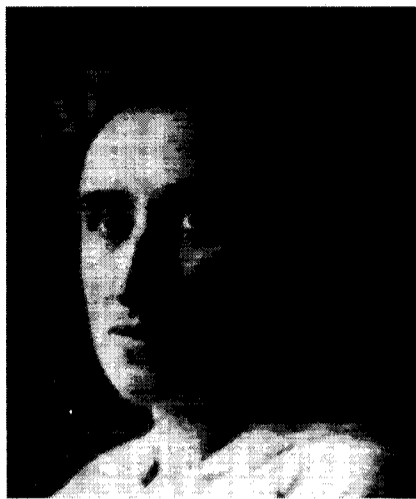
In the immediate period before joining the ICL (in 1988-90), I was active in the short-lived Young Left Movement, a loose grouping of students from several cities, active in or around the Stalinist organisations. At the founding conference of the Young Left Movement, I remember how the rector called us and demanded that we take down the white banner with the hammer and sickle painted on it from the university building. It was outside and people could see it from the buses. We responded that it was not the symbol of the state, as he claimed, but the symbol of world socialist revolution, and despite further phone calls we didn't take it down until the end of our conference. That movement was a leftist response to the flourishing of pro-Solidarność groups at universities. When I learned about the existence of the ICL in mid-1990, only four people were active as the Young Left Movement, but we had a paper called *Platforma*, in which we used to publish articles and translations from various leftist groups.

By the time we met the Spartacists, we were trying to join another political organisation, the Current of the Revolutionary Left, affiliated to the United Secretariat of the late Ernest Mandel. We met them and they demanded that we condemn our political past, because it was connected with the Stalinist organisations. They were all members of Solidarność.

Now, what was my recent political past that I refused to condemn, because



W. Plier



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ICL honours the internationalist tradition of communist leaders Vi Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. A Polish, Jewish communist leader, Luxemburg embodied the revolutionary unity of the Polish, German and Soviet working classes.

I was proud of it? In 1987 I discovered and popularised the international tradition of the “three Ls” (Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht), suppressed by Stalin around the time of dissolving the Communist Party of Poland in 1938. I did that by showing slides from German and Polish communist papers from the 30s—during conferences and meetings organised by the Stalinist youth organisations, of course. I also published several articles in the paper of the Union of Socialist Youth of Poland in Wroclaw, under the masthead “Let's discover our tradition”. It was about the “three Ls” tradition, and about International Women's Day. In 1988 I got a copy of a translation of Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* and I was instrumental in publishing the first edition of it in Polish—by a Stalinist organisation!

Some time later we were about to join a group of Morenoites, an ostensibly Trotskyist tendency based in Argentina. What prevented us from doing that? We published in *Platforma* a factional document from the Morenoite Mexican group. The document was called the “Trotskyist Platform” and was written by two comrades who went on to join the ICL section in Mexico. What we liked in that document was the call for a red Germany in a socialist Europe—for revolutionary reunification of Germany

through a proletarian political revolution in the East and a socialist revolution in the West. We liked the slogan “Hail Red Army!” in Afghanistan, because some Solidarność activists in Wroclaw were organising a Polish fighting squad in Afghanistan, on the side of the *mujahedin*! We liked the call for unconditional military defence of the Soviet Union and other workers states against capitalist counterrevolution. But the Morenoites refused even to discuss the issues with us. “Lies”, they said. Moreover, they hadn't heard of the tradition of the “three Ls”. Do I have to explain the impact of an article on the “three Ls” that we found in an ICL paper?

We also got a leaflet published by the German section of the ICL, written in (bad!) Polish, the “Letter to Polish Workers” (May 1990). In that letter the German section was warning the Polish workers against Solidarność. In our response—we wrote them a letter—we counterposed the communist tradition to Solidarność and we wrote that in the so-called “Trotskyist movement” in Poland we often meet activists, “who have a ‘Solidarność’ pedigree, or in any case put all their hopes in ‘Solidarność’”. We also wrote: “The threat to the workers states by German imperialism against which you are warning is in Poland being used to fuel nationalistic hysteria. Our aim is to

oppose it with an internationalist stand calling for a common defense of the gains of workers revolution on this and the other side of the Oder” [reprinted in *Workers Vanguard* no 513, 2 November 1990].

After a short period of discussions, we joined the ICL in October 1990 and signed an “Agreement for Common Work between the Young Left Movement of Poland and the ICL”, the founding document of the Spartacist Group Poland. In that document we stated our line of unconditional military defence of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states against imperialism and internal counterrevolution; our opposition to Solidarność as a counterrevolutionary force from the time of its national congress in the autumn of 1981, as expressed in the ICL call to “Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!” and the ICL's description of Solidarność as a “company union for the CIA, Vatican and bankers”. We honoured the 600,000 Soviet soldiers who fell while liberating Poland from the Nazi occupation and recalled the proud communist tradition of the proletariat in Poland, personified by Rosa Luxemburg. We called for revolutionary unity of German, Polish and Russian workers. We also included a number of democratic slogans like “For free abortion on demand!” and called “For class struggle against attempts to dismantle social gains of the collectivised economy”.

As the Polish section of the ICL, we did interventions and sales to the Soviet troops still remaining in Poland; we intervened in a wave of strikes in 1992-93, which were the response of the working people to the capitalist “shock therapy” imposed after the counterrevolution. We fought against anti-Semitism and anti-Roma racism; we called on the workers movement to mobilise in defence of the right to free abortion on demand. Although we had subscribers to our paper called *Platforma Spartakusowców*, we found it difficult to recruit, as the capitalist counterrevolution had just concluded its victory in December 1990 when Walesa replaced general Jaruzelski as the president.

As we warned, women were the first to suffer from that counterrevolution.



Spartacist Group Poland was formed from Young Left Movement in Poland who published *Platforma* (left). Propaganda of Spartakist Workers Party of Germany sought to revive internationalist tradition of the “three Ls” (above) during unfolding political revolution in DDR, 1989-90.

Solidarność crowned their victory with a ban on abortion. Women were the first to be sacked. Recently there were some scandals revealing women's oppression: one was that a young woman gave birth to a baby and gave it away to an orphanage in Lodz, because the boss demanded that she return to work after the weekend. Another scandal was sex-

ther was I. But my generation was well-educated and I understood pretty well that I owed everything to the workers state. My grandfather was a peasant, while my father was a foreman (organiser of production in a factory unit) in a big factory. From my grandmother I heard stories about how hard her life was under capitalism: she had no shoes



Fabian/Sygnia

1983: Lech Wałęsa warmly embraced by Pope John Paul II, who backed Solidarność, as did Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

ual harassment at work. There is a post-counterrevolutionary phenomenon of desperate women killing their newly born babies, something unknown in the workers state. Professions dominated by women, like nursing, are among the lowest paid.

In general, the counterrevolution brought misery to the working people. The official unemployment figure has been close to 20 per cent for many years. Despite Poland joining the EU, nothing has changed, except you have more Polish immigrants here in London and shops with Polish food. But nothing has changed in Poland—social inequalities are greater than ever. The vast majority of the unemployed have no benefits from the state. There are anti-Semitic and racist attacks.

I grew up in a completely different social reality in the deformed workers state. The factory my father used to work in all his life originally owned blocks of flats for its workers within walking distance; a cultural centre; a big kitchen and dining room; a workers hotel; a summer swimming pool and a modern holiday centre at the seaside. I remember excursions to the forest in a factory bus, organised by a trade union. Add to that a free health care system available to everyone and free education on a very good level, and you can get an idea of the social security that existed under the workers state. Culture and science flourished in comparison to what we see after the counterrevolution.

We say it was a deformed workers state, because political power was in the hands of a parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy, not workers councils. The bureaucrats did not permit any truly socialist party, nor even a paper. They destroyed the class consciousness of the proletariat and appeased the Catholic church. Social inequalities existed and special oppression existed, eg against gays and Roma people, who were forced to settle down in the 1960s. A political proletarian revolution was necessary, but a revolutionary party was lacking.

My family was not political, and nei-

to go to school and wasn't viewed as being worth educating; she finished her education in the fourth grade. School was for boys. Her marriage was arranged when she was only 16 years old, against her will of course. However, in the workers state her daughter became a manager of a medical laboratory.

I become politicised under the impact of the wave of strikes in July-August 1980, which began with mainly economic demands and concluded with a famous deal with the government in Gdansk and with the establishment of Solidarność. I was a factory worker myself in Wrocław. I considered myself a member of the newly established mass trade union of Solidarność at the time, although I didn't formally join it, because I was subsequently drafted to the army. There I got some good education about Solidarność. My main objection was that the imperialists were financially supporting them.

The state of emergency was declared in the early morning of 13 December 1981, soon after the tapes from a meeting of Solidarność leaders in Radom were made public, revealing that they were pushing for taking state power. Nobody in my unit knew what was going on. What was announced was a "state of war". I hated the bureaucrats and was quite prepared to participate in arresting our commanders. But with whom? Who was fighting on the other side in this "war"? After several hours it became clear that there was no shooting, no fighting, it was just a coup by the military against Solidarność. I decided that I was a supporter of those police-military measures to prevent Solidarność taking power.

What did the "state of emergency" look like? Solidarność leaders were arrested and imprisoned—in some summer hotels, sports centres etc. These were not real prisons. When the spring came, Wałęsa was allowed to go fishing! There were some isolated factory occupations against the state of emergency, which were crushed, with

tanks smashing factory fences and police storming the occupied buildings inside. That happened in the factory I used to work at, where among others, my brother was arrested as a striking Solidarność worker and kept at a police headquarters courtyard in the freezing cold without proper clothes for several hours. In Katowice, the police at some point shot at the crowd of workers confronting them and nine died. The total number of those who died as victims of the state of emergency, which lasted over a year, was relatively low. One estimate gave the figure as 200-300 people on both sides.

The truth about Tiananmen Square

In 1989 I got a videotape (made, I believe, by Mandelites from Hong Kong) documenting the June events in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. I found the only Chinese student in my city at the time and asked him to explain to me what it showed. On that video one can see students wearing red ribbons, singing the *Internationale*. They also had a model of the "Statue of Liberty". What was important for pro-Solidarność groups was the massacre at Tiananmen Square by the Stalinist army. They built a small monument—a bike crushed by a tank—in Dzerzhinsky Square and people prayed there, just commemorating the victims of "communism". I organised two video-showings because this was an incipient political proletarian revolution that was suppressed.

Today in Poland there is a new generation of leftist-minded youth, who are looking for alternatives to capitalist exploitation, oppression and war. Our task is to win some of them to Marxism

and to the ranks of the ICL. At the same time those leftists, or better to say pseudo-leftists, who used to tail Solidarność when it was popular, are still capitulating to the forces of reaction. There was well over a week of hysteria in Poland after the godfather of Solidarność, John Paul II, died at the beginning of April. You know that, it also happened here. In Poland there were no business meetings, no work, no other news from the world. We even had appeals from the bishops to postpone sex in the bedrooms—no joke!—and there were tons of candles in front of churches and other places. Near the Old Town in Warsaw, 20 tons of candles were removed from the front of one church to clear a road for cars, because there are many restaurants there. Two days ago I looked at the website of the Mandelite Current of the Revolutionary Left. They complain about the late pope Wojtyła, who "seemed to be a giant. And it's a pity, that having such big possibilities of influencing the world, the vision of radical change of the human condition was for him associated infinitely more with internal life and the post-mortem future, than with the practice on Earth" (www.marksizm.of.pl). What a pity! The Catholic church's role is not to effect some "radical change", rather it is to maintain the integrity of the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression! Our perspective is to work for new October Revolutions and for sure we know that no patriarch and no pope was helpful to that revolution, which was the beacon for the oppressed worldwide. That is the tradition we stand on, and in the spirit of Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht we will train new generations of revolutionaries. ■

The Pope's "socialists"

Socialist Worker

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COMMENT
Alex Callinicos

The two sides of John Paul II

EVEN ALLOWING for the predictable saturation coverage by the media, the death of Pope John Paul II does seem to have touched a genuine chord of grief and respect.

Certainly John Paul reached out beyond the traditional enclave of the faithful.

Probably the most admirable single aspect of his pontificate was the sustained effort he took to apologise for the Catholic church's role in creating and fuelling anti-Semitism.

And he won the respect of the Muslim world for the firmness with which he championed the Palestinian cause and denounced the wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003. His constant refrain—"Never again war!"—had the authority of a man who had endured the Second World War in one of its greatest victims, Poland.

But against all this has to be set John Paul's shameful record of entrenching the most reactionary aspects of traditional Catholic teaching on, for example, women priests, contraception and abortion.

We have to see John Paul in the context of Poland, a country subordinated to neighbouring empires for two centuries. The strength of Polish Catholicism derived from the church's role as one of the main sources of national identity.

John Paul brought this spirit of a vigorous but embattled Catholicism into the Vatican when he was elected pope in 1978. He didn't take up where the Second Vatican Council had left off in the 1960s and seek to reconcile Catholicism and modernity. He was much closer to Pope Leo XIII, who in 1891 issued an encyclical called *Rerum Novarum* (Of the New Things). Leo saw modernity as a threat to Catholicism.

Ideological

John Paul II's worldview provided the Polish with an ideological basis for resisting the Stalinist regime that was installed by Moscow after 1945.

It is, however, ridiculous to claim, as Tim Garton Ash did in Monday's *Guardian*, that John Paul "destroyed communism". In fact, in 1980-1, the Polish Catholic hierarchy consistently encouraged the Solidarność workers' movement to negotiate with the regime, thereby opening the door to the military coup that broke Solidarność in December 1981.

In 1991, after the final fall of the Stalinist regime, John Paul II consistently condemned the

Pope John Paul II was honoured in his death by imperialist leaders of the world for his role in supporting Solidarność, the vehicle for counter-revolution in Poland, which was also fulsomely supported by the reformist SWP. Thus an obscene obituary by Alex Callinicos for the ultra-reactionary pontiff in the 9 April *Socialist Worker* attacked him from the right, for being too *conciliatory* towards the Polish Stalinist regime. Callinicos says it is "ridiculous to claim" that John Paul II "destroyed communism", arguing that "in 1980-1, the Polish Catholic hierarchy consistently encouraged the Solidarność workers movement to negotiate with the regime, thereby opening the door to the military coup that broke Solidarność in December 1981". It should have been elementary for any socialist to support this coup, which temporarily spiked Solidarność's bid for power.

It is, however, ridiculous to claim, as Tim Garton Ash did in Monday's *Guardian*, that John Paul "destroyed communism". In fact, in 1980-1, the Polish Catholic hierarchy consistently encouraged the Solidarność workers' movement to negotiate with the regime, thereby opening the door to the military coup that broke Solidarność in December 1981.

ICL's fight...

(Continued from page 5)

class-collaborationist programme of keeping class peace with the so-called "democratic" bourgeoisie. Thus, in terms of the central political criterion of the impact on consciousness, organisation and capacity of the proletariat to defend former conquests and fight for new ones, the role of the Stalinists confirmed what Trotsky had written earlier: "From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution."

Cold War II and the unravelling of "socialism in one country"

Economically, the Soviet Union demonstrated the vast superiority of a collectivised planned economy over capitalism. But this was distorted, limited and deformed under the bureaucracy and its dogma of "socialism in one country". In his 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky analysed the vast contradictions of the Soviet degenerated workers state:

"It is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command—although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost. But the further you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow.... Under a nationalized economy, quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative—conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery."

Economic planning can be effective only when the workers identify themselves with the government that issues the plans. And to identify with the government means workers must rule through soviets. When they are alienated from the government, the plan will be subverted from the base: the formal target plans may be met, but by poor quality goods. Raw materials will be used wastefully and state-owned supplies diverted into the black economy. All of these conditions were present in the Soviet Union over the course of decades. By the late 1970s, the contradictions of "building socialism in one country" would come dramatically to the fore.

In the early part of that decade, the Soviet Union had achieved rough military parity with US imperialism, which was bogged down in its long, losing, dirty war in Vietnam. The Soviet economy also got a big boost from the rising world market price of oil. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the living standards of the population increased dramatically. The states in Eastern Europe were also beneficiaries as the Soviet Union supplied them with oil at a fraction of the world market price.

But all of this began to change in the mid-to-late 1970s. Defeated by the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants, US imperialism began to rearm itself, building up a huge military arsenal directed against the USSR, which had been the central target of the imperialists since the 1917 Revolution. This began under Democratic Party president Jimmy Carter and his "human rights" campaign for a whole cabal of Soviet dissidents. The aim here was the "moral rearmament" of US imperialism, to overcome the American population's deep distrust of the government and to refurbish the tarnished "democratic" and military credentials of US imperialism.

This renewed Cold War got red hot with the intervention of the Soviet Army into Afghanistan at the end of

1979. As we wrote in our article "The Russian Question Point Blank" (*Spartacist* no 29, Summer 1980):

"Afghanistan is a flash of lightning which illuminates the real contours of the world political landscape. It has exploded the last illusions of détente to reveal the implacable hostility of U.S. imperialism to the Soviet degenerated workers state. It has stripped away all diplomatic cover for Washington's alliance with Maoist/Stalinist China. And it has confronted the left inescapably with 'the Russian Question': the nature of the state originating in the Bolshevik Revolution and its conflict with world capitalism.

"For revolutionary socialists there is nothing tricky, nothing ambiguous about the war in Afghanistan. The Soviet army and its left-nationalist allies are fighting an anti-communist, anti-democratic mélange of landlords, money lenders, tribal chiefs and mullahs committed to mass illiteracy. And to say that imperialist support to this social scum is out in the open is the understatement of the year."

We said "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend the gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!"

It should have been a reflexive response for any self-respecting leftist or radical to take the side of the Red Army in a war where they were fighting



Moscow, 7 November 1918: Celebration of first anniversary of October Revolution.

not only in defence of women from barbaric reaction but the defence of the gains of the October Revolution. But overwhelmingly the generation of leftist radicals who only years earlier were marching in mass protest against the Vietnam War chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" now found themselves on the side of US imperialism against the Red Army. The likes of Tariq Ali who during the Vietnam War was the epitome of "anti-imperialist" radicalism, reportedly even the model for the Rolling Stones song "Street Fighting Man", wasn't street fighting anymore. He was baying along with the imperialists demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Here was a big change in political period. It had been somewhat fashionable to be a leftist during the Vietnam War. At the time most radicals identified with Marxism as the road to liberation, regardless of how they might have understood that. But now the winds were blowing in a distinctly different direction, as Cold War anti-Communism was the order of the day. While the left's support for Khomeini's mullahs in the 1979 Iranian Revolution was the precursor to siding with the imperialist-backed forces of Islamic reaction in Afghanistan, they really went whole hog behind counterrevolutionary Solidarność in Poland. After all, here was a "movement" commanding the allegiance of masses of Polish workers. How had this happened?

These were the bitter fruits of Stalinist misrule, which had come to a head under the weight of burgeoning foreign debts. As I said before, in the early 1970s the Soviet Union had heavily subsidised the

deformed workers states in Eastern Europe, particularly with cut-price oil as well as other raw materials. But by the mid-1970s, the oil prices were jacked up and the shipments cut down so that the Soviets could sell on the world market. This itself is a savage indictment of "socialism in one country". At the same time these countries were hit by a world capitalist recession, which collapsed their export markets. To maintain employment and living standards, the East European Stalinist regimes turned to the loan sharks of Wall Street, the City of London and the Frankfurt Börse. Having mortgaged their countries to the Western banks, to meet their debt payments these regimes imposed ever more severe austerity programmes dictated by the IMF. In Poland the economic crisis drove the historically socialist Polish workers into the arms of Solidarność, which was heavily backed and bankrolled by the Vatican and the CIA.

The Gorbachev regime

At the same time all the contradictions, deformities and limitations of the "socialism in one country" which Trotsky had so brilliantly analysed in *The Revolution Betrayed* were also coming to a head in

sions of belief in the superiority of Western-style capitalism.

To relieve the overhead of military expenditures in the face of the increasing military build-up of US imperialism, the Gorbachev regime offered a "partnership" to the imperialists. Here Afghanistan was key and in 1989 the Red Army troops were withdrawn. Days before the last troops left, on 7 February 1989, the Partisan Defense Committee, the class-struggle legal and social defence organisation associated with the Spartacist League/US, sent a telegram to the Afghan government offering to "organise an international brigade to fight to the death" to defend "the right of women to read, freedom from the veil, freedom from the tyranny of the mullahs and the landlords, the introduction of medical care and the right of all to an education". We anticipated drawing into this international effort the ranks of militant fighters in many parts of the globe who would see in such a brigade the opportunity to strike a powerful blow against the imperialist system by which they themselves were oppressed and dispossessed. We also saw that this could have a powerful effect among the Soviet army veterans who saw themselves as performing their internationalist duty in Afghanistan. This would have been an important lever for advancing the programme of revolutionary internationalism and proletarian political revolution within the Soviet Union itself.

Though our offer of a brigade was turned down, the Afghan government did ask if we could undertake a publicity and fund-raising effort for the embattled citizens of Jalalabad, then under siege by the bloodthirsty *mujahedin*. We raised over \$44,000, largely from working people and minorities, a number of whom had their origins in the region. But this campaign had greater significance. It showed that with the betrayal of Afghanistan, as well as developments in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, the absence of a communist party worth its name was acutely felt. And in 1989 we founded ourselves as the International Communist League.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan was the opening act of the counterrevolutionary tide that would engulf Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union itself. In 1992 this was admitted by Eduard Shevardnadze, then Soviet foreign minister, who said: "The decision to leave Afghanistan was the first and most difficult step. Everything else flowed from that" (*Washington Post*, 16 November 1992). Less than a year later, the Kremlin bureaucrats would pull the plug on the East German deformed workers state, giving the green light for capitalist annexation of the DDR by the Fourth Reich of German imperialism. This will be addressed in the remarks of other speakers here today.

I will simply conclude where I began. Our fight to defend the gains that were embodied in these workers states, however warped and deformed by Stalinist misrule, and our fight today in defence of China and the remaining workers states was and is part of our struggle for new October Revolutions. As Trotsky said: "Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones." The period we live in now, one conditioned by the destruction of the world's first workers state, is deeply reactionary. But the lessons of past struggles are the ammunition for arming new cadre for the struggles that can and will break out. Out of such struggles will further be steered the cadre for building a revolutionary, internationalist proletarian vanguard—the crucial instrument for the socialist liberation of humanity. ■

the Soviet Union. Under the increasing military pressure of US imperialism, and trying to preserve domestic stability at home through maintaining living standards (not to mention the bureaucrats handsomely enriching themselves), economic growth had fallen by about half under the corrupt Brezhnev regime. Here again they ran up against the limitations imposed by their own bureaucratic rule when it came to the technical and scientific innovation needed for the renewal of Soviet industry. Hostile to workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism, the only means at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy to raise labour productivity was to subject workers and managers to the discipline of market competition. Coming to power in 1985, the new "modernising" regime of Mikhail Gorbachev introduced *perestroika*—"market reforms". To increase productivity, workers' wages were geared to profitability; piece rates were reintroduced, widening income differences between workers, managers and the technical elite; factory was pitted against factory, industry against industry in the struggle for resources and consumers. It fuelled nationalism and the break-up of the USSR, pitting far richer, more industrialised areas against more backward, less industrialised ones.

Underlying this growing inequality was the appetite, especially among a layer of younger bureaucratic functionaries and intellectuals, to enrich themselves at the expense of the working class. A privileged layer, many of them the sons and daughters of the bureaucracy, envied the indulgences of their counterparts in the West. This was reflected in increasingly open expres-

Lebanon...

(Continued from page 2)

As a *New York Times* (19 July 1975) article noted:

"The fighting was something of a class war between the haves, who are for the most part Christians, and the have-nots, who are for the most part Moslems and who are allied with the heavily armed Palestinian guerrilla movement."

A Marxist party standing at the head of the Lebanese Muslim toilers and the Palestinians would have put forward a socialist programme capable of attracting the "have-nots" in the Christian community, splitting the Maronite leadership's base. Instead, the struggles of the Lebanese Muslims and the Palestinian commandos were channelled into the efforts of the Muslim elite to increase its influence in the traditional confessional system.

A key figure in derailing the incipient social revolution and transforming it into communalist bloodletting was Kamal Jumblatt, hereditary head of the Druze sect and leader of the so-called Lebanese National Movement (LNM), which included the pro-Moscow Lebanese Communist Party (PCL), the small Lebanese section of the late Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat and a host of Arab nationalist and Nasserite groups. The PLO leadership subordinated its forces to this sectarian demagogue, as did the entire Lebanese left. Because the PLO commandos and the "progressive" Lebanese fought on behalf of the traditional Muslim and clan chiefs like Jumblatt, the Maronite clan chiefs, like Chamoun, were able to mobilise the entire Christian community by appealing to its ancient fear of Muslim domination. The PCL, which until then maintained a significant base of supporters across the sectarian divide, was completely eliminated from Christian areas. As the Lebanese journalists Selim Accaoui and Magida Salman wrote:

"The PCL, which counted hundreds of Christian members and had a dominant influence in some Christian villages, saw its membership and its influence in the Mount Lebanon area crumble in a few months. Communist militants were chased out or massacred, and their houses burned. "By going in on the Muslim confessionals' game, the PCL was able to implant itself in the Muslim areas of Beirut; but at the same time it lost most of its ranks in the Christian regions."

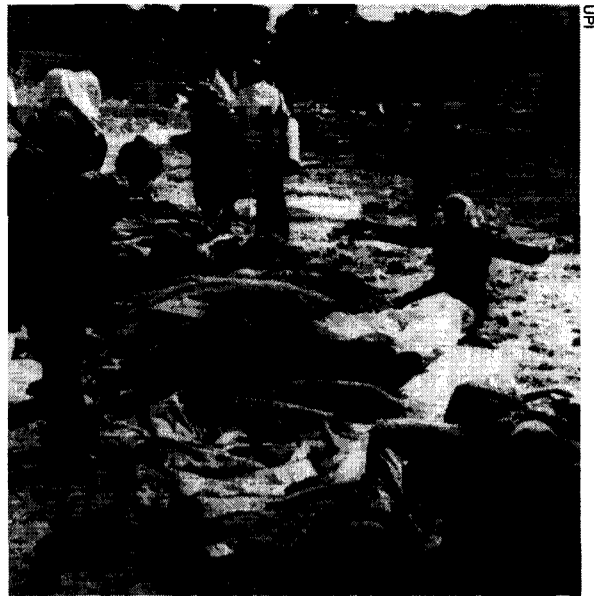
—*Comprendre le Liban* (1976)

By the beginning of 1976, the war had become a succession of communalist massacres and counter-massacres with Maronites sacking Muslim enclaves and Palestinian refugee camps, while PLO commandos and Druze militias responded by putting to the torch Christian villages, such as the village of Damur, home base of Chamoun. The conflict widened and a full-scale civil war raged for the next fifteen years.

Syrian Ba'athists massacre Palestinians

By the spring of 1976 the once-privileged Maronites, squeezed into besieged enclaves, were on the brink of defeat, as Lebanon gradually moved towards de facto partition. In an attempt to reverse the tide of battle, Israel opened a supply line of weapons to the Christian forces, including Soviet-made tanks and armoured personnel carriers captured during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars.

But it was the Syrian Ba'athists, the self-proclaimed "vanguards of the Arab revolution", who saved the pro-Western Christian rightists from defeat when they invaded Lebanon in June 1976 with a mandate from the Arab League and the



A woman weeps over the dead bodies of her relatives in Palestinian refugee camp of Sabra in West Beirut, 1982. Nearly 2000 Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila were slaughtered by Maronite militias organised by Israeli forces.

approval of both Washington and Tel Aviv. Like Lebanon, Syria itself is a medieval patchwork of potentially hostile ethnic, national and sectarian groupings where the ruling minority Alawites hold sway over the Sunnis, Kurds, Druze and others. Behind the Syrian invasion was the fear that the breakup of Lebanon along sectarian lines would spill over into Syria. Besides, the Ba'athist rulers, who were negotiating via US imperialism for the return of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, needed to demonstrate their ability to police the Palestinians in Lebanon.

The Syrian military intervention shifted the balance of forces in favour of the Maronite militia, culminating in the siege and fall of the huge Palestinian camp of Tel Zaatar in Beirut. The Syrian army provided logistical support for the Maronite militia that was surrounding the camp and prevented PLO commandos from lifting the siege. Hundreds died of hunger and disease. When the Palestinians surrendered, they were slaughtered en masse. At Tel Zaatar, the Syrian Ba'athists provided the Israeli rulers with a model for the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 2000 defenceless Palestinians in 1982, which was masterminded by Israel and carried out by the same Maronite criminals.

When Syrian forces entered Lebanon in 1976, we declared: "Syrian Troops Out of Lebanon!" (*Workers Vanguard* no 114, 18 June 1976). Our opposition to the Syrian forces was based on the fact that they intervened to suppress the Palestinian fighters and refugees as well as the Lebanese Muslims. It was not based on the notion that Syria was violating the national sovereignty of Lebanon. As we wrote following the Israeli invasion ("Israel Out of Lebanon!" *Workers Vanguard* no 308, 25 June 1982):

"There is a fundamental difference between the Syrian and Israeli armies in Lebanon, though both are oppressors and murderers of the peoples of Lebanon. Lebanon is not a nation separate and distinct from Syria, but a collection of religious-ethnic fiefdoms sharing a common ethnic makeup with Syria.... The Syrians in Lebanon are no more a 'foreign' army than the Maronite Phalange. Lebanon and Syria have been for centuries a common historical entity, united by language, culture and ethnic makeup."

1982: Israel invades Lebanon

Israel's 1982 invasion and occupation of Lebanon, backed by US imperialism, marks a watershed in the history of the region. Buried, along with the 20,000 Palestinians and Lebanese killed by the Zionists, was the fiction that Israel is one reactionary mass. As Sharon's blitzkrieg into Lebanon spread death and destruction, massive anti-war protests took place in Israel, an unprecedented development in the midst of a military campaign. The Lebanese war threatened to unravel Fortress Israel. In that war we stood for

revolutionary defencism of the Palestinian commandos, also recognising that—given the unpopularity of the war among Israelis and the fact that Israel's population is relatively small—rising Israeli casualties could serve to widen the wedge between the Hebrew-speaking population and the Zionist rulers of Israel. For this reason, the decision of the PLO leadership to withdraw from Beirut, a surrender arranged by US imperialism, was especially catastrophic for the Palestinian people and the prospects for social revolution in the region.

If the war in Lebanon deeply upset liberal Zionists, it also shattered the myth of Arab unity behind the Palestinian cause. Not a single Arab state came to the aid of the embattled Palestinians facing Sharon's genocidal terror. As a Palestinian commando exclaimed bitterly to a Western newsman during the siege of West Beirut, "You see where the Israelis are. Well, behind the Israelis is King Fahd [of Saudi Arabia] and Hafez el-Assad [of Syria] and King Hussein [of Jordan]. They are all in this together." Indeed, from King Hussein's Black September massacre of 10,000 Palestinians in 1970, under the gaze of 12,000 Iraqi troops stationed in Jordan, to the siege and slaughter of Palestinians by the Syrian-aided Maronites at Tel Zaatar, Arab rulers have been as ruthless enemies of Palestinian national emancipation as the Zionists. For the Arab rulers, the Palestinian question represents no more than a diversion, whereby popular discontent is channelled into a "holy war" against Zionism.

Faced with the impotence and betrayal of the Arab states, the PLO leadership turned to US imperialism as a potential saviour. Arafat agreed to allow the US Marines and the French Foreign Legion to disarm the Palestinian commandos guarding West Beirut and escort them to their new exile in Tunisia. American troops were sent into Lebanon for that purpose, eventually becoming a target in the Lebanese quagmire. On 23 October 1983, a powerful bomb exploded near the US military barracks in Beirut, killing 240 Marines. It was to divert attention of the American population, outraged over what many perceived as a senseless intervention into the bloody Lebanese civil war, that President Ronald Reagan ordered the invasion of the tiny island of Grenada (see "Rape of Grenada, Bloody Mess in Lebanon—Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive! U.S. Out of Grenada, Dead or Alive!" *Workers Vanguard* no 341, 4 November 1983).

Meanwhile, Arafat's betrayal in withdrawing from Beirut—setting the stage for the Sabra and Shatila massacre by Sharon's fascistic Maronite henchmen—liquidated the PLO as an independent military force. In the end, Israel withdrew its

forces from southern Lebanon in 2000, concluding its nearly 20-year occupation of that country.

For a socialist federation of the Near East!

Comparing the initial defeat of the Maronites in 1975 to the events of the French Revolution, LNM leader Kamal Jumblatt declared, "This is our 1789." In that revolution, the bourgeoisie swept away the feudal order and consolidated a nation-state. However, in this epoch of imperialist domination, the national bourgeoisie in countries of belated development, like Lebanon, is incapable of realising such goals as national consolidation. In their struggle for hegemony, colonial bourgeois forces may clash with the imperialists that ravage their resources, retard their economic development and create innumerable barriers to national emancipation. But in the age of imperialism, the colonial and semicolonial bourgeoisie can only exist as middlemen and brokers for imperialism. From the oil sheiks of the Gulf emirates to the bankers of Beirut and the bonapartists of Cairo and Damascus, the ruling classes of the Near East are as dependent on the backwardness and balkanisation of their countries as the imperialists themselves. Their interests are firmly intertwined with those of imperialism. As Trotsky wrote of the Chinese Revolution in 1927: "Everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists" ("The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin", *Leon Trotsky on China* [1976]).

In such backward countries, the perspective for resolving the fundamental democratic questions posed by combined and uneven development, such as ensuring the democratic and national rights of all peoples in the Near East, is provided by the theory of permanent revolution developed by Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky. He wrote in *Permanent Revolution* (1929): "The complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses." The genuine liberation of colonial and semicolonial countries can be achieved only through the successful struggle of the proletariat for state power, leading all the oppressed.

Within the historic cauldron of national hatred and communal warfare of the Near East the prospects for even a modicum of intercommunal harmony in Lebanon are bleak under capitalism, for if the historic exclusion of the Muslim population is reversed it will simply lead to the victimisation of the formerly dominant Christians. There is no possibility of an equitable solution to national and communal conflict short of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As we wrote in the last part of our four-part series, "After Lebanon: The Left and the Palestinian Question—From the 'Arab Revolution' to Pax Americana" (*Workers Vanguard* no 335, 29 July 1983): "The struggle for the democratic rights of all the peoples of the Near East and for the survival and national emancipation of the Palestinians must necessarily sweep away the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the bloody Ba'athist bonapartists in Syria, bring down the rotten medieval structure in Lebanon and shatter the Zionist state. This struggle must place the revolutionary proletariat with its vanguard party at the head of the exploited and oppressed, and can only find its fulfillment in a socialist federation of the Near East."

Adapted from *Workers Vanguard* no 849, 27 May 2005.

Social Forum...

(Continued from page 12)

closely collaborated with the US Central Intelligence Agency internationally, and in India has helped to shape the government's policies in favour of American interests."

Left cover for class collaboration

The fact that the World and European Social Forums have been all but bought and paid for by various capitalist governments and agencies is no big deal for the SWP. As SWP leader (and prominent spokesman on Social Forum platforms) Alex Callinicos shamelessly put it, "we all understood that a mass Social Forum needs money and money means compromises" (International Socialist Tendency Discussion Bulletin, January 2005). Indeed! Such sentiments are hardly peculiar to Callinicos. The first World Social Forum in 2001 was partly organised by the fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat (USec). Here young radicals were schooled in administering fiscal austerity for the capitalist state through mock "participatory budgets". The capitalist benefactors who funded the WSF got their money's worth. Today the Workers Party (PT) of Brazilian president Lula—with the aid of a "comrade minister" who is a member of the USec—are administering the capitalist state in Brazil, slavishly abiding by the dictates of the IMF through pushing austerity on an impoverished population.

At the most recent WSF in January, Lula was roundly booed by many of the attendees who oppose his open pandering to and collaboration with the IMF and World Bank. But the truth is that Lula represents the politics and programme of the WSF on the level of state power. This is what is known as the popular front: a class-collaborationist political bloc of working-class organisations with capitalist agencies in which the politics of the working-class component of the bloc are subordinated to the politics of the bourgeoisie, to the defence of the bourgeois state and capitalism. Like Lula's government in Brazil, popular fronts are called upon by the rulers to sell austerity to the workers more effectively than the discredited bourgeois parties can.

With Lula now discredited due to his attacks on Brazilian workers and peasants, the new hero of the 2005 WSF was Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. This was quite a turn-around because at the 2003 WSF, while he was fighting the attempts of the US government to overthrow him, he was not invited and not given an official space when he turned up anyway. Chávez's popularity among the oppressed in Venezuela comes from the fact he has used the oil revenues to introduce reforms that have benefited the poor, and he is not seen as a lackey of the US. But these are not even basic structural reforms, much less a social revolution, and are subject to the fluctuations of world oil prices.

Chávez is a bourgeois nationalist who rules for capitalism in Venezuela. Nationalist populism and economic neoliberalism are merely alternative policies of the rule of the same capitalist class. It is a fact that Chávez is reviled by many of the big landowners and capitalists in Venezuela as well as the neocons in the Bush administration, who in April 2002 backed a military coup against him. But more rational representatives of imperialism see Chávez, with his popular appeal, as a man who can be trusted to protect their investments. Chávez's defeat of the 2004 recall referendum against him was welcomed as a guarantor of "stability" by such mouthpieces of imperialism as

the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times*. As we wrote in *Workers Vanguard* no 831, 3 September 2004:

"The immediate perspective that is urgently posed is not only to oppose U.S. imperialist incursions into Venezuela and elsewhere, but to fight to shatter the support of the workers movement to either Chávez or the opposition, and to forge a revolutionary internationalist workers party to lead the working class to power. This requires an intransigent fight against nationalism in Venezuela, which obscures class divisions in the country. Only the victorious struggle for working-class rule, i.e., socialist revolution throughout the Americas, will ensure land to the landless and enable the oil workers and other proletarians to enjoy the wealth created by their labor."

In presenting bourgeois nationalists like Chávez as fighters against "globalisation", the Social Forums provide a service against the fight for socialist



AP



Simone Bruno

Left: Brazilian cops attack landless workers movement (MST) protesters in Brasilia, 17 May. Right: Lula, head of Brazilian popular-front government, speaking at World Social Forum in Porto Alegre earlier this year.

revolution, binding the working class to their "own" national capitalist class. In fact the reason why the World Social Forums have all been hosted in "Third World" countries such as Brazil and India has been to mask the class antagonism between the working class of these countries and their native bourgeois exploiters. The message has been that the bourgeoisie of the "Global South" can be relied upon to join with "the people" and fight against "globalisation". But the main concern of the capitalists of the "Third World" is to defend their profits, for which they are dependent on the imperialists and require the maximum exploitation of the working class.

With the same goal of binding the exploited to their exploiters, the ESF pushes the illusion of a humane "Social Europe" under capitalism, contrasting it to the "neoliberal" model represented by the US and Britain. It is the promotion of this vision of a "Social Europe" that has attracted to the ESF the pro-capitalist trade union leaders as well as social-democratic politicians across the continent. The political perspective of the European Confederation of Trade Unions was expressed by its general secretary at the 2000 Nice EU Summit protests: "There needs to be the incorporation of the trade unions and NGOs into the decision-making structures in Brussels.... We agree that Europe must become more competitive, yes. But the new Europe must also contain a dignified quality of life for all its citizens" (quoted in "The Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum"). Becoming "more competitive" means extracting greater profits from the sweat and toil of the working class. The bureaucrats of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) endorsed the 2004 London ESF

and used it as an opportunity to provide a platform for the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions' (IFTU) Sobhi Al-Mashadani, a stooge of the imperialists' stooge government in Iraq. This followed the Labour Party conference where, at the behest of the union bureaucrats, another IFTU representative, Abdullah Muhsin, backed the imperialist occupation by helping to ensure the defeat of a motion calling for early withdrawal of British troops from Iraq.

Workers Power induced by its own hypnosis

In its pamphlet *Anti-Capitalism: Summit Sieges and Social Forums* (2005), Workers Power's League for the Fifth International (L5I) poses as a left critic of WSF organisers like Bernard Cassen and Susan George of ATTAC, an organisation founded to campaign

group Revolution, is that they can build not only a "movement" but even a "revolutionary" party out of these cross-class, state-funded alliances: "the anticapitalist movement, the workers' movement, the movements of the racially and nationally oppressed, youth, women, all must be brought together to create a new International—a world party of socialist revolution" (*Anti-Capitalism: Summit Sieges and Social Forums*). While crying foul against right-wing bureaucratic dominance, Workers Power seeks to gain "democratic structures" within the Social Forums to engineer the movement's transformation. It urges the utilisation of "initiatives like the Assembly of Social Movements to propose permanent delegate-based, elected, co-ordinating bodies that can prepare the way for a structured Congress in which organisational and policy proposals can be debated out, amended and adopted".

Left out of Workers Power's equation is any political fight in opposition to the whole purpose of these Social Forums, which are premised on the *maintenance* of the capitalist system, merely trying to give it a more "democratic" and "humanitarian" face lift. But even Workers Power is forced to admit that these Assemblies lack a conception of the "capitalist system as the enemy", "the working class as the force" and "socialism as the only possible basis for the 'other world' it aims to build" (*Workers Power*, March 2005).

The reality of class-collaborationism was starkly brought home at the first ESF in Florence in 2002. The L5I gushed: "The sheer intoxication of being 'tous ensemble' (all together) meant that even dyed-in-the-wool reformists spoke like revolutionary firebrands. Everyone was carried forward too by the urgency of doing everything possible to stop George Bush's war on Iraq." "Everything possible" included an explicit appeal to Europe's imperialist rulers to oppose US plans to invade Iraq, signed by a gamut of the European left including the SWP, Workers Power and Revolution at a Brussels meeting preparatory to the Florence ESF. It said: "We call on all the European heads of state to publicly stand against this war, whether it has UN backing or not, and to demand that George Bush abandon his war plans" (*Liberazione*, 13 September 2002). This wretched appeal to the "peace-loving" European capitalist rulers only serves to bind the exploited to their exploiters.

The prime movers behind the Florence ESF were mass Italian reformist parties such as Rifondazione comunista (RC) and Democratic Left (DS). In the 1990s, DS formed part of

for a tax on international financial transactions and against "neoliberalism". Despite the fact that its offices are staffed by French Communist Party and USec supporters, ATTAC does not pretend to oppose capitalism. It is a thoroughly bourgeois organisation which boasted of its close ties to the Lionel Jospin popular-front government. Yet regarding Cassen and George, the L5I argues: "We don't need to arrange any artificial split from them. But neither do we need to fear a split with them. If we go forward determinedly, they will desert at once." By an "artificial split", the L5I means a *split along class lines*. The L5I is not opposed to class collaboration; it simply wants a more militant popular front.

Indeed, the crackpot conception of the L5I, Workers Power, and its youth

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the "Olive Tree" coalition government that administered anti-immigrant terror and severe attacks on the working class on behalf of Italian imperialism. Until late 1998, RC formed a tacit coalition with DS. The ESF provides these consummate popular frontists with a cheap way to rebuild support so that they can return to government. Likewise the Paris ESF was organised by the Communist Party (PCF) and Alain Krivine's pseudo-Trotskyist Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR). Today in France, where Chirac's government is totally discredited with the vote against the EU constitutional treaty, these same forces are working feverishly to put together a new class-collaborationist alliance hoping to take the reins of government. That means implementing the attacks on welfare as well as the racist "war on terror".

The popular front: not a tactic but the greatest crime

Breaking the working class and radical youth from the idea that they can negotiate a common progressive future with representatives of the capitalist ruling class responsible for exploitation, imperialist war, racism and women's and sexual oppression, is the basic task of revolutionary Marxists. As the producers of capitalist society's wealth, and the bourgeoisie's profits, the working class is the only agent with the social power and objective interest to overthrow the capitalist system and to shatter its state. This requires socialist revolution to replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with a workers state that will defend and administer a collectivised, planned economy. On an international scale, this would lay the basis to eradicate scarcity and produce for the needs of the entire human race. The only instrument that can organise the proletarian struggle for the overthrow of capitalism is a revolutionary vanguard party.

This is counterposed to the class-collaborationism of the Social Forums. Tailored to the sentiments of activists who are sick of parliamentary politics and parties, the Social Forums are popular fronts that promote the myth that a "people's alliance" with supposedly "progressive" capitalists can end the ravages of imperialism. The popular front (or "People's Front") was the weapon of choice used by the Stalinists in the 1930s for the purpose of preventing workers revolution. Trotsky vehemently opposed the popular front and relentlessly warned of its dire consequences for the working class. As then-Trotskyist leader James Burnham pointed out in his 1937 pamphlet, "The People's Front, the New Betrayal":

"For the proletariat, through its parties, to give up its own independent program means to give up its independent functioning as a class.... By accepting the program of the People's Front, it thereby accepts the aims of another section of society; it accepts the aim of the defense of capitalism when all history demonstrates that the interests of the proletariat

can be served only by the overthrow of capitalism."

The popular front has often had bloody repercussions for the working class and oppressed. A classic example is that of Chile in 1973, where Salvador Allende and his fellow reformists led the revolutionary-minded working class into a coalition government with the capitalists. Allende vowed not to challenge the capitalist order or the state; he put an end to peasants seizing land and workers seizing factories. Aided by US imperialism the Chilean bourgeoisie then turned to General Augusto Pinochet to attack the working class and its leaders (including Allende), impos-



Neville Elder



Peter Macdiarmid

Ken Livingstone — patron of London ESF, cheerleader for cop violence against anti-capitalist youth at May Day 2000 (left).

ing a savage military dictatorship at the cost of 30,000 lives.

From Seattle to Social Forums

Hoping to appeal to militant youth who despise the Social Forums as endless talk shops, the LSI pleads for a return to the street demonstrations of Seattle and Genoa. Its pamphlet proclaims that "For five years our movement has besieged the summits of the rich and the powerful.... It must take to the streets again, and show through mass direct action its intent; to build a world without classes, oppression, racism, war and imperialism." But the politics of the WSF is an extension of, not counterposed to, the politics of Seattle. While attracting many youth who oppose the impact of capitalism internationally, the political shots at Seattle were called by the social democrats and trade-union bureaucrats whose anti-Communist tirades against China echo the interests of the imperialist rulers whose aim is the restoration of the system of capitalist exploitation to the Chinese deformed workers state. "Direct action" protest based on pro-imperialist, popular-front politics is just "militant" class collaborationism.

The backdrop to the proliferation of Social Forums is the counterrevolution

in the former USSR and the bourgeoisie's ideological campaign that "communism is dead". Typical of the regression of consciousness brought about by the destruction of the Soviet Union is the idea, prevalent among young leftists, that the working class is irrelevant as the agency for social change, or simply one more victim of oppression. Meanwhile union bureaucrats now justify betrayals of workers' struggles by arguing that "globalisation" makes class struggle ineffective because the capitalists can easily move production to low wage economies in Asia or Eastern Europe. While there have been certain *quantitative* changes

the social-democratic left in the anti-globalisation movement joined in violence-baiting and cop-baiting the Black Bloc. The ICL stood out for our forthright defence of the Black Bloc against the capitalist state and its lackeys. At the same time, we stressed:

"The question before the huge numbers of young radicals who have been drawn to the 'anti-globalization' protests of recent years is: how do you change the world? While the protests have succeeded in forcing the imperialists to schedule future meetings in isolated backwaters, this does nothing to impede the workings of the capitalist system. To do away with imperialist exploitation requires a political mobilization of the proletariat in a thorough-

going socialist revolution....

"What's needed is a new, revolutionary leadership of the working class, a tribune of the people and fighter on behalf of all the oppressed. It is necessary to break with the class-collaborationist politics pushed by those who, in the name of a 'lesser evil,' subordinate the vital interests of the proletariat to those of its capitalist exploiters and oppressors. It's necessary to forge a revolutionary workers party that fights to set up a workers government through socialist revolution against the entire capitalist system."

—"Blood and Bullets in Genoa", *Workers Vanguard* no 762, 3 August 2001

ing a savage military dictatorship at the cost of 30,000 lives.

in the world economy in recent decades, "globalisation" is not a *qualitatively* new phenomenon. The fact that the capitalist market economy is "global", that banks and corporations seek out those (low wage) countries where they can get the highest return, and the internationalisation of finance capital, was explained by VI Lenin nearly 90 years ago:

"Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed."

—*Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*

Poverty, disease, exploitation and war are not aberrations in the capitalist system but are inherent within its workings. Only through the overthrow of capitalism can the productive forces be developed to provide a decent standard of living for all of humanity.

In the face of an international witch hunt against the "direct action" anarchists of the Black Bloc, following the police killing of leftist protester Carlo Giuliani in Genoa in 2001, the bulk of

We Marxists of the Spartacus Youth Group and International Communist League understand that the fight for the independence of the working class is the precondition for the emancipation of humanity through socialist revolution. Our attitude to the Social Forums, as with any other popular front, is to oppose them through intervening with a sharp characterisation and explanation of this deception in a bid to win those that genuinely want to fight oppression and exploitation to an internationalist, revolutionary, proletarian programme. We are proud communists and refuse to be lackeys of the social democrats, trade-union bureaucrats and their capitalist masters. If you do too—join us! ■

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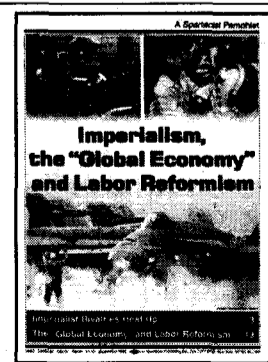
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This pamphlet assesses recent changes in the world economy in a historical perspective, from the origins of modern imperialism in the late 19th century through the capitalist counterrevolution in Eastern Europe and the former USSR and its aftermath. Reformist ideologues of "globalisation" seek to obscure the role of the capitalist nation-state and the danger of inter-imperialist war which is inherent in capitalism, while amnestying the refusal of the trade union bureaucracies to wage class struggle against their respective bourgeoisies.

Exploitation, poverty and social degradation can be eliminated only through proletarian revolutions in the imperialist centres as well as the neocolonial countries, laying the basis for an international planned socialist economy.

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Churches, charities and CIA cash

Social Forum con game

If the "Make Poverty History" campaign had anything to do with actually challenging the scourge of poverty, AIDS, illiteracy and all-sided misery and destitution for the peoples of Africa, would it be endorsed by Tony

Young Spartacus

Blair and Gordon Brown? These butchers of Iraq are trying to rebuild Labour's popularity with voters at home and to refurbish the image of blood-drenched British imperialism. Behind them is a whole cabal of celebrities, religious charities, NGOs, trade-union bureaucrats and reformists like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) championing the "Make Poverty History" fraud.

Not everyone is taken in by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's newfound concern for the poor. A letter in the *Glasgow Herald* (6 June) wryly noted: "Gordon Brown's genuineness about eradicating poverty is as genuine as, and in direct proportion to, his willingness to lead a demonstration of bankers, financiers and stockbrokers along the streets of Edinburgh with a banner proclaiming 'Long live the Cuban Revolution!'" As for imperialist hypocrisy about aid to the "Third World", we endorse a characterisation of bourgeois charity written by Engels in 1845. Addressing the English bourgeoisie, he wrote it was "as though you rendered the proletarians a service in first sucking out their very life-blood and then practising your self-complacent, Pharisaic philanthropy upon them placing yourselves before the world as mighty benefactors of humanity when you give back to the plundered victims the hundredth part of what belongs to them!" (*Condition of The Working Class in England*). "Sucking out the life blood" from the world's working masses and oppressed is what the G8 is all about.

For those who want to protest against the G8 meeting but don't want to go along with the "we are the world" roadshow, there is the iron fist of state repression. For months, the tabloids and other media have echoed police forces in scaremongering about "violent" anarchists attacking the G8 summit. An army of 10,000 cops has been mobilised; a five-mile-long fence has been erected around the five-star hotel in Gleneagles where the meeting will take place; and reportedly the US is stationing an aircraft carrier full of Marines off the west coast of Scotland.

Here are the methods the capitalist

rulers use to deal with any perceived protest against their rule—state repression on the one hand and political co-optation on the other. Foremost among the mechanisms for co-opting "anti-globalisation" protest are the World Social Forum (WSF) and European Social Forum (ESF), which are led and organised by much the same forces that are leading "Make Poverty History". Starting in 2001, these Social Forums have been used to defuse the wave of mass protests—against the G8, World Trade Organisation, IMF and other imperialist agencies—exemplified by

italists. The Social Forums are an obstacle to this class-consciousness.

Social Forums and state funding

The European and World Social Forums have all been funded by capitalist states in the countries where they were held and received official backing from either bourgeois municipal governments or mayoral offices. The list of sponsors for the WSF has included not only the government of the city of Porto Alegre, the state government of Rio Grande do Sul and the federal government of Brazil but also the Banco do

dition, the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2003 received a message of support from UN secretary general Kofi Annan.

As the old saying goes, "He who pays the piper calls the tune." And while all the Social Forums rail against the truly savage and deranged Bush administration in the US, among those funding the WSF are none other than foundations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation. The Rockefeller foundation was used to clean up the Rockefellers' reputation following the 20 April 1914 massacre in Ludlow, Colorado in which 20 people—including children—were killed by company guards and militia during a bitter struggle by the mineworkers union. The Ford Foundation came to prominence in 1936 at the height of the industrial struggles in the car industry in the US. Following World War II it became a conduit for CIA funds for anti-Communist causes around the world.

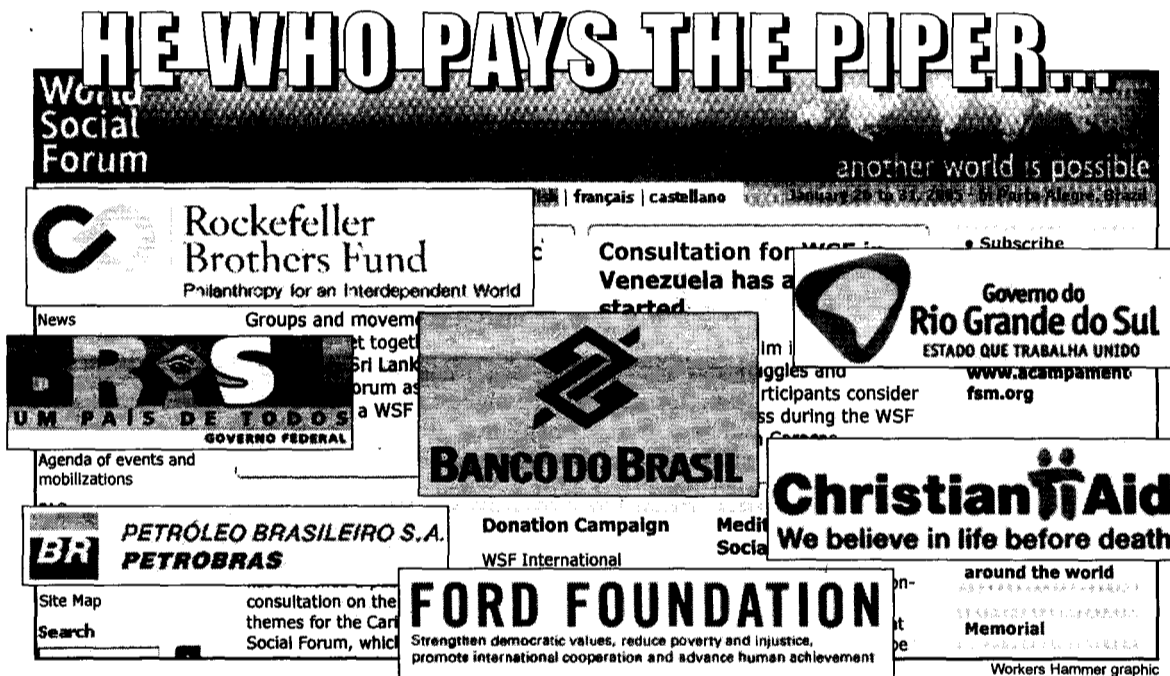
While funded by some of the most notorious agencies of US imperialism, the World Social Forums have not been so welcoming to those seen as potentially threatening the interests of imperialism. The statement in the WSF Charter of Principles that "neither party representatives nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum" has

been used to exclude the Zapatistas as well as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia). Even the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an organisation of mothers of leftists who were "disappeared" during the 1976-1983 Argentinian military dictatorship, was excluded from the 2002 WSF. On the other hand, a warm welcome has been extended to various heads of capitalist governments—who preside over "special bodies of armed men" more commonly known as the capitalist state.

An insightful article titled "The Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum" in *Aspects of India's Economy* (September 2003) by Rajani X Desai captured the purpose and nature of the Social Forums:

"While several political forces fighting for a change of the system [have] been excluded from the WSF meets, droves of political leaders of the imperialist countries have been attending. Not only does the WSF as a body receive funds from agencies which are tied to imperialist interests and operations, but innumerable bodies participating in the WSF too are dependent on such agencies. The implications of this can be seen from the history of one such agency, Ford Foundation, which has

continued on page 10



WSF's slogan is "another world is possible". But whose world? Above are some of the agencies who have sponsored and funded the Social Forums.

the Seattle protest in 1999. The purpose was to draw radical youth away from pitched confrontations with the forces of the capitalist state and to corral them behind the "democratic alternative" of parliamentary reformism, while pretending that these talking shops were "non-parliamentary". Far from being met with the tear gas, water cannons and bullets of the capitalist state, as happened in Genoa in July 2001, the WSF and ESF have been backed and bankrolled by various agencies of the imperialist rulers.

This is because the Social Forums and the so-called "anti-capitalist" movement in fact pose no fundamental threat to capitalist rule. Their organisers buy into the predominant myth of the "post-Soviet" world: that class struggle against the capitalist order is a thing of the past; the working class is irrelevant as a factor for social change and the best that can be achieved is to give the system a "human" face. The truth is that the capitalist system is as dependent as ever on the working class, which has the power to overthrow capitalism. To achieve this, the working class must become conscious that its own interests are irreconcilable with those of the cap-

Brasil and its biggest petroleum company, Petrobras! The 2002 ESF was financed by the city of Florence and the 2003 Paris ESF funded by the Chirac government. The 2004 London ESF was bankrolled and hosted by the New Labour mayoral office of Ken Livingstone, supporter of the imperialist bombing of Serbia and cheerleader for the police terror against "anti-capitalist" protesters on May Day 2000.

The Social Forums have also all been dominated by the misnamed "Non-Governmental" Organisations (NGOs). Of course these organisations, sanctioned by and receiving much of their funding from churches and capitalist states, are hardly independent from the governments to which they are answerable. Charities have long been the "humanitarian" face of imperialist intervention and of multinational companies looking to pillage "Third World" economies. Prominent NGOs at the Social Forums have included Oxfam, War on Want and Christian Aid. The major sponsor of NGOs around the world is the United Nations, which itself was set up to give a humanitarian veneer to the depredations of imperialism, particularly American. In this tra-