

1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International"

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

No. 17



1996



STEVE STARR—SABA

Class War—Not Holy War!

Islam, Empire & Revolution

In April 1991 Sudan's fundamentalist regime hosted an international Islamist conference in Khartoum. Chaired by Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan's clerical ruler, delegates from 55 nations, representing millions of supporters, approved a six-point manifesto calling for pan-Islamic unity and the adoption of the *sharia* (Islamic law) as the basis of government in every Muslim country. The Afghan *mujahedin* (then on the brink of overthrowing the left-nationalist People's Democratic Party regime) were represented by Gulbuddin

Hekmatyar, who first gained notoriety in the 1970s for throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women at Kabul University. Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), represented by Abassi Madani, had just bested the ruling party in municipal elections. Throughout the Muslim world, Islamists were making inroads among students, young intellectuals and discontented plebeian masses.

Since 1991, the Islamists have suffered some setbacks. In Algeria the "moderate" elements in the FIS are seeking an

accommodation with the military rulers who have spent the past four years trying to crush them, while in Afghanistan, rival Islamic factions battle each other for supremacy, as the country slides into chaos. Sixteen years after taking power, Iran's Islamic Republic inspires more cynicism than fervor. However, Muslim fundamentalism retains a mass following throughout much of the Middle East, and today the specter of militant Islam is acknowledged by the world powers as itself a world power.

Yet Islamic fundamentalism is far from being a unified world movement. Some groups seek accommodation with regimes willing to assume Islamic trappings; others are more intransigent toward the "internal infidel." Different groups employ various combinations of parliamentary, terrorist and mass insurrectionary tactics. Despite occasional ecumenical declarations, the enduring sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites remains. The most powerful Islamist state, Iran, is Shiite, and therefore viewed as somewhat heretical by the 85 percent of Muslims who are Sunni. Many Sunni Islamists, including Turabi, who is now a proponent of ecumenism, supported Iraq in its war with Iran in the 1980s.

Orthodox Muslims believe that the Quran is the word of God, dictated to the Prophet Muhammad, which can only be interpreted in conjunction with the *hadiths* (the sayings and actions of the Prophet and whichever other early Muslim leaders the particular sect venerates). Liberal Muslims, employing modernist interpretations, argue that Islamic doctrine is compatible with democracy, socialism and women's rights. Conservative fundamentalists are hostile to Islamic "modernism," but, unlike the radicals, they generally preach obedience to political authority. In Sunni countries, the *ulama* (religious scholars) are paid employees of the state, and can therefore be relied upon to interpret Islam's political message to suit the rulers of the day.

Tenets of Radical Islamism

Radical Islamists reject both liberal modernism and conservative quietism. The radicals view most of the states in the Middle East as pseudo-Islamic. They define the enemy as creeping secularization and consumerism, which they associate with both the growth of the market and class struggle. In their view, pro-Western, free-market regimes are as guilty of promoting these trends as the Ba'athist "socialist" regimes in Syria and Iraq or the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria. The Islamists preach an internal *jihad* to establish truly Islamic regimes as a prerequisite for a successful external *jihad* .

While the modernists argue that Islam is inherently democratic because of its institution of *shura* (consultation), the radicals assert that *shura* only involves consultation with religious scholars for the proper interpretation of the *sharia* . In *Islamic Government* Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wrote:

"The Islamic government is not despotic but constitutional. However, it is not constitutional in the well-known sense of the word, which is represented in the parliamentary system or in the people's councils....The difference between the Islamic government and the constitutional governments, both monarchic and republican, lies in the fact that the people's representatives or the king's representatives are the ones who codify and legislate, whereas the power of legislation is confined to God, may He be praised, and nobody else has the right to legislate...."

Islamist militants combine denunciations of Western

imperialism and the conspicuous consumption of the rich with reverence for private property and "Islamic economics." They are uniformly hostile to all forms of socialist and pro-working class ideology. Khomeini crushed the Iranian left soon after they aided his ascension to power and Turabi's regime decimated the Sudanese Communist Party, once one of Africa's largest. Sayyid Qutb, the preeminent ideologue of Sunni fundamentalism, often denounced "plutocracy" and western capitalism, but was opposed to the very idea of social equality:

"Muhammad could have certainly hoisted a social banner, launched a war upon the privileged and the high-born. He could have set Islam up as a movement aspiring to social change and redistribution of assets of the rich unto the poor.... Yet Allah, in his eternal wisdom, did not instruct the Prophet to take this course.... He made him launch only one rallying cry: 'There is no God but Allah!'"

—quoted in Emanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*

Radical Islamists are also distinguished by their virulent commitment to the subordination of women. Qutb referred to the idea of women's liberation as a "sewer." The tiniest social space for women's freedom from male authority is denounced as *jahiliyya* (barbarism). From Algeria to Bangladesh, Islamists have attacked women who fail to abide by the reactionary social code of the mullahs.

Modernist interpretations of Islam downplay texts like the 34th verse of the Fourth Surah in the Quran:

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge [other translations say 'beat'] them."

—*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, trans. by Muhammad Pickthall

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1917

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Signed articles or letters do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the International Bolshevik Tendency.

Subscription: U.S. \$5/4 issues

Order from/pay to:
BT, Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.,
Toronto, Canada M5C 1J0

closing date: 1 December 1995

Defend Quebec's Right to Self-Determination! For Working Class Unity Across National Lines!

Quebec voters' narrow rejection of independence (by a margin of 50.6 to 49.4 percent) in the October 1995 referendum satisfied no one and settled nothing. Unlike the previous vote in 1980, where the 60/40 federalist victory relegated the question of separation to the back burner for over a decade, this result signals that momentum has shifted toward the camp of the *indépendantistes*. The *Toronto Star* (31 October 1995) concluded that, "A third time out, the forces of national unity will not win."

The narrow federalist victory came after a tumultuous few weeks in which they saw an early lead melt away. The apparent volatility of the voters is based on a longstanding three-way division in Quebec popular opinion on the question of independence. Roughly half of Quebec's francophones (between 30 and 40 percent of the total population) has consistently favored separation. A comparable percentage of Quebec's population (including anglophones, aboriginals and immigrant "allophones," who together total roughly 20 percent) are firmly opposed. The balance is composed of francophone Québécois, who primarily identify with Quebec rather than Canada, and who are profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo, but would prefer some kind of new federal arrangement with English Canada to outright independence. If and when the majority of them are finally convinced that "renewed federalism" is not an option, they will likely join the *indépendantiste* camp.

Jacques Parizeau, a long time separatist and Parti Québécois (PQ) leader, resigned as Quebec premier the day after his side's narrow defeat. He was saluted for his "bracing cynicism" by the *Toronto Globe and Mail* (1 November 1995):

"We are elected by idiots," he once said privately. "In Quebec, 40 per cent are separatists and 40 per cent are federalists—and 20 per cent don't know who is prime minister of Canada. And it is that 20 percent that makes and breaks governments."

Attempts to appeal to the undecided introduced an element of deliberate ambiguity in the pronouncements of both camps. The results were reflected in a Groupe Léger & Léger poll, conducted between 1 and 5 October 1995, that revealed:

"Almost 30 per cent of respondents intending to vote Yes said they believe a sovereign Quebec would continue to elect members to the [federal] House of Commons. Another 20 per cent of Yes supporters said they did not know whether a sovereign Quebec would continue to elect MPs...."

—*Globe and Mail*, 6 October 1995

The sovereignists asked for a mandate not for immediate separation, but for one last round of negotiation with English Canada to reach a new arrangement. Only if that failed would they declare independence. The federalists initially responded that there would be no negotiations following a Yes vote and that Quebec's economy would collapse. Early indications showed the federalists ahead. But as the cam-



GAMMASTUDIO X

Quebec nationalists rally before referendum

paign progressed this lead vanished. The unpopular Parizeau (still remembered as the architect of the PQ government's brutal attacks on public sector workers in the early 1980s) was replaced by Lucien Bouchard, a former Conservative cabinet minister and leader of the separatist Bloc Québécois (BQ) in the federal parliament, giving renewed momentum to the Yes campaign.

Federalists Running Scared

When Bouchard took over, he tossed the PQ economic studies aside and instead appealed to the national pride of the Québécois and their anger at the long history of humiliation at the hands of English Canada. PQ ads picked up the threat of one federalist, Charles Garcia, to "crush" the separatists, and asked, "Do you want to be crushed or respected?" The result was a dramatic swing to the Yes side.

This was met by a last-minute outpouring of national-unity mongering from English Canada, culminating in a massive "spontaneous" federalist rally in Montreal a few days before the vote. Most of the participants in the demonstration (which was initiated by a member of the federal cabinet, and organized and paid for by English Canadian corporations) were Anglophones from outside Quebec. Billed as a demonstration of "love," this mobilization of Canada's patriotic petty bourgeoisie was little more than a veiled form of intimidation. Workers in shops and offices across Montreal were given the day off and encouraged to attend the No rally. Those who did not jump at the chance to wave the Canadian flag had their arms twisted by their bosses. Some employees were told that they should start looking for a new job if the Yes side won.

Canadian prime minister, Jean Chrétien, initially stayed out of the campaign, except to declare that he would refuse to recognize the legitimacy of a Yes vote. Chrétien is widely

reviled in Quebec for his opposition to recognition of Quebec's national rights. To win the 1980 referendum, Pierre Trudeau, Chrétien's mentor, promised constitutional reforms and a new deal for Quebec. Two years later, when Chrétien and Trudeau repatriated the Canadian constitution from Britain, Quebec's traditional veto was eliminated.

In the last week before the vote Chrétien suddenly changed his tune and began pleading that those in Quebec who wanted change should vote No. In a major address in Montreal on 24 October, he pledged to recognize Quebec as "distinct" in its language, culture and institutions, to restore the veto to Quebec over constitutional matters, and to devolve various administrative functions from the federal government to Quebec. Chrétien's desperate reversal on these questions (in 1990 he had opposed similar measures proposed by the Conservative government as part of its Meech Lake Accord) appears to have been a major factor in swinging enough votes to produce the razor-thin "victory" for the No side.

Two Wings of Anglo Chauvinism

Immediately after the vote, Chrétien said he would act quickly on his promises, but within a matter of days he had begun to backpedal. A few weeks later, with pollsters reporting separatist support rising, Chrétien reversed course again and proposed to push a motion through the federal parliament recognizing Quebec's distinctiveness, and promising to veto any future constitutional changes that did not have the support of Quebec, the West, Ontario and the Maritimes. The BQ immediately pointed out that any such motion had no constitutional significance and could be overturned at any point in the future by a simple majority.

This is quite true, but it seems unlikely that Chrétien can deliver a more substantive package. The federalist camp is deeply divided between the reactionary Anglo chauvinists of the Reform Party (who are eager to decentralize federal power, but insist that Quebec is only a province like the others) and the Ontario-centered traditional bourgeoisie (represented by the Liberal Party) which is prepared to negotiate cosmetic constitutional alterations to retain Quebec. At this point the chance of any kind of consensus between the two wings of the federalists seems remote.

The Liberals combine their paper carrot with plenty of sticks. The *Toronto Star*, Canada's largest circulation liberal paper, exposed the ugly face of Maple Leaf chauvinism in its post-referendum editorial:

"Will this torment never cease? Canadians freely chose to accept separatist ballots in 1980 and 1995 as democratic expressions of opinion. But must we continue to tolerate these referenda whose sole aim is to destroy the country? Should 30 million Canadians offer themselves as perpetual hostages to some 2 million disaffected co-citizens? Or should such referenda in the future be treated as no more than non-binding popular consultations?"

"Should breaking up Confederation even be possible without a national referendum, requiring the assent of a majority of Canadians and a very strong majority of the province concerned?"

—*Toronto Star*, 31 October 1995

Chrétien weighed in the next day at a Liberal Party fundraiser in Toronto with an ominous threat: "I will make sure that we have political stability in this land...That is my constitutional responsibility and I will deliver." He hinted that one way to "deliver" would be to prevent Quebec from having any more referenda: "We've been extremely gener-

ous in Canada...We Canadians have done it twice and we cannot carry it on forever" (*Globe and Mail*, 2 November 1995).

Behind all the federalist contingency plans lurks the threat of economic blackmail, or even military force. Lucien Bouchard, who took over as Quebec premier from Parizeau, has promised to give the federalists a chance to present a new proposal. Bouchard is confident that the outpouring of Anglo chauvinism that will accompany the squabbling in the federalist camp, as well as the negligible results of the exercise, will cement support for separation among an overwhelming majority of Quebec's francophones. Chrétien's threats to prevent a third Quebec vote are an admission that he does not expect to be able to cobble anything together that has a chance of satisfying Quebec's national demands.

Proletarian Unity & Bolshevik Tactics

The International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), while upholding Quebec's right to self-determination, did not advocate voting for separation in the 1995 referendum, as our 20 October statement (reprinted below) explains. This is consistent with our advocacy of joint class struggle across national lines by English Canadian and Québécois workers, a position developed by the Trotskyist League of Canada (TL—affiliated with the Spartacist League/U.S.) twenty years ago. In the course of the recent referendum, the ex-Trotskyist TL announced that it was not only calling for a Yes vote this time, but also retroactively repudiating its historic position. According to the TL, proletarian unity between Québécois and English Canadian workers has not been possible for at least two decades—and those who think otherwise (as they did until a few months ago) are living in a "fantasy world."

On 19 October 1995, we had the rare opportunity to debate this question with the TL as co-participants (along with the Canadian-nationalist Communist Party) in a joint meeting in Toronto entitled "Quebec Referendum & the Left." Charles Galarneau, speaking for the TL, attacked our position:

"Maintain workers' unity—I mean, which planet do these people live on? I mean, the PSAC [Public Service Alliance of Canada] strike, okay, postal workers, these are like national unions, so of course you are going to see some sort of strike together, but this is not—I'm sorry, any transit strike in Quebec, nobody hears about it here, and vice versa. It's just, it's split and it's going to be split until the question is resolved."

Tom Riley replied for the IBT:

"The comrade says, 'oh well, the postal workers, you know, they're a national union, so of course they'll struggle together, won't they?' Well, no, *not 'of course,'* not necessarily—not if, in fact, as you claim, the relations are deeply poisoned, horribly polarized and they all hate each other: *no they won't.* They might even scab on each other's strikes, comrades. The fact is they haven't. In fact the Quebec workers have tended to lead. They've led the postal workers, the most militant section of the working class for decades. And most recently [the PSAC strike] in 1991, the last big strike we had in this country, was led by the Quebec workers (from Hull predominantly) and it went immediately across the river to the English Canadian workers...."

The TL sputters about how in the "real world" joint proletarian struggle has been impossible for at least 20 years, but they cannot produce any evidence to substantiate



JIM MERRITHEW

1991 PSAC strike: united struggle of Québécois and English-Canadian workers rocked federal government

this claim. When this notion was first proposed in December 1994, John Masters, editor of the TL's newspaper, responded:

"Anglo chauvinism and concomitant nationalist reaction have not (yet) decisively undercut working-class unity. The last important test was the PSAC public sector workers strike of fall 1991. This Canada-wide strike occurred at a time when sovereignist sentiment among Quebec workers was actually stronger than today. Yet there was no scabbing or other evident national animosity, and Québécois and English Canadian workers regularly united in joint strike rallies. Among youth, too, hard-nationalist sentiment is weak. PQ leaders worry openly about their lack of active support in the younger generation. I recently sold the paper in Ottawa at a 15,000-strong anti-cutbacks student protest, which was thoroughly integrated (indeed majority Québécois), with speeches and chants all given in both languages and national animosity barely noticeable."

SL chairperson, James Robertson, who was busy "correcting" the TL on this question via fax, replied with dark hints that Masters and others who were slow to adjust their perceptions to the new reality decreed from his California lair were perhaps being a touch "undialectical." Masters took the hint and capitulated.

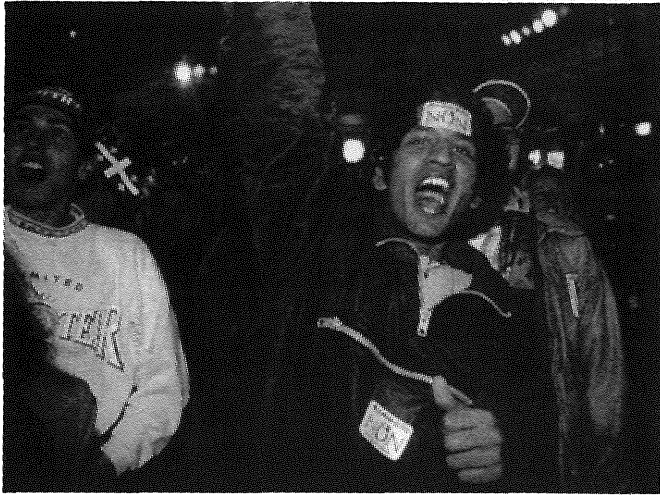
Well aware that its new position on the course of the class struggle over the last 20-odd years in Quebec cannot be substantiated by reference to the historical record, *Workers Vanguard* (3 November 1995) demagogically attacks our referendum statement for "nowhere mentioning—much less opposing—the national oppression of Quebec." Even the cynics who churn out what pass for polemics in *WV* must be aware that the key element in opposing the national oppression of the Québécois is the defense of their national rights, particularly the right to self-determination. We invite people to read our statement (reprinted below) and draw their own conclusions.

The *WV* polemic also advances the brazen lie that our "statement calling for abstention [on the 1992 constitutional referendum] failed even to defend Quebec's right to independence." In fact our October 1992 statement (reprinted in 1917 No. 12) explicitly stated:

"The designation of Quebec as a 'distinct society' within Canada obscures the fact that it is a nation, and as such, has an unalienable and unconditional right to self-determination. If the Québécois decide to separate and form their own state (something that we do not advocate at present) we will support their right to do so. If the Canadian bourgeoisie attempts to forcibly retain Quebec, it would be the duty of class-conscious workers across English Canada to defend the Québécois with every means at their disposal, including protests, strikes and even military assistance."

The *WV* smears are aimed at diverting attention from the political implications of the Robertsonians' flirtation with the revisionist "two-stage" (first independence, then socialism) theory of social liberation. Their insistence that successful proletarian struggle can only take place *after* Quebec achieves independence, signals that, for them, the question of whether or not to advocate independence at a given moment (which Trotskyists have always viewed as a tactical question) has been raised to the level of a strategic one. This would explain why, in the weeks prior to the Quebec vote, TLRs were loudly proclaiming that, *regardless of the outcome*, they would continue to advocate independence.

This rejection of the group's historic position on Quebec parallels the shift of position on the Irish national question (see 1917 No. 16). It is also of a piece with the TL's earlier reversal of its initially correct refusal to take sides in the intra-bourgeois Free Trade dispute in 1988. This latter flip was never acknowledged, but is documented in 1917 No. 12. All of these changes represent shifts in the direction of more mainstream Trotskyoid centrism, and reflect an appetite to find potential "dynamics" to hitch a ride on.



ED QUINN—SABA

'No' supporters celebrate razor-thin victory

The Robertsonians have, at least since 1992, repeatedly stated that, in the event of Quebec's separation, they were "opposed to the disintegration of English Canada which at present could only strengthen the power of U.S. imperialism." We have challenged them on this, and pointed to the reactionary implications of championing English-Canadian unity (see 1917 Nos. 12 & 16). Other leftists have also criticized this social-patriotic declaration. We therefore note with interest that the TL's 1995 Quebec statement takes a confused half step back and admits that its former position was "potentially one-sided" and that Anglo-Canadian disintegration after Quebec separation "poses no particular question of principle." Yet they claim that they remain "far from indifferent, however, if the principal aspect of such an act would be to strengthen American imperialism." No one in the Trotskyist League understands what any of this means—why they had the position in the first place, or why it was changed. Nor does Joseph Seymour, their tendency's leading theoretician. Like many of the group's other idiosyncratic positions, it was initially introduced and subsequently modified by James Robertson, who is a power unto himself.

Quebec Nationalism On the Rise

Robertson is wrong about the possibilities of joint struggle between Québécois and English Canadian workers since the 1960s; however, nationalist sentiment in Quebec at this point is very volatile. The upsurge of support for the sovereignist side in the last two weeks of the campaign, despite the doom and gloom scenarios projected by big business and the federalists, signals a resurgence of nationalism among francophone Québécois. The result of the referendum, coming after two earlier failures to include formal recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society" in the constitution, has undoubtedly increased momentum toward separation, and inflamed national passions. Barring some dramatic new development, all sides expect that the PQ will get the mandate it was narrowly denied this time if there is another referendum in a couple of years.

An ugly polarization was evident on both sides during the campaign. Bouchard lifted the corner on the racism latent in Quebec nationalism with a remark about the tragedy of the low birth rate of the Québécois "white race." Parizeau touched on the same theme with his condemna-

tion of "money and ethnics" for the PQ's loss. On the federalist side, the continuing threats, the chauvinist denial of Quebec's national right to decide its own fate, point to a period of escalating nationalist antagonisms. This was pre-figured in Montreal the night of the vote, when a few hundred youths from headquarters of both Yes and No faced off with rocks and fists on the streets.

Tactics may change, but the strategic objective of Marxists is always to struggle for working-class unity across national lines. The evident inability of English Canadian politicians to offer anything to the Québécois who reject the status quo, but have as yet hesitated to opt for outright separation, suggests that the momentum for independence is likely to increase. If national tensions continue to mount, they will inevitably begin to pour into the workers' movement, and could indeed poison relations, even in historically integrated sectors. In that case it would be necessary for class-conscious workers on both sides of the Ottawa River to go beyond defense of Quebec's right to separate, and *advocate* immediate separation as a necessary step to take the national question off the agenda and help clear the decks for class struggle.

Reprinted below is our 20 October 1995 statement on the referendum:

On 30 October Quebec votes on independence. For socialists the question of whether or not to advocate separation is a tactical, rather than a principled, one. What is a matter of principle is the recognition of Quebec as a nation with the right to self-determination, i.e., the right to independence. If the people of Quebec wish to establish their own state, the workers' movement in English Canada must defend their right to do so.

The defense of Quebec's national rights is not an abstract question. Twenty-five years ago, in October 1970, Pierre Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act and sent the army in to occupy Montreal. Hundreds of unionists, leftists and nationalists were jailed, supposedly in an attempt to block an "apprehended insurrection" sparked by the tiny FLQ (*Front de Libération du Québec*). But there was no insurrection, as Trudeau, Chrétien and the rest of the cabinet well knew. The imposition of martial law was intended to intimidate Quebec and blunt the growth of the nationalist movement.

In 1978, as the Parti Québécois (PQ) was preparing its first referendum, Trudeau recalled his 1970 action and boasted that, "I'm not going to be shy about using the sword if something illegal is attempted in the province of Quebec." Jean Chrétien echoed his old boss last month when he remarked that he was not necessarily going to recognize a majority "Yes" vote as a mandate for independence. Daniel Johnson, Quebec's Liberal leader, who officially heads the "No" camp, promptly distanced himself from Chrétien's threat.

Marxists unconditionally defend Quebec's right to separate. But upholding the right of the people of Quebec to decide their own future does not imply *advocating* separation in every circumstance. Lenin compared the right of self-determination to the right of divorce—one can recognize that partners in a marriage have a right to leave if they choose without insisting on an immediate dissolution.

In recent decades nationalist sentiment in Quebec has fluctuated considerably. In the late 1960s and 1970s many Québécois feared that if they did not win independence, [they] would disappear as a people. This fear fueled an upsurge in nationalist sentiment and led to the passage of

Quebec's language laws which enshrined French as the dominant language. Twenty years later, the trend toward assimilation has been largely reversed and the survival of the French language in Quebec is no longer a major issue. This has tended to undercut support for separation.

Since the passage of the language laws, and the election of the first Parti Québécois government in 1976, much of the anglophone bourgeoisie has pulled up stakes and transferred assets out of Quebec. They have been replaced by an increasingly self-confident Québécois bourgeoisie. For the moment at least the new francophone elite is not throwing in its lot with the separatists.

For years the pollsters have reported that only a minority of Quebecers favor outright independence. This is why the PQ/BQ (Bloc Québécois) campaign has been light on nationalist rhetoric, but full of promises that after separation Quebecers can keep their Canadian citizenship and assurances that a sovereign Quebec would continue to use the Canadian dollar. Instead of simply asking for a yes or no on separation, the *indépendantistes* are asking:

"Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the Bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995? Yes or no."

The business about "June 12" and a new "partnership" is aimed at those dissatisfied with the status quo but uncertain about independence. The majority of the Québécois are unhappy with Quebec's status as a mere province. Yet many working people don't trust the promises of Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard that an independent Quebec will somehow be able to provide better pensions, better social programs and more jobs. Many workers, particularly in the public sector, recall that when Parizeau was René Lévesque's finance minister, his chief concern was holding down wages and cutting social programs to impress Wall Street.

IS Votes 'Yes'

Most of the ostensibly revolutionary left in English Canada is calling for a "Yes" vote. This includes the International Socialists (IS), who are usually a pretty reliable weathervane of popular opinion among petty-bourgeois "progressives." But the IS seems to have some trouble coming up with plausible arguments for their position. Some of their propaganda sounds like it's been lifted directly from Parizeau & Co.:

"Quebec is the poorest province in the country. That is the real legacy of federalism. No wonder many have little loyalty to Ottawa."

—*Socialist Worker*, 20 September

The widespread unemployment and poverty in Quebec is the result of the operation of *capitalism*—as hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers and poor people in the Maritimes and Ontario can attest. The workers of Quebec will not escape the ravages of "lean and mean" capitalist economic irrationality by creating a separate state. In fact, the first priority of an independent Quebec under Bouchard and Parizeau would likely be to impose a round of patriotic belt-tightening and attacks on the union movement aimed at projecting a "business-friendly" image to the international bankers and bond-raters.

The IS also points to the fact that "the most powerful government and business forces in the country" are calling for a "No." This is the same approach the IS used to arrive

at its embarrassing decision to back Mulroney on the 1992 Charlottetown accord: if Preston Manning and the reactionary right were voting "No," the IS was going to vote "Yes." Today many IS members are willing to admit this was a mistake.

The front page of the 20 September *Socialist Worker* (which announced the IS call for a "Yes") featured a demonstration of 12,000 protesting the closure of the Queert Elizabeth Hospital in Montreal. The photo clearly shows banners in *English and French* and the caption reads: "French and English workers together can stop the cuts." Quite right. But this is evidence that relations between francophone and anglophone workers in Quebec are *not* so embittered that separation is necessary to get the national question off the agenda and open the road to joint class struggle.

TL Flip-Flop

The Trotskyist League (TL) has recently done an about-face on this question and signed on as unconditional advocates of separation. They have decided that they have been completely wrong about Quebec—a central question in Canadian politics—for the past 20 years. The TL now considers that advocacy of bi-national class struggle is a dead end, and that separation is "the only means of cutting through these hostilities and bringing the class struggle against capitalism to the fore" (*Spartacist Canada*, September-October). There is no explanation as to why they failed to recognize the "poisonous" national tensions that surrounded their organization from its inception. Nor do they provide any hint as to how exactly they suddenly came to this startling realization.

Despite repeated assertions that "mutual national suspicions and hatreds" preclude the possibility of united class struggle, the article cites very little evidence to support this contention. It recalls how in 1972 federal NDP leader David Lewis denounced the Quebec general strike. But what else would you expect from a right-wing social democratic labor traitor, who made a career out of purging reds from the unions? Lewis was certainly an enemy of militants in the Québécois workers' movement. But he was equally hostile to leftists of any sort in the English-Canadian labor movement, as he demonstrated in 1972 when he purged the leftist/Canadian nationalist Waffle from the NDP.

The only other evidence the TL presents is a recent pair of attacks by Anglo bigots. In 1994 a Québécois tourist in "an upscale Vancouver neighborhood" was assaulted by some chauvinist thugs, and last summer in Owen Sound a Québécois family had their home "pelted with eggs and defaced with 'Frogs Go Home' written in excrement on the living room window."

The explosive 1991 PSAC strike in which tens of thousands of Québécois and Anglo workers bypassed their official leadership and united in a semi-spontaneous mass struggle against the government is dismissed as merely one of the "episodic examples of common class struggle." This is how bourgeois sociologists routinely treat *any* eruption of class struggle. For the TL massive, united strike action across national lines can be dismissed, while the true index of relations within the working class is found in the cowardly actions of a handful of bigots in Vancouver and Owen Sound.

The origins of the TL's abrupt reversal can't be traced to either Owen Sound or Vancouver, but rather to California where James Robertson, peerless leader of the "Interna-

tional Communist League" (to which the TL is affiliated) resides. One day late last year Robertson sent a letter to Toronto announcing that he had recently changed his mind on Quebec. This set off a flurry of activity as TL members strained to divine the meaning of his somewhat enigmatic communication. For the sake of appearances there was some pro-forma internal discussion, but it soon became clear that the Great Man had spoken and the line had to be changed.

Suddenly *Spartacist Canada* discovered that for decades the existence of two nations in a single Canadian state has "terribly undermined working class struggle" and proclaimed that:

"The recognition by the workers of each nation that their respective capitalist rulers—not each other—are the enemy *can only come* through an independent Quebec." [emphasis added]

The clear implication is that the working class cannot develop class consciousness until and unless Quebec separates. This pessimistic assessment is reiterated later in the text:

"In Canada and Quebec, the experience of at least the past two decades demonstrates clearly that successful proletarian struggle demands separation into two independent nation-states."

In fact the pattern of class struggle since the 1950s has largely been one of joint struggle, across national and linguistic lines, with workers in English Canada frequently following the initiatives of their more militant Québécois sisters and brothers, as they did during the 1991 PSAC strike.

If "proletarian struggle" cannot be "successful" until Quebec is independent, what does the TL plan to do if, on October 30, Quebec votes "No"—dissolve? Or will they follow in the footsteps of the Quebec supporters of the United Secretariat, who elaborated a two-stage model of social revolution: first, Quebec independence; then, successful proletarian struggle. Seventeen years ago *Spartacist Canada* answered a Quebec pseudo-Trotskyist who advanced such a position:

"In your letter you state that the 'independence of the Quebec people is a necessary precondition for the coming to class consciousness, for any communist revolution.' Your position that the fight for socialist revolution cannot begin until the 'national liberation' struggle is complete is not a new one. Such a stagist theory has been the stock-in-trade of every stripe of revisionist from Kautsky to the Mensheviks to Stalin...."

—*Spartacist Canada*, October 1978

For Bi-National Working Class Unity!

If national antagonisms were acute enough to prevent effective class unity then it would be necessary to advocate immediate separation. The question is always a concrete one that requires careful study of attitudes within the working class. In assessing relations between English-Canadian workers and those in Quebec over the past several decades it is instructive to look at the case of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. CUPW is a union with roots in both nations and a history as one of the most combative unions in the Canadian labor movement.

During the 1970s the capitalist press ranted and raved about the influence of Marxists and revolutionaries in the post office and CUPW's propensity for shutting down an "essential service" for the bourgeoisie. But the post office

was not always a hotbed of militancy. For decades postal workers had been seen as timid civil servants without the right to strike. That changed in 1965 with what Joe Davidson, a former CUPW president, described as a "Post Office rebellion which changed the face of federal labour relations and shocked not only the government but most of the elected leaders of the postal employee associations."

In his memoir, Davidson recalled how, in the 1965 strike, "The initiative came, as has often been the case since, from Montreal." The national leaders of the postal workers had rejected demands from Montreal for an "illegal" strike. So the Montreal branch set its own deadline and launched its own strike. They were immediately joined by postal workers in Hamilton, Vancouver and Toronto. This was the first of a series of militant strikes that often began in Montreal and spread to English Canada. But they never spread to Seattle, Buffalo or Chicago.

The influence of the more militant Québécois working class was not confined to the post office. In 1975, when CLC head Joe Morris tried to implement an overtly class-collaborationist policy of business-labor-government "tripartism," resistance was spearheaded by the Quebec unions. And "tripartism" was buried. Much of the pressure that compelled the CLC brass to call the famous one-day general strike in October 1976 against Trudeau's wage controls came from Quebec. Despite the cynicism and passivity of the labor tops, who intended nothing more than a token protest to let off steam, the response from the ranks was a powerful demonstration of proletarian unity as hundreds of thousands of workers in Quebec and English Canada walked out together in the first (and so far the only) national general strike in North American history.

Labor has been on the defensive in recent years but thus far there is no serious evidence that relations between English Canadian and Québécois unionists have been poisoned. There have been no instances of workers of one nation scabbing on the strikes of the other. In fact there has been considerable desire for unity evident in recent protests against cuts to UIC, healthcare, education and other social programs. There is, consequently, no reason at this time for Marxists to advocate separation. Our advice therefore to Quebec workers is to vote "No" to Parizeau and Bouchard's attempt to establish themselves as the political representatives of an independent Quebec bourgeoisie.

The working class of Quebec is the best organized and most militant in North America. For decades it has sparked class battles across Canada. In most pan-Canadian unions the Quebec component is the most combative and the natural base for opposition to the class collaborationism of the union brass. If Quebec were to become independent, many of the organizational connections, particularly in public-sector unions, would likely be broken, and the militant struggles of the Québécois working class would have a great deal less impact in the English-speaking proletariat of North America than they do today. This would be a setback for the cause of labor across the continent. If national antagonisms become sharp enough however, it could be a lesser evil.

Certainly if the people of Quebec determine that they wish to establish their own state it is our duty to actively support their right to do so. But the whole course of class struggle in this country over the past few decades provides evidence, in life, that at least at this time, it is not necessary to advocate Quebec separation.

**Defend Quebec's National Rights!
For Working Class Unity—Not National Unity!**

Down with the Racist Death Penalty!

For United Front Defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal!

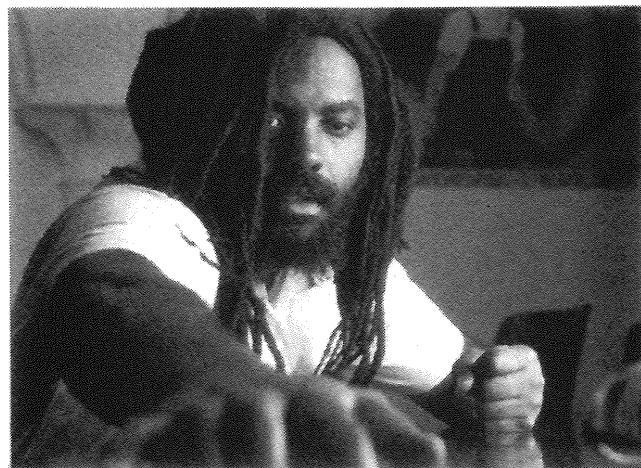
Last summer saw an explosion of protest over the threatened execution of black journalist and political activist Mumia Abu-Jamal. Jamal, a former Black Panther, who was wrongly convicted in the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia policeman, Daniel Faulkner, has spent over 13 years on death row. It was clear during his trial that the government's case against Mumia is a pack of politically motivated lies.

As the news of his wrongful conviction spread, support for Jamal grew steadily. It mushroomed following the signing of his death warrant on 1 June 1995 by Pennsylvania's governor, Tom Ridge. Tens of thousands attended rallies in Philadelphia, New York, Toronto, Rome, London, Berlin, Johannesburg, Wellington, Sydney and other cities around the world to demand a halt to the execution, which was scheduled for 17 August. The eruption of protest forced Philadelphia judge Albert Sabo to grant Jamal an indefinite stay of execution on 7 August. However, his appeal for a new trial has been turned down by the same judge, and he remains on death row. The struggle for Mumia's freedom is far from over.

At 3:55 am, on 9 December 1981, at the corner of 13th and Locust Streets in Philadelphia, shots were fired, and when the smoke cleared both Mumia Abu-Jamal and police officer Faulkner lay wounded on the ground. The circumstances surrounding the two men's shooting are far from clear, but much of the evidence presented against Jamal was obviously concocted, and the manner in which the trial was conducted was a travesty of justice.

The state's case against Jamal had three essential components: witnesses who supposedly saw him shoot Faulkner; ballistic tests which allegedly confirmed that Jamal's gun had been used to commit the crime; and Jamal's own "confession." All three have been discredited. First, there is strong reason to suspect that Cynthia White, a prostitute with a substantial criminal record, who was clearly vulnerable to police pressure, perjured herself at the trial. After the shooting, she was twice picked up by cops on charges of prostitution and taken to the *homicide* division in Faulkner's precinct. This is highly irregular. Since testifying against Jamal, she has freely pursued her profession without arrest or police harassment. Another prostitute working the same area, Veronica Jones, reported that police attempted to get her to testify against Jamal, even though she was nowhere near the crime scene. The other supposed witnesses to the shooting—Robert Chobert and Mark Scalan—both say they didn't see White at the crime scene.

The state's second witness, Chobert, a taxi driver who needed to keep his license, was on probation for an arson conviction at the time of the shootings. Like White, he was therefore vulnerable to police pressure. Also like White, his initial statements to the police were considerably different from what he testified to in court. He had first told police that the shooter, who weighed about 225 pounds—Jamal weighs 170—had fled the scene. At the trial he claimed to identify Jamal, who had supposedly run only 10 feet after



NEWSWEEK

Mumia Abu-Jamal: Voice of the Voiceless

the shooting. The prosecution's third witness, Mark Scalan, a passing motorist who was drunk at the time of shootings, said he was "confused" and couldn't identify the shooter.

Despite the extremely dubious testimony provided by these "witnesses," District Attorney Lynn Abraham had the gall to write, in a 13 August op ed piece in the *New York Times*, "the only witnesses whose testimony agrees with the known facts came forward immediately after the crime." Apparently, for the Philadelphia DA, a little police coercion can sometimes be helpful in establishing "known facts."

The ballistic and forensic evidence in the case against Jamal is equally dubious. Mumia was *never* tested to see whether there was gunpowder on his hands after the shooting—a standard police procedure in cases such as this. Neither was Jamal's gun (for which he had a permit) checked to see if it was used that morning. The failure to conduct these two basic tests (or, alternatively, to report the results) suggests something is amiss. In the police version of events, Jamal was standing above Faulkner when Jamal was shot. Yet the bullet that wounded Jamal went in the opposite direction—it entered his chest and went *downward*, ending up in the base of his spine.

Perhaps the most outrageous assertion by the prosecution was that Jamal had "confessed" to the crime. According to Garry Bell, Faulkner's former partner, Jamal, while lying wounded in the hospital, was screaming, "I shot the motherfucker and I hope the motherfucker dies!" A security guard at the hospital, who was a personal friend of Faulkner's, claimed to hear the same thing. Yet in his official statement concerning the events that night, Gary Wakshul, the policeman assigned to guard Jamal at the hospital, wrote, "during this time the negro made no statements." Moreover, as the late William Kunstler, America's best known civil rights lawyer, observed in a letter published in the *New York Times* (17 August): "This officer [Gary Wakshul] conveniently took his vacation at the beginning of the



VALIRIE WEATHERS

Jamal's attorney Leonard Weinglass addresses rally at Philadelphia courthouse

trial, and a defense request for a short continuance to await his return was summarily denied by the judge, a former Philadelphia undersheriff."

Albert Sabo: Hanging Judge

As if the state's case against Mumia Abu-Jamal wasn't spurious enough, he was also tried under highly dubious circumstances. The presiding judge, Albert Sabo, is best described by Terry Bisson of *New York Newsday*:

"A life-time member of the Fraternal Order of Police, branded a 'defendant's nightmare' by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Judge Albert F. Sabo has sentenced more men to die (31 to date, only 2 of them white) than any other sitting judge in America. A fellow judge once called his courtroom a 'vacation for prosecutors' because of his bias towards convictions."

This same Judge Sabo forced Jamal to take a court-appointed lawyer, Anthony Jackson, who insisted from the outset that he was not prepared to defend Jamal, since he had never tried a capital case. Jackson has since been disbarred for unrelated reasons. Moreover, Sabo four times denied Jamal and his lawyer funds to pay for the investigation of the ballistics evidence and witnesses.

The stench of racism hung heavy over the trial. The prosecution clearly feared that an integrated jury might very well acquit Jamal; they used 11 of their 15 peremptory challenges to remove black prospective jurors. Equally sinister was the prosecution's use of Jamal's political activism to ensure he received the death penalty. Joseph McGill, the prosecutor, played up Jamal's former membership in the Black Panther Party to paint him as a violent black extremist to the mainly white jury. McGill's prize piece of "evidence" was a 1970 interview Jamal did with a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter, where he commented that the murder of dozens

of Black Panther members by police proved Mao's dictum that, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." McGill told the jury that this proved Jamal was prepared to kill police "way back then!"

Since the trial, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled against the use of peremptory challenges to exclude blacks from juries. Moreover, in 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled a death sentence in the *Dawson* case because, during the trial, the prosecutor raised the defendant's association with the Aryan Brotherhood, a violent fascist outfit. Yet, when Jamal raised the *exact same* objection in his appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1989, he was flatly rejected. In its decision the court argued that his participation in an "unpopular political organization" proved his "longstanding disdain for the system!"

A closer look at the system's treatment of Jamal shows something worse than disdain. As a former member of the Black Panther Party and long-time political activist, Jamal has earned the U.S. government's overt hostility. Jamal, known as Wesley Cook in his youth, was a bright, self-taught writer and organizer for the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia. As a Panther, he sought to organize and defend the black community in Philadelphia against the violence and harassment of the city's notoriously racist police department. Jamal recalled at the age of 14 he and a group of young blacks attended a rally called by supporters of the arch-segregationist George Wallace:

"We came, we demonstrated, and we were clubbed into insensibility afterwards by plainclothes police who never identified themselves as police, who put three of us in the hospital. We were 15, 16-year-old boys from North Philly, who got a lesson in constitutional law very quickly, very clearly."

—interview with *Revolutionary Worker*, December 1994

This was only the beginning of the massive campaign of surveillance and harassment at the hands of the U.S. government. Over 700 pages of information were collected by the FBI on Jamal. He was placed on the Security Index of the FBI and the Administrative Index, a list of citizens to be rounded up in a "national crisis." The recently released FBI files on Jamal describe him as "Armed and Dangerous" despite the fact he had not committed any crime other than to expose the racist nature of American capitalism. Jamal was a target of the FBI's murderous Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). In an interview on New York's WBAI radio station, Ward Churchill, an expert on COINTELPRO, was asked recently what this meant:

"Mumia Abu-Jamal would have been directly targeted by the FBI for what they euphemistically refer to as neutralization, which is to say, to be incapacitated politically by any means available to the Bureau....but most intensively, repression that was part of the so-called COINTELPROs or counter intelligence programs administered by the FBI were directed at the Panthers.

"That is something that hasn't gone away. There is a residue of that in this country which exists. Many of the former [Black Panther] Party members, especially those who were identified by the Bureau as being key members, remain incarcerated on what are self [evidently] at this point, fabricated cases."

—transcribed by Bob Witaneck, *NJ Speakout*, 20 August

The Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police has made it clear they want to see Jamal eliminated by any means necessary. The day he was granted a stay of execution, Philly cop James Green spat: "It makes you wonder. Maybe we should have executed him at 13th and Locust where he

executed Danny Faulkner" (*NYT*, 8 August 1995). In fact, the cops made a fairly serious attempt to do just that. Even though Jamal was seriously wounded (his lung and liver had been perforated by the bullet) and bleeding the morning of 9 December 1981, he was beaten by police on the scene and again in the paddy wagon. A witness at Jamal's trial testified that it took more than 40 minutes to get the critically wounded man from the shooting scene to the hospital, three blocks away. This suggests that the police on the scene hoped he would die from his wounds.

The courts, the D.A. and the Fraternal Order of Police all want Jamal dead because, as a journalist, he often exposed the racism and brutality of the Philadelphia police. In particular he investigated harassment of MOVE, a black organization that follows the teachings of John Africa. He was known as the "Voice of the Voiceless" for his fearless exposure of police violence, and was elected president of the Philadelphia chapter of the Association of Black Journalists.

Live from Death Row

Neither a death sentence nor confinement have silenced Jamal. After his conviction, he began to write about the notoriously inhumane conditions and racism of America's prisons. These essays have been published in a single volume by Addison-Wesley under the title, *Live from Death Row*. The authorities responded to this book with open hostility. Saying that Jamal was attempting to "run a business" from his jail cell, they used the publication of the book to place him in extreme isolation. They have attempted to seize all money coming to Jamal, open his correspondence, prevent his attorney's paralegals from visiting him and ban all visits from journalists. The FOP also pressured National Public Radio into cancelling a planned series of death-row broadcasts by Jamal, and even flew a blimp over the offices of Addison-Wesley denouncing them for publishing a "cop killer."

It is instructive to compare this to the official reception accorded *Presumed Guilty*, by the LAPD's Stacy Koon. Sergeant Koon is in jail for the media-exposed racist beating of Rodney King. Although his legal expenses are being paid by the LA Police union, he is soliciting by mail contributions of \$30 to the "Stacy Koon Defense Fund" in return for a copy of his book, in which he shamelessly alibis the brutal beating of King. There has been no interference in Koon's activities.

The campaign to free Mumia began years before Pennsylvania governor Ridge signed his death warrant. One of the key organizations involved in his defense from early on was the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC—legal defense arm of the Spartacist League [SL]). Refuse and Resist and a variety of anarchist groups also played an important part in bringing the case to public attention and organizing on Jamal's behalf.

Following the signing of the death warrant in June 1995, there was a flood of articles in a wide variety of publications, as well as on the Internet, explaining Jamal's case and demanding his freedom. *Live from Death Row* was even released on CD-ROM. A broad array of leftist, anarchist and civil rights organizations around the world took up Jamal's cause, and organized the massive outpouring of rage that succeeded in winning the stay of execution.

The International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) made a modest contribution to building the campaign for Mumia's freedom. In 1990 our New Zealand comrades organized a demonstration in conjunction with the first wave of inter-



IBT supporter speaks at PDC rally for Mumia in London

national protests demanding freedom for Mumia. In Toronto, upon learning of a scheduled PDC demonstration, our comrades immediately endorsed it and sent a letter offering to help "with leafleting, postering and any other practical work necessary to make the demonstration a success" (letter to the Trotskyist League 18 June 1990).

In the latest phase of the campaign, IBT supporters won union endorsements for Jamal's defense from a New York United Auto Workers local, as well as the Trades Council of Birmingham, England. In New Zealand our comrades initiated a demonstration in June 1995 with anarchists and other leftists. Our supporters have participated in rallies in London, Berlin, Hamburg, the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as Philadelphia. Bill Logan spoke for the IBT at a PDC-initiated rally for Mumia in Paris. In Canada, IBT comrades worked closely with the PDC, anarchists and other leftists to build several united-front demonstrations for Jamal in both Montreal and Toronto.

The tens of thousands who demonstrated for Mumia—students, blacks, trade unionists and many others—were mobilized by the joint efforts of many different leftist, black, religious and even some liberal organizations. The demonstrations were a visible counterpoint to the general rightward trend of recent years, and were important enough that the major bourgeois media in the U.S. felt compelled to pay attention. Naturally, they took a somewhat unfriendly attitude toward the protests, but breaking the media embargo counts as a victory of sorts.

For United-Front Defense!

The campaign to free Jamal, however, is not without its problems. While the level of practical cooperation was relatively high (particularly in the U.S., where the left has not had much to celebrate in recent years) there were, unfortunately, instances of sectarian reluctance by some left groups to building joint actions. There was also a tendency to put maintaining control above considerations of building the broadest and most representative mobilizations. This sectarianism was evident in some of the actions of the PDC and



1917 PHOTO

Mumia Abu-Jamal defense rally, Toronto June 1995

its parent, the Spartacist League.

In the midst of the campaign to stop Jamal's execution, the *Wall Street Journal*—an authoritative voice of U.S. finance capital—published an article on 16 June 1995 that sneered "Not Much Left: 'The Movement' Is Pretty Still Nowadays." The author, Laurie Cohen, derided the massive support for Jamal, and sought to trivialize the campaign and his defenders on the left. To this end she retailed various misrepresentations and half-truths about a number of left organizations, including the Spartacist League, and briefly mentioned our criticisms of the latter's undemocratic internal regime.

The SL attempted to use this article as an excuse to attack its leftist opponents, particularly ourselves. In its 28 July issue, *Workers Vanguard* (WV) printed an article entitled "Anti-Communist Smear Targets Jamal Campaign," in which we were accused of being "sinister" and an "instrument for bigger forces" who seek to persecute the SL. The article concluded that criticism of the SL amounts to "*spiking the necessary mass protest that is essential in fighting for Jamal's freedom*" (emphasis in original). Ironically, Trotskyist League (TL, Canadian affiliate of the SL) members and supporters were selling this article at a demonstration in Toronto for Jamal that had been initiated by the youth arm of the New Democratic Party (Canada's social-democratic party). It was built by our comrades in conjunction with the TL, the International Socialists (who were also being denounced by the SL as enemies of the campaign to free Mumia) as well as various other leftist and anarchist groupings. This demonstration, which was by far the largest held in Jamal's defense in Canada, was one of the few genuine united fronts the SL or its international co-thinkers participated in during the entire campaign.

In a letter written to the editorial board of WV, and distributed at an SL meeting as a leaflet entitled "Sectarian Stupidity Will Not Free Mumia," our New York comrades

pointed out that the SL was in fact contemptuous of the Trotskyist history it claims as its tradition:

"According to your logic, Trotskyists in the 1930s, by pointing to the bureaucratic internal regime of the U.S. Communist Party and its cult of Stalin, were sabotaging the campaign to defend the Scottsboro Boys. The Stalinists themselves seized every opportunity to make this point. But Trotskyist exposures of Stalinist betrayals from Germany to Spain, or their condemnations of the Moscow trials, never prevented them from defending the Soviet Union against imperialism, or from defending American Stalinists from McCarthyite witchhunts. Similarly, our knowledge of the of the cult-like practices of the SL leadership does not prevent us from seeking united fronts to defend Mumia, nor from defending the SL from repression by the state."

Our letter apparently struck a nerve. The next issue of WV (25 August 1995) printed it in full and wrote a lengthy reply, "Poison Pen Pals." As well as recycling various sub-political smears they have thrown at us in the past, the SL leadership responded directly to our criticism that its sectarianism had limited the potential of the Jamal campaign in the U.S. and internationally. In a letter dated 6 August 1995, before the stay of execution, our British comrades had written to the Spartacist League/Britain to propose an emergency united-front mobilization:

"Time is short, but it is still not too late to initiate a sizeable national demonstration before 17th August. Other groups are planning various events, but these will be fragmentary and isolated in the absence of a co-ordinated campaign. There has been considerable coverage of Mumia's case in the bourgeois press and most of the left groups would probably come on board for united action. The SL/B, of all the groups on the British far left, is probably best positioned to initiate such a united front because of the years of work by your American comrades in Mumia's defence. We pledge our fullest support in building any such action, and are prepared to participate actively in every facet of it."

Workers Vanguard replied:

"[A] letter from the International Bolshevik Tendency to our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain argues that we have undermined Mumia's defense by not setting up a 'united-front committee.' We don't know what world the BT lives in, but we have a lot more grasp of social reality and our own social weight than to believe that a 'Free Mumia Committee' of ourselves, the BT and a bunch of other small leftist organizations would be able to rally the social forces necessary to win Mumia's freedom."

We don't know what world the SL/U.S. lives in, but it is precisely the fact that "a bunch of other small leftist [and other] organizations" all began to mobilize around the same issue, at the same time, that made the demonstrations for Jamal successful. In order to build the mass support necessary for winning his freedom, it makes sense to organize this cooperation. In New York in July, there were a series of separate demonstrations—some of which the SL initiated and controlled, and some where other organizations played the central role. This is not a good model. True, the combined forces of the left are less than massive. But is the SL suggesting that *it alone* is capable of mobilizing greater numbers than small groups working in concert? The largest single event in the U.S. campaign to date was a demonstration of 10,000 in Philadelphia on 12 August. That event was chiefly organized by Sam Marcy's Workers World Party through its front groups.

In its better, revolutionary days the SL wrote:

"A united front does not refer to any and every kind of cooperation with other political organizations. A united front is essentially a common *action* characteristically around concrete, usually negative, demands on bourgeois authority. The characteristic organizational form of the united front is a technical coordinating committee. This does not mean that a united front need be limited to a single event. It is possible to have a united front campaign, for example, a legal defense case."

—*Young Communist Bulletin* No. 3, "On the United Front"

The IBT embraces this tradition because it is the *best* way to run a defense committee, i.e., it *works*. In Birmingham (Britain's second-largest city), for example, the only demonstration for Jamal that took place happened thanks to a united-front committee, which allowed the maximum number of those who wanted to fight for Jamal's life to act together. A similar committee in Toronto organized the biggest Mumia demonstration in the city, almost 1,000 people. The SL leadership's idea of a united front, on the other hand, consists in allowing representatives of other organizations to speak at rallies organized and controlled by themselves. In general, the SL avoids participating in building activities jointly with other groups, deriding all such efforts as "popular frontist."

While the campaign to save Mumia is, in itself, vitally important, it is also necessary that communists show leadership in this fight. Jamal's threatened execution has everything to do with the violently racist, capitalist society we live in. Many youth, blacks, working people and members of other oppressed groups who are drawn to the Mumia campaign have a rudimentary understanding that they have an interest in preventing the courts and police from

getting away with murdering Mumia. As Leon Trotsky wrote in 1922:

"If we [i.e., communists] were able simply to unite the working masses around our banner or around our practical immediate slogans, and skip over reformist organizations, whether party or trade union, that would of course be the best thing in the world...."

"The question arises from this, that very important sections of the working class belong to reformist organizations or support them. Their present experience is still insufficient to enable them to break with reformist organizations and join us. It may be precisely after engaging in those mass activities, which are on the order of the day, that a major change will take place in this connection. That is just what we are striving for."

—"On the United Front," *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2

Showing leadership means being able to work with those who still have illusions in capitalism and its legal system and, through the experience of fighting for Jamal's life, show them that ultimately it will take a socialist revolution to root out the racist police, jails, courts and executioners and build a society based on human equality.

Much has been accomplished in the campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, but much remains to be done. We urge our readers to participate actively in the struggle. Letters of support can be sent to: Mumia Abu-Jamal, AM8335, SCI Greene, 1040 E. Roy Furman Highway, Waynesburg, PA 15370-8090. Financial contributions should be made out to Bill of Rights Foundation (for "Jamal Defense"), and sent to: Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, 163 Amsterdam Ave., No. 115, New York, NY 10023-5001. ■

Defend Argentinean Leftists!

On 2 October 1995 in the town of Neuquén in southern Argentina, a demonstration of 500 unemployed workers was violently attacked by the police. This was followed by a witchhunt against the left, particularly groups identified as Trotskyist, on the grounds that their activity incited violence. On 24 October 1,000 people demonstrated in Buenos Aires to protest this repression and demand an end to attacks on the left and workers' movement.

A statement by the Campaign against Repression in Argentina, a united-front committee based in London, reported that:

"Horacio Panario, a leading member of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), was arrested and is being held in prison. Warrants have been issued for the arrest of Alcides Christiansen, Hector Etchebaster, Ruth Zurbriggen and Jorge Toledo, all of them members of the MAS as well as of ATEN, the teachers' union, or other unions. Under similar threat are Hipolito Aramedia, Enrique Gomez and Jorge Chiguay of the Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST) and Alberto Vidal, Jose Mara and Norberto Calducci of the Partido Obrero (PO).

"In April a worker was killed by the police during protests against the closure of a television factory in Usuahia, Tierra del Fuego. Oscar Martinez and other leaders of the metalworkers' union, UOM, are being prosecuted following the events. While those responsi-

ble for the murder of the worker have been allowed to go free, the left is being persecuted."

The Campaign includes comrades of the International Bolshevik Tendency, along with those of the Revolutionary Internationalist League, Workers Internationalist League, Workers Power and others. Representatives of Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Argentina) and also Poder Obrero (Bolivia) are also participating. The Campaign was formed on the basis of three demands:

- The immediate release of Horacio Panario and other left leaders in prison in Neuquén.
- An end to all legal proceedings against members of MAS, MST and PO, and all class fighters.
- Stop the witchhunt against the left!

On 13 November 1995 the Campaign held a demonstration at the Argentine embassy in London and delivered petitions to the charge d'affaires who said that she would forward them to Buenos Aires. In addition to the sponsoring organizations, Militant Labour attended the demonstration and the Socialist Workers Party sent a message of support. The Spartacist League/Britain, which attended the planning meetings but had refused to endorse or join the Campaign, did send a contingent to the protest and had a speaker at it.

The Campaign plans to hold more activities in the future. It is vitally necessary to build the largest and broadest possible united front solidarity campaign to defend the Argentinean left.

LRCI Splits Over Bosnia Betrayal

O, What a Tangled Web



TOMIUSLAV PETERNEK—SYGMA

Bosnian Serbs in Teslic pick through wreckage after NATO bombing raid

The following item was originally published in November 1995 by the British section of the International Bolshevik Tendency:

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), the international tendency led by the British Workers Power group (WP), have recently suffered two important splits. In early September, the founding leadership and half the members of the LRCI's New Zealand section walked out. A month later, at a public meeting in London, a leading Latin American cadre announced that the members of the LRCI's Peruvian and Bolivian sections had unanimously decided that they could no longer remain members of an organisation that refused to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO.

The splits appear to have been occasioned by the rightward movement of the LRCI's leadership over the past several years, particularly over the bloody communal war in Bosnia. This drift to the right is no surprise to us. Centristism—of which Workers Power is a chemically pure example—is inherently unstable. It was therefore only a matter of time before the LRCI began to fracture along right-left lines. But, although the dissidents seem to have split to the left, their break with the LRCI's centrist politics is incomplete.

LRCI Moves Right

The LRCI were burdened since birth with a glaring contradiction. On the one hand, their empirical observa-

tions were often trenchant and realistic, and appeared to support a Trotskyist political understanding; on the other hand, WP were unwilling to draw the proper political and theoretical conclusions from these observations for fear of offending left-liberal and social-democratic opinion. To pursue their thinking to its logical conclusions might isolate them on the left, and gain them a reputation for being "sectarians"—which to the centrist mind is a fate worse than death.

Following their 1980 renunciation of the "state capitalist" characterisation of the former Soviet bloc, which they had inherited from Tony Cliff's International Socialists, Workers Power often distinguished themselves from the mainstream of Britain's ostensible Trotskyists by their apparent leftism. In regard to Poland in 1981, for example, they published a lengthy analysis showing that *all* significant tendencies within Solidarnosc were going in the direction of capitalist restoration:

"The programme of the Solidarnosc leadership was one which, if implemented, would have strengthened the forces of capitalist restoration in Poland. We do not advocate that restorationists take political power from the Stalinists or that the working class should struggle to make this possible."

—"Revolution and counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-81", July 1982 (reprinted in *Trotskyist International* No. 4, Spring 1990)

Yet, when the Polish Stalinists suppressed Solidarnosc in December 1981, WP joined other pseudo-Trotskyist outfits in siding with Walesa against Jaruzelski, on the grounds that Solidarnosc's mass base in the working class prevented it from being a counterrevolutionary organisation "per se".

A similar contradiction was evident in the LRCI's stance during the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. While accurately characterising the new governments as restorationist, the LRCI insisted that the mass protest movements that brought them to power represented "political revolutions" that Marxists should support and attempt to deepen:

"Trotskyists must be prepared to support and participate in the ousting of the Stalinist dictatorships even where the majority of the working class has no other clear objective and even when pro-capitalist forces are involved."

—*Trotskyist International* No. 4

As in the case of Solidarnosc, Workers Power were prepared to support mass movements in Eastern Europe that were hostile to the Stalinist regimes, regardless of who was leading them or what direction they were heading in. In recent years, as they moved to the right, Workers Power have attempted to reconcile the contradiction between their description of reality and their programmatic conclusions by adjusting the reality to fit their opportunist politics.

In the abortive 1991 Moscow coup, when the demoralised "hardline" element of the dissolving Soviet bureaucracy tried to preserve the status quo against the Yeltsinite counterrevolutionary juggernaut, Workers Power instinctively sided with Yeltsin. They nonetheless initially characterised the coup leaders as Stalinists, who "hoped by their actions on 19 August to defend their privileges on the basis of post capitalist property relations". They described the Yeltsinites as:

"a faction of the bureaucracy that has abandoned the defence of its caste privileges and their source—a degenerate workers' state—in favour of becoming key members of a new bourgeois ruling class".

—*Workers Power*, September 1991

This assessment was retracted, as it gradually dawned on the LRCI leadership that if indeed Yanayev & Co. were Stalinists seeking to defend the status quo, then siding with Yeltsin put them, as ostensible Soviet defencists, on the wrong side of the barricades. To "solve" this contradiction, the Stalinist coup makers were retrospectively declared to have been just as pro-capitalist as Yeltsin, but less democratic. Thus the bloc with Yeltsin and the counterrevolution could be justified on the grounds of defending "democracy".

Yet the decision to support the counterrevolution in August 1991 was understood by the more politically conscious WP cadre as an important line change. This shift was reflected in the "Where We Stand" box, which appears in every issue of *Workers Power*. Prior to the 1991 showdown, *Workers Power* included a specific commitment to the defence of the workers' state against the forces of capitalist restoration:

"In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open up the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations."

—*Workers Power*, August 1991 (emphasis added)

By February 1992 the box had been rewritten, and the explicit commitment to the defence of workers' states against internal restorationist forces was removed, without any justification or explanation.

In an attempt to square their claim to be defencists of the "degenerate" workers' states with their actual position of supporting the forces of the "democratic" counterrevolution, WP now flatly deny that anything fundamental has happened in the former Soviet bloc. They criticise the leading Latin American oppositionist for believing "that we are in a profound period of historic defeats and counterrevolution" and note that this is "a phenomenon he shares with the other recent defectors from the League in New Zealand and Austria". The LRCI's "optimistic" refusal to recognise reality can only be maintained by those willing to keep their eyes tightly shut. Except for East Germany, which was simply annexed by its imperialist other half, the whole of the former Soviet bloc, according to WP, remain workers' states (albeit "moribund" ones).

On this question too they have been forced to rewrite their own earlier theoretical positions—once again with no word of explanation. In 1990 the LRCI offered the following criterion for the establishment of a bourgeois state in the Soviet Union:

"The establishment of a government, able and willing to separate the state power from the Stalinist bureaucracy and use its monopoly of armed force to defend private property, constitutes the bourgeois counterrevolution. From this point on the state is bourgeois. It must then proceed to dismantle the remaining proletarian property forms—the state monopoly of foreign trade and central planning. After this is accomplished, private property can be restored to a commanding position in economic life over a more or less prolonged period."

—"The Crisis of the USSR and the degenerate workers' states", Resolution adopted by the International Executive Committee of the LRCI, 4 March 1990, printed in *Trotskyist International* No. 4 (emphasis added)

But after supporting Yeltsin, the LRCI backtracked, declaring that capitalism is not restored until the economy is fully regulated by the law of value. Thus, according to the LRCI, Yugoslavia, Albania and all of the former Soviet bloc states (except the former DDR) remain workers' states. This has led to another difficulty. Marxists assert that the state is a *weapon* wielded by the dominant social class to defend its position against the rest of society. Yet it is obvious that the state machines in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are not armed instruments for the defence of collectivised property.

To reconcile this contradiction, the LRCI have been pushed into reworking the Marxist theory of the state, seeing it as merely a reflection of the dominant form of social property. Since the majority of industry in the former Soviet bloc has not been privatised, WP conclude that these societies remain (moribund) workers' states. Thus WP counterpose a norm of "pure" capitalism to the chaotic and unruly reality that marks the emergence of a capitalist social order from the wreckage of a bureaucratically planned economy, and claim that the latter is not capitalist because it does not conform to the norm. The counterposition of norm to reality, and the view that the state must always reflect the norm, recalls the mechanical materialism of the pre-1914 Second International. It is of course true that the character of the state and the dominant form of property



APESTEGUY-GAMMA/ONOPRESSE

Moscow, 19 August 1991: Soviet troops mobilized on first day of coup

usually coincide. The exceptions occur precisely in periods of *revolution and counterrevolution*.

Part Way Back to Cliff?

The rightward evolution of WP, evident in their response to the August 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, was no doubt accelerated by the passing of David Hughes, the original architect of WP's leftward departure from the Third Camp fifteen years ago. Since Hughes' death, the WP/LRCI leadership seems to have devolved on people who are much less interested in claiming the mantle of Trotskyist orthodoxy. The New Zealand oppositionists allege that the dominant current in Workers Power's leadership today subscribe to the view that the former workers' states of the Soviet bloc—Cuba, China, etc.—are purely and simply *bourgeois* institutions presiding over collective property relations, a position that had been rejected by a majority of WP in 1981. The New Zealand Proletarian Faction's declaration states:

"The revisionist position on the state can be seen to be one mid-way between the Cliffite position of state capitalism and that of Trotsky. The LRCI formally broke with State Capitalism in 1981 and as such could not revert to that position. It could not openly revive the junked political economy of state capitalism. But because the League's method separates society from the state, it could revise Marxism to allow workers property to coexist with a bourgeois state. This was the thrust of the 1981 minority position on the Stalinist state. If adopted, this position would allow the League to explain the relatively peaceful transformation of the state without 'winding the film of reformism back'. If it was already a bourgeois state, it need change only in its personnel and not its class nature. While empirically very neat in accounting for the apparently peaceful transfer of power from bureaucrat to bourgeoisie in the collapsed Stalinist states, this revision went

too far. It argued that the post-war overturns in which the bourgeoisie were expropriated [were] performed by a bourgeois state!"

—"Declaration of the Proletarian Faction"

A characterisation of the degenerated/deformed workers' states as essentially bourgeois, that is, completely antagonistic to the property relations upon which they rest, would buttress their argument, in the wake of the failed August coup, that the Stalinist "hardliners" were every bit as much in favour of restoration as Yeltsin. It would also fit their assertion that the social overturns carried out in Cuba, China, etc. were "predominantly counterrevolutionary" in character (see "Cuba, the LRCI and Marxist Theory", 1917 No. 13). Characterising the deformed workers' states as simply bourgeois perhaps qualifies as the most audacious "theoretical" gloss ever put upon the crass Stalinophobic position which remains fundamental to the politics of many a pseudo-Trotskyist: that Stalinism is "counterrevolutionary through and through to the core".

While Stalinism was and (in so far as it still exists) is a mortal enemy of revolutionary socialism, a Stalinist ruling caste may sometimes be forced to defend collectivised property from the class enemy. In exceptional circumstances, it may even be pushed into extending workers' property forms.

The refusal or inability to grasp the dual character of Stalinism disoriented the Trotskyist movement of the post-war period in the face of Stalinist-led social revolutions in China, East Europe, etc., and led to pro-Stalinist deviations. In recent years a symmetrical Stalinophobic impulse led the LRCI, and others, to refuse to defend the gains of October from the "democratic" counterrevolution.

Matgamna's Cure for Centrist Confusion

Workers Power like to present themselves as a "hard", "principled" alternative to the run-of-the-mill reformists

and right centrists of the British left. Many of WP's members take this seriously, which is why the leadership is having trouble making the membership eat their betrayal on Bosnia. Workers Power today find themselves in a dilemma similar to that faced by Sean Matgamna's *Socialist Organiser* in the late 1980s, as they struggled to shed the skin of ostensible Soviet defencism. According to *SO*:

"Our political attitude to the workers and bureaucracies in the Eastern Bloc has been quite different from that of other Trotskyists following the 1951 formula of the 'degenerated and deformed workers states'. We should have been more explicit and outspoken about Vietnamese Stalinism—we did attack the illusions widespread on the left, but only, so to speak, in footnotes—but beyond that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in practical politics. We did not—as did the Healyites—prattle about the danger of capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia in 1968. We supported Solidarnosc's call for a working-class boycott of Polish goods when martial law was imposed in 1981. We demanded the withdrawal of USSR troops from Afghanistan from day one.

"Over the last 30-odd years, many Trotskyists have made many efforts—often very intricate—to formulate better theories to underpin the 1951 codification. But aren't all those efforts scholastic? Isn't the shift of focus from the working class to the nebulous, classless 'world revolution' a logical product of the attempt to define Yugoslavia, China, etc., as somehow distorted socialist revolutions? (For sure the working class was not centre stage to make those revolutions socialist. So what was? The 'world revolution'.) Isn't the great instability of official Trotskyism, its constant wavering in its attitude to the Eastern Bloc states, an inescapable consequence of the *unviability* of the 1951 formulas?

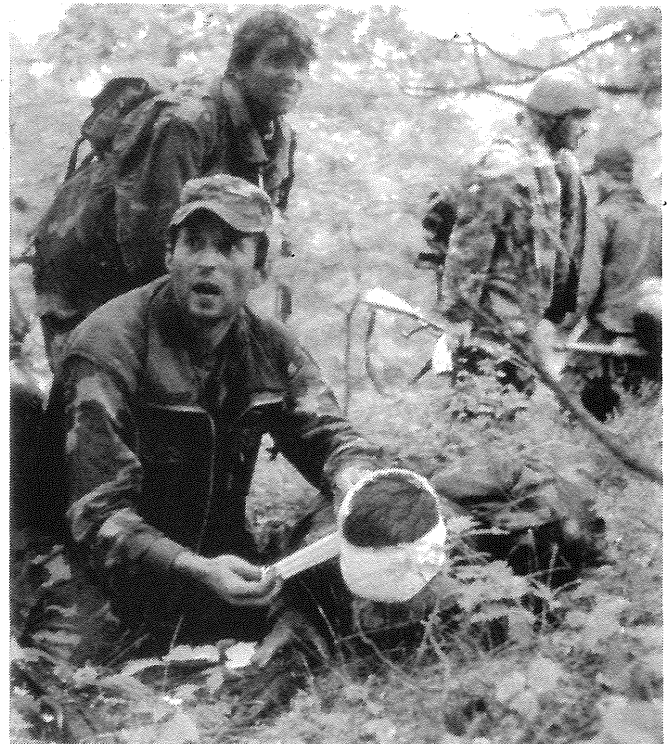
"Increasingly the formula 'degenerated and deformed workers states' plays no role at all in our substantive political arguments. Our conclusions are derived from factual assessment, and the formula sits uncomfortably on top of that factual assessment as a formula, no more. Isn't it time to reassess?"

—*Socialist Organiser*, 15 September 1988, as reprinted in *Workers Power: A tale of Kitsch Trotskyism*, Alliance for Workers Liberty pamphlet, November 1993

Matgamna found his way out of his dilemma by renouncing Trotsky's analysis of the USSR. This may not be so easy for the leadership of Workers Power who have staked their whole political reputation on their claim to have defended and developed orthodox Trotskyism on the workers' states. This is why they feel compelled to insist that the workers' states of the old Soviet bloc still exist. None of their positions can be substantially modified by the LRCI leaders without exposing to *their own membership* the fact that they have been wrong on virtually every aspect of the collapse of Stalinism. The knot of contradictions at the centre of the LRCI's politics is inescapable, and seems likely to lead to further ruptures in the future.

NATO, Bosnia & Marxist Theory

The immediate catalyst for the recent splits from the LRCI was the growing softness on the liberal and social democratic Bosnia 'solidarity' milieu, culminating in WP's refusal to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO. The LRCI leadership's insistence that the former Eastern European workers' states (including Yugoslavia) are still workers' states creates some particularly thorny problems in connection with the group's Bosnian position. The October



LUC DELAHAYE

Bosnian government soldiers near Banja Luka

Workers Power states:

"Serbia's wars have never been about defence of the workers' state, but about the fulfilment of a reactionary nationalist project. The class character of its war aims, not just the class character of the state, have to be appraised and understood by Marxists. And the class character of Serbia's war aims is not serving the working class, even in a 'deformed' or 'degenerate' fashion.

"All the pro-Serb 'Trotskyists' are guilty of an abstract method, whereby social categories like 'workers state', 'imperialism' and 'semi-colony' are utilised to produce a 'kwik fit' answer for whose side to take in the current war. "They retreat into their world of sterile formulae leaving the real world of the class struggle in Bosnia, with all its horror, behind."

It is unclear who WP means by "pro-Serb" Trotskyists. We do not regard Serbia, or any part of what was Yugoslavia, as a workers' state. We have never taken a side in the territorial battles being fought among the component nationalities of the Balkans. When, however, the Serbs, or any other indigenous people in a semi-colonial or dependent capitalist country is hammered by an imperialist coalition, is it not self-evident that Marxists must defend imperialism's victims? Apparently not to WP. One is reminded here of Burnham and Shachtman during the 1940 fight in the American SWP. Arguing for the abandonment of Soviet defencism after the Stalin-Hitler pact, they urged that the party be guided not by "sterile formulae" (e.g., the class character of the Soviet state), but rather by the "concrete course of events" in the unfolding war. Trotsky called such a method "impressionism".

Moreover, WP's neutrality between imperialism and the Serbs is particularly reprehensible given their own premises. Workers Power maintains that Yugoslavia is *still a workers' state*. Not only, therefore, does it refuse to defend a semi-colony against imperialism, it refuses to defend what it considers a *workers' state* from NATO bombs!



RON HAVIV—SABA

Bosnia Croat HVO militia on the offensive

For Marxists, theory is a guide to action; for opportunists of the Burnham/Shachtman/WP type, the opposite is true. If a particular position, taken for the convenience of the moment, contradicts one's theoretical position, there is nothing to be upset about; theory can be adjusted to practice soon enough.

In a leaflet distributed in September, we commented on WP's claim that Serb defencism was not posed by NATO's blitz bombing, but would be in the event of a full-fledged ground invasion:

"This sophistry is transparent. For the WP leadership the question of Serbian defencism is posed, but not *now*. It is obvious to those who read the press or watch television that the Bosnian Serbs are under massive imperialist attack today. The question of whether or not there will be a complementary intervention by NATO ground troops is merely a tactical one. So far the imperialist chieftains have opted for a low-risk strategy of pummeling the Bosnian Serb army from the air, leaving the Croats and Muslims to sort things out on the ground at some future point."

—*Bolshevik leaflet No. 1*

LRCI's Zig-Zags on Yugoslavia: Too Much to Swallow

The recent opposition was a reaction to the LRCI's rightward drift in recent years. The Latin American oppositionists pointed to a 1994 resolution of the LRCI International Secretariat on a US invasion of Haiti as "very symptomatic" of the leadership's tendency to value "democracy" above opposition to imperialism:

"In these circumstances revolutionaries can give no support of any kind to the military or to any guerrilla struggle which might be launched by elements of the army and the attachés against the Aristide government and the US forces in the coming period."

—quoted in "Bosnia: From a Revolutionary Line to an Eclectic Line", José Villa, June 1995

It is evident from Villa's document that the LRCI position regarding the Bosnian Serbs was the immediate cata-

lyst for the split. The opposition took a line on Bosnia clearly to the left of the LRCI leadership:

"A key demand in the Balkans and Bosnia is to call for all the Muslim, Croat, Serb and other peoples to stop its reactionary war and to unite to expel the 40,000 imperialist troops, the warlords and the oligarchies. This is the same policy that Lenin and Trotsky advocated for the Balkan wars and the great European wars of this century. Instead of that, the LRCI is calling on the imperialists to arm the US allies in the region: the Bosnian government. "The LRCI always call for UN troops out. But we never call for its military expulsion by the workers of Bosnia. The LRCI don't support the imperialist bombs but don't give too much importance to them. The leaders of WP like to say they are not so strong and significant. Sometimes they didn't even condemn these attacks.

"On 11 November 1994 50 NATO warplanes attacked Serbian Croatia. It was 'the biggest air strike in the history of the Western Alliance' (*Guardian*, 12 November 1994). For a revolutionary group based in Britain the most elementary task was to condemn the attack of its own imperialism and call for its defeat.

"The next issue of *WP* (December 1994) didn't condemn at all the 'biggest air strike in the history of NATO'."

Villa's document also comments:

"In Bosnia we should be in favour of arms to...*the workers!* Like in the two Balkan wars and in the two world wars, Marxists have to fight for the creation of separate multinational workers' militias in opposition to *all* nationalist ethno-religious bourgeois forces. These multi-ethnic workers militias could make concrete military actions with this or that other force in the defence of a particular community that is under a pogromist attack."

This was the LRCI position until their sudden flip-flop in late 1992 under the pressure of the "Workers Aid" cabal of B-52 "socialists". As the LRCI oppositionists point out, the betrayal over the imperialist blitz in August–September 1995 was prepared by the revision of their line over several years, "based on adaptation toward bourgeois democracy, the imperialist media, and centrist currents like the USec and LIT". (For our analysis of WP's drift rightward over Bosnia, see "Balkan Barbarism", 1917 No. 15.)

Even the United Secretariat (USec), previously among the most craven tailists of Bosnian nationalism, began to adjust their position after the massive NATO bombing campaign. In the October issue of *International Viewpoint*, Livio Maitan, a longtime USec leader, writes:

"In this sense, and despite all the obvious distinctions, the intervention follows the same logic as the Gulf War. What is more, it creates an extremely serious precedent....

"None of the governments in place respects even the most elementary political rights. They all make use of authoritarian methods. They have changed, or tried to change, the map of the region through war. They are inspired by reactionary nationalist ideology, favouring the ethnic purification which they have all practised, though to different degrees....

"All this applied to the Bosnian army and government too. They now follow the same dynamic as the Serbian and Croatian forces....

"*THE WAR MUST STOP*. All military operations should cease immediately. This is the condition sine qua non for reversing the perverse dynamic of nationalist and racist hysteria, destruction and massacre, to make possible the re-emergence of the most basic forms of civil society, and to sketch out political solutions which respect the interests

and aspirations of the peoples concerned.

"In the face of a typical imperialist project, it is impossible to shuffle in silence. We must say 'Stop the bombing!' 'Stop the NATO intervention!'"

—*International Viewpoint*, October 1995

This represents a significant shift by the USec—from Bosnian defencism to a social pacifist "Stop the War" position, with a pronounced tilt against NATO. There is a certain irony in the fact that the LRCI dropped their original position of defeatism on all sides in order not to miss out on the USec-influenced Bosnian "solidarity" milieu. With the stench of NATO intervention growing thick, the USec has begun to back away in embarrassment, leaving the LRCI alone to explain its neutrality between imperialism and the Bosnian Serbs.

LRCI Dissidents & Yeltsin's Counterrevolution

The Latin American oppositionists connect the LRCI's betrayal in Bosnia with a wider critique of the group's Stalinophobic deviations:

"For many years we have been fighting against [the LRCI's] progressive right-turn degeneration. In August 1991 we opposed the line for a united front with and behind Yeltsin and the capitalist parties against the stalinist coup d'etat in Moscow. We argued that we had to be against a coup d'etat that would repress the workers but that we couldn't unite with the capitalist social counter-revolution. Inside a Workers' State we couldn't make a common block with the world bourgeois counter-revolution against an authoritarian faction of the bureaucracy, because this class is worse than the stalinist caste. The victory of Yeltsin and of the bourgeois parties meant the imposition of an openly capitalist regime and the destruction of the USSR, with that was produced a defeat of incredible proportions world-wide."

—"Resolution From All the Latin American Members of the LRCI", September 1995

This clearly stakes out a left position within the LRCI, but it stops short of drawing the necessary conclusions. If the bourgeoisie "is worse than the Stalinist caste", which it is, and if the destruction of the Soviet Union as a workers' state was "a defeat of incredible proportions world-wide", which it was, then it follows that Trotskyists had the political duty to bloc militarily with any apparatchiks, no matter how venal and treacherous, who sought to resist the counter-revolution. Despite their incompetence, their attempts to placate imperialism and their reactionary Russian nationalism, the Emergency Committee of August 1991 were trying to arrest the inroads of the market "reformers" who threatened to destroy the planned economy. Of course, in the event of their victory the Stalinists would attempt to repress the workers (which revolutionaries would naturally oppose), but this is no reason to refuse a bloc with them against capitalist counterrevolution.

The LRCI's Latin American oppositionists may fail to draw the logical conclusion of their observations about the Yeltsinists' victory. However, the position of the New Zealand oppositionists of the Proletarian Faction on this critical question is much worse:

"It was necessary for revolutionaries to expose Yeltsin as the enemy of the political revolution. The correct position was to mobilise workers independently of Yeltsin, an open restorationist. If Yeltsin was serious in opposing the coup we could offer a military bloc with him, but only if he 'broke with the bourgeoisie'. Revolutionaries would



AFP/DPA

Serb refugees flee ethnic cleansing

have demanded that Yeltsin not only called for and supported a general strike, but called on the army to defect and arm the workers. Against Yeltsin calling off the strike we would have called on the miners to break from Yeltsin. This would have helped Yeltsin to expose himself to those layers of workers who saw the need to build an independent, armed workers movement."

Despite the "left" nuances and criticism of WP's bloc with Yeltsin, the PF is prepared to bloc militarily with the forces of counterrevolution. Calling for Yeltsin, the leading restorationist figure, to "break with the bourgeoisie" is like urging a wolf to become a consistent defender of sheep. Yeltsin had a consistent counterrevolutionary programme whose fundamentals are beyond conditions. Unlike the Stalinists, Yeltsin was—and is—"counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core". Any bloc with him against the Stalinist coup places one on the wrong side of the barricades.

LRCI Dissidents on the National Question

While the LRCI's former Latin American comrades take a correct position on Bosnia, their treatment of the national question as a whole still bears distinct birthmarks of their centrist origins. Villa's document compares the squalid communal wars in Bosnia and Rwanda with other situations of mixed populations, where there is systematic oppression of one people by the other:

"The LRCI made a terrible mistake when the IS [International Secretariat] supported the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front, the communal militia that won the Rwanda civil war]. The IS made that error because it has the same wrong methodology as over Bosnia. They take sides according to who is now the main victim. But in a communal war the situation could change completely. That is why in an inter-ethnic war like that between Pakistan and India the Trotskyists do not take sides. Only when we are dealing with the battle of an historic oppressed nation/community against an historic oppressive nation/community (like between Israel and the Palestinians, or Northern Ireland) could we take sides."



A. BOULAT/SPA

UN/NATO troops enforce imperialist 'peace' in the Balkans

The above is more than a little murky. There is, of course, a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, a general land grab by nationalities on a more or less equal military footing, as in post-Stalinist Yugoslavia and post-independence India, and, on the other hand, a situation of systematic, institutionalised oppression of one people by another, as in Palestine and Northern Ireland. In the first kind of situation, Marxists clearly take no side. But, although we do indeed defend IRA attacks on British troops, just as we support Palestinians throwing stones at occupying Israeli soldiers, this does not amount simply to "taking sides". We do not, for instance, offer one ounce of support to the IRA when it bombs Protestant pubs, or to Hamas when it attacks unarmed Israeli civilians. In these national questions, as in all others, we are guided by single strategic goal: to unite the working class in opposition to the capitalist class and its state. National, ethnic or religious groups oppressed by the state have a right to resist that oppression, arms in hand if they deem it necessary. But to support this right is by no means to support the *nationalist ideology and politics* that usually accompanies such resistance.

One pernicious feature of nationalist ideology is that it usually tends to regard the entire dominant nationality or group as complicit in its oppression, and therefore often considers *all* members of such a group to be fair game. Many nationalists also see nothing wrong with attaining the oppressed group's aims at the expense of the dominant group, i.e., reversing the terms of oppression. Marxists, on the other hand, are always guided by the objective of breaking the workers of the dominant group from the influence of "their" bourgeoisie, and uniting them with workers of oppressed groups. We cannot accomplish these tasks without being the most resolute opponents of every form of national exclusivism and by rejecting all-class national alliances of the oppressed. The whole matter, in short, is far more complicated than simply "taking sides".

In national conflicts which involve geographically mixed (or interpenetrated) populations, Marxists seek to formulate a programme that recognises the rights of *all* the peoples involved, in order to undercut reactionary national/communal hatreds and unite the masses in a strug-

gle against capitalism. And this is just as true in Northern Ireland as in Bosnia.

The Falklands/Malvinas War Revisited

The Latin American comrades contrast the LRCI's refusal to defend the Bosnian Serbs against NATO with WP's Argentine defencist posture during the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands conflict. Their split resolution comments:

"The actual LRCI doesn't have anything to do with the organization that we founded. WP, that in 1981 had the courage to agitate for the victory of Argentina in the war that was fought by its 'own' British imperialism, now is calling for the defeat of the people who are being bombed by the British planes and is asking its own imperialism to arm and train their allies in Bosnia."

It undoubtedly took courage for British leftists to defend Argentina in 1982—but that does not prove that the policy was correct. Unlike the recent NATO attacks on the Bosnian Serbs, the war over the Falklands/Malvinas did *not* involve an assault by imperialist forces on the indigenous population of a semi-colony. The Malvinas war was fought for a remote group of islands that had been possessed by Argentina for a dozen years early in the nineteenth century, but never had an indigenous Argentine population. For 150 years there had been no Argentine presence on those islands, and the few thousand shepherders who lived there in 1982 were of British origin and wanted nothing to do with Argentina.

In a recent theoretical piece on the national question, the LRCI criticise ideologies which call for "claiming and forcibly recovering 'lost' national territory, inhabited by another people, 'lost' centuries or millennia ago; e.g. Serbian claims to Kosovo, Zionist claims to Arab lands considered part of *Eretz Israel*" (*Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 6). It is only adaptation to Third Worldist sentiment that causes them to be so resolutely "anti-imperialist" over the Malvinas/Falklands.

Argentine self-determination was *not* at stake in the war over the Malvinas and there was, consequently, no reason to shed workers' blood in the conflict. The entire episode was initiated by the Argentine military regime in order to derail a growing wave of proletarian struggle. It was just

such situations that Lenin had in mind in "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism" when he remarked: "We shall not 'support' a republican farce in, say, the principality of Monaco, or the 'republican' adventure of 'generals' in the small states of South America or some Pacific island."

There is a methodological connection between WP's knee-jerk "anti-imperialism" over the Falklands, their support to Green nationalism in Northern Ireland, Palestinian nationalism in the Middle East and their capitulation to the imperialist hue-and-cry over Bosnia today. They are rooted in liberal moralism on the national question, the belief that "oppressed peoples" (whoever they are) can do no wrong. In the Malvinas, the Middle East and Ireland, the LRCI, by tailing the nationalism of the oppressed, pose as the most intransigent opponents of imperialism. In Bosnia this same tailist impulse has led to the shameful refusal to defend the Serbs against imperialist terror.

NZ Dissidents Reject Regroupment

The NZ oppositionists (who now call themselves the Communist Workers Group) appear to have drawn pessi-

mistic conclusions from their time in the LRCI:

"Our experience is that small, isolated, petty-bourgeois dominated tendencies, geographically located in a major imperialist power, have yet to find a way to overcome these problems. They will not rise above national narrowness until they recognise that the 'solution' is part of the problem. The LRCI instead of recognising the need to fight to overcome these dangers, makes a virtue of necessity. Of necessity revolutionaries have to start with FPG's [Fighting Propaganda Groups] that are small, overwhelmingly petty bourgeois in composition, and which do not represent the major forces of struggle around the world. This was the situation faced by the FI in the early 1930s. But this does not mean that we make a virtue of the propaganda stage of party building, minimising or even fetishising the fact of our narrow petty bourgeois composition and national narrowness.

"A symptom of fetishising the early stage of party building is the tactic of splits and fusions among the fragments of trotskyist centrism with the aim of 'rebuilding', 'reforging' etc. the FI. We reject this tactic as the main orientation of any FPG because the FI is dead and cannot be revived. Such a project wears the history of the postwar FI like a stinking corpse around its neck. None of these

Defeat NATO/UN Attack on Bosnian Serbs! Imperialist Hands off the Balkans!

Reprinted below is the IBT's 5 September 1995 statement on the NATO bombing of Serb targets in Bosnia:

The recent air strikes by British, French and American aircraft, and the bombardment of Bosnian Serb positions by UN heavy artillery, represent a qualitative escalation of imperialist intervention in former Yugoslavia. The current blitz is an act of all-out war, reminiscent of the murderous assault on Iraq in 1991. The open-ended attacks on the Bosnian Serbs, which go far beyond the previous "pin-prick" air strikes, are intended to humiliate the Serbs and force them to accept the diktat of the Great Powers. The 31 August London *Times* reported:

"As the allies continued their bombardment, the UN delivered its ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs, setting out the conditions under which the raids would be halted. They included the withdrawal of all heavy weapons within 12 miles of Sarajevo and the signing of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities."

NATO's military intervention in the Bosnian communal war was prefigured by the massive covert arming of the ultra-nationalist Croatian regime of Ustasha-apologist Franjo Tudjman by the imperialists. This resulted in the re-annexation of the largely Serbian-inhabited Krajina region and the expulsion of some 250,000 Serbs. The imperialists, who have routinely fulminated against Bosnian Serb "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims, could barely hide their glee at the Croats' military success and the resulting change in the balance of forces. The NATO air bombardment followed directly.

The position of Marxists in the current conflict is clear: we are for the defeat of the NATO/UN imperialist forces and the military defense of Bosnian Serb forces resisting them. We advocate political strikes and solidarity actions by British, French, American and other workers against the imperialist blitz. Insofar as Bosnian government or Croatian forces act in concert with, or under the command of, the imperialist forces in attacking the Bosnian

Serbs, we are for their defeat. While defending the Serbs against imperialist attack, our position on the communalist conflict remains unchanged—we do not support the territorial claims of any of the combatants to land inhabited by other peoples. Marxists must defend all communities (Serb, Croat and Muslim) from "ethnic cleansing", whether in Krajina or Sarajevo.

Many reformists and centrists, bending to the pro-imperialist sentiments prevalent in the social democratic and rad-lib milieu ("B-52 liberalism"), have sided militarily with the Bosnian Muslim government. To give this a leftist coloration they have suggested that the NATO powers really support the Serbs. But in reality the imperialists would like to stabilize the Balkan powder keg and turn *all* the fragments of the deceased Yugoslavian deformed workers state into compliant semi-colonies. Any illusions about the imperialists having some special affinity for the Serbs have been blown to pieces by the recent NATO bombardment.

The barbaric communal slaughter in Bosnia is a product of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the multi-national deformed workers state, and the victory of capitalist counterrevolution. To expect the U.S. or European imperialists to solve the resulting catastrophic mess would be to appeal to Satan for salvation from the fires of hell! A defeat for the imperialists in the Balkans would be a victory for working people in the region as well as internationally. Revolutionaries seek an end to the communalist bloodletting and the development of a class axis of struggle against the imperialist godfathers and their local allies: Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic.

Imperialism out of the Balkans!

For a multi-ethnic workers militia to stop communal terror!

For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!

fragments seeking to breathe life into the corpse have survived the current crisis of Trotskyism. This is what we would expect. None of the trotskyst left currents was theoretically armed to cope with the crisis of 'trotskyst centrism' posed by the world crisis of capitalism and the collapse of the Stalinist states. The permanent crisis of leadership was already acute by the 1940s. In the 1990s there is as yet no recognisable embryo of a revolutionary vanguard. To solve the crisis of revolutionary leadership we must turn our backs on the bankrupt method, theory and practice of post-war fake trotskysm."

—"Declaration of the Proletarian Faction"

The PF depicts the LRCI as an international tendency dominated by European centrists who tend to capitulate to social democracy over questions like Russia and Bosnia, and who seek to dragoon their international comrades into endorsing their betrayals. But the cure the PF advocates is at least as bad as the disease. To "turn our backs" on political struggle amounts to a refusal to combat revisionism on an international scale. This was the great mistake of the pioneer American Trotskyist, James P. Cannon, in his early struggle against Pabloism. Now the PF wants to repeat it! The only way an internationalist cadre committed to the programme of Marxism can be forged is through political struggle—through "splits and fusions". Rejection of this points to a retreat into "practical" work in one's own national (or even local) terrain, which must inexorably lead to a slide into exactly the "national narrowness" that the PF denounces.

Some Unresolved Questions

Faced with a sharp turn to the right, the LRCI threw up a real, if heterogeneous, leftist opposition. The LRCI leadership is making much of the fact that the oppositionists split before exhausting their opportunities for internal discussion. The Latin American oppositionists counter with allegations that they were bureaucratically denied their factional rights.

There do seem to be a few irregularities in the LRCI leadership's handling of its internal opponents. While anticipating that the former oppositionists will "gossip" about how badly they were treated, the LRCI's own documents

admit that a leading Latin American oppositionist was suspended from membership for being "involved in discussions with comrades organising an undeclared, *secret* faction that eventually led to a walkout without a political fight by eight members of the New Zealand section". The same document admits that a leading NZ oppositionist was suspended from membership, not for any breach of discipline, but for expressing "disloyal" views in an intra-tendency document that inadvertently found its way into the hands of the WP leadership. The leadership admits further that:

"All these manoeuvres led the IEC to take the unusual step of delaying recognition of [i.e., attempting to suppress?] a tendency the Bolivian section and [a leading Latin American oppositionist] proclaimed on Bosnia and Rwanda just before the [June] IEC."

As is often the case in factional situations, an "unusual step" by one side was matched by the other. The result was a complaint by the LRCI that the suspended Latin American oppositionists carried out a "precipitate and unprincipled split". The Latin Americans explained their action as follows: "Because we were obstructed in our right to be a tendency inside the LRCI we declare ourselves as a tendency of the international workers movement."

It is clear that the LRCI have suffered a serious setback—particularly in the departure of their Latin American membership. Workers Power are currently circulating a sheet predicting that Villa, one of their former leading cadres:

"will frequent the pubs of London with any hopeless sectarians, like the Spartacists and the International Bolshevik Tendency, who can use him, because they are enemies of the LRCI, conveniently forgetting that these pro-Serb 'anti-imperialists' always scabbed on the Irish national struggle and refused to side with Argentina during the Malvinas war. He will fuel his own, and their fantasies, about further 'splits' in the LRCI. He and they will be sorely disappointed."

—"Statement on the expulsion of J. Villa and the suspension of Poder Obrero (Bolivia) from the LRCI", 13 October 1995

The LRCI leadership is quite right that their former left oppositionists must come to terms with a number of questions that are clearly unresolved in their minds. They must attain clarity on the failed Soviet coup of 1991, and, more generally, on the question of with whom to make and not to make military blocs. They should re-evaluate LRCI positions on the national question, especially as it pertains to interpenetrated peoples. They should also seriously reassess the significance for the working class of Galtieri's 1982 Malvinas adventure. How they answer these questions will play a large part in determining whether they continue to develop toward genuine Trotskyism or slide back into some approximation of the classical centrism of Workers Power circa 1981.

We note that the LRCI statement predicts that anyone expecting "further 'splits' in the LRCI" will be "sorely disappointed". That may be, but we are not entirely surprised to learn that the WP leadership has forbidden WP members from engaging in informal political discussion with comrades of the IBT. This prohibition suggests that the LRCI leadership is already thinking about where those who leave to the left may go. Naturally we regret this unprecedented policy by the LRCI leadership. At the same time we are flattered by the attention, and promise to do everything possible to be worthy of this expression of confidence in the power of our programme. ■

TROTSKYIST BULLETIN No. 3 \$2.50

In Defense of the Trotskyist Program

a polemical exchange between
Workers Power and
the Bolshevik Tendency

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From the SL to Trotskyism

In the last number of 1917, we published an open letter to *Workers Vanguard* ("Getting Russia Right") by a former Spartacus Youth Club (SYC) activist who had been driven out after having expressed strong reservations concerning the Spartacist League's assertion that Russia under Yeltsin remained a workers' state. Shortly thereafter, the comrade became a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). In this issue, we have the pleasure of reporting that Alexander H.—another outstanding youth activist of the SYC and the Spartacist League—has joined the IBT.

Recruited to the SYC in January 1994, Alex became an SL spokesperson at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Soon afterward, he began reading 1917, which initially raised questions in his mind concerning the SL's Stalinophilic slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" and its position of neutrality during the attempted 1991 Stalinist coup in Moscow. As a loyal SL member, Alex considered it his duty to raise these questions internally in the hope that he might win a majority to his point of view. This is how members of democratic-centralist organizations are supposed to act. At the suggestion of a local SL leader, Alex declared his intention to write a document setting forth his differences. But, before he could do so, the Robertsonians made him the object of their favorite tactic for dealing with anyone deemed capable of internal dissent: the pre-emptive strike.

In June 1995 he was invited to dinner by the organizer of the Boston branch (to which he was assigned). Cordial in demeanor, and professing nothing but comradely interest, the organizer encouraged him to talk about his recent political thinking, especially regarding points of disagreement between the SL and IBT. The purpose of this tête-à-tête became evident a few days later, when a meeting of the Boston local was called for the exclusive purpose of denouncing this errant teenager. Heavies from out of town were brought in to lead the attack, including the SL's nominal second-in-command, George Foster. The meeting featured the usual chorus of hysterical name calling, followed by the obligatory motions of condemnation. One motion passed against Alex declared that, since he appeared to agree with every IBT position he knew about, and because the purpose of the IBT is to destroy the SL, that he too must desire the SL's destruction.

The object of the above exercise was obviously to brand Alex an "enemy of the party," isolate him, intimidate the rest of the membership and prevent other members from associating or even entering into political discussion with him. But Alex refused to give up without a fight. He handed in a document entitled "A Confused Neutrality—The SL on the Moscow August 1991 Coup," in which he stated:

"The counterrevolutionary victory of Boris Yeltsin and his cronies over the last remnants of Soviet Stalinism known as the 'Emergency Committee' in August 1991 has already [been] shown to be one of the most defining events of the 20th century. The destruction of the remaining gains of the October revolution (i.e., planned economy) which grew from this victory is something that the working-class of the world is paying dearly for and will be for some time. It is axiomatic that Trotskyists defend unconditionally these gains from all attempts at capitalist restoration, which may at times mean a military bloc with Stalinism. For despite its parasitical and counter revolutionary nature, Stalinism derives its privileges from proletarian

property forms and is thus at times forced to defend them.Unlike their earlier correct positions of blocking militarily with Stalinists, like in Afghanistan and Poland, the SL\ICL's position on August '91 fails to draw any correct conclusions, and is confusing to say the least. While claiming to see Yeltsin as the main danger, its position on how revolutionaries should have oriented to the Stalinists of the 'Emergency Committee' can only be described as a neutralist [one]. While the SL\ICL seems to have many versions on who the coup plotters were and what they represented, all these explanations fail to correctly state that Trotskyists should have been in a temporary military bloc with the Stalinists of the 'Emergency Committee' against Yeltsin."

Only one junior SL member ventured a (rather unoriginal) reply to this document. When Alex approached individuals to discuss politics, they would either respond with stony silence or hysterical denunciation. With no apparent sense of the absurdity of their behavior, SL members repeatedly demanded that Alex quit, while at the same time denouncing the founders of the IBT as "gutless quitters" who left the SL years earlier without first fighting for their politics internally! In the end Alex concluded that he had no choice but to resign, given the total impossibility of conducting a serious political discussion that could lead to the further clarification of either his positions or the views of the majority. In a document submitted with his resignation, Alex wrote:

"For the past year I have studied seriously the program of the IBT in comparison with the SL's and have found myself in increasing agreement with their perspectives. These issues however have not been met head on by the SL in any clear political way but [have] instead been clouded by slander and hysteria toward the IBT. Also add in the fact that the SL has flat out refused to debate the IBT, despite many offers by them. When a couple of comrades in Australia did debate the IBT, they were quickly disciplined by New York!"

The loss of some of their most political youth to the IBT was apparently a major consideration in publishing yet another pamphlet aimed at us. This latest attempt is entitled *The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?* While it cannot be recommended as an honest or even, for the most part, a political polemic, it does provide a compendium of their arguments against us.

The SL's persistent refusal to debate openly the main questions that divide our two organizations is a reflection of the Robertsonians' declining capacity for political intervention. Cheerleading, posturing and mudslinging have almost completely taken the place of politics in the Spartacist League. This, as much as the present reactionary period, accounts for their difficulty in recruiting new members, and in holding on to any intelligent, political youth they do manage to attract. We are committed to uphold the program and tradition of the revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1960s and 1970s—long since abandoned by the moribund leader cult that now retains nothing but the formal trappings of its Trotskyist past. ■

We have reprinted the SL's latest diatribe (*The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?*) along with our reply. It is available to interested readers for U.S. \$5. Please order from our Toronto address.

Islam...

continued from page 2

Unlike the modernists, Islamic radicals unabashedly emphasize the incompatibility of Islam and equality for women. One of the first laws enacted by the Iranian parliament, after Shah Reza Pahlavi was deposed, was the Islamic Dress Law, which imposes a penalty of one year in prison for any woman not wearing the *hijab* (a headdress traditionally worn by unmarried Muslim women). Executions for adultery and homosexuality are common under the *sharia*.

Radical Islamists are also intensely anti-Semitic and generally intolerant of other religions. The Iranian regime initiated campaigns to wipe out the tiny Bahai and Zoroastrian minorities. The Egyptian fundamentalists have organized riots against the Christian Copts, whom they term the "crusaders." When Turabi's Sudanese regime took power through a military coup in 1989, one of its first acts was to declare a *jihād* against the black population in the south who are mainly Christians or animists. According to *Middle East Report* (November-December 1992):

"Many interpret this [declaration of *jihād*] to mean that land, cattle and women in conquered areas can be claimed by the conquerors. One influential woman leader in the Islamist movement suggested that a solution to the 'southern problem' was for Muslim men to take non-Muslim Dinka women as second wives or concubines, assuming their children would be raised as Muslims."

Social Roots of Radical Islamism

The phenomenon of radical Islamism has perplexed many Western analysts. To the Islamists themselves it is all quite clear: their movement is simply a reaction by pious believers to contemporary iniquity. Their successes can be attributed to divine intervention and their failures to satanic interference. For liberals and modernizing nationalists, the rise of Islamism is more troubling. It is a movement characterized by worship of irrational authority and unremitting hostility to the Twentieth Century that appears to increase its following every year, not only among the backward and uneducated masses and traditional exploiters, but also among the scientifically trained intelligentsia—precisely the social group that the modernizers look to. Western Orientalists talk about the region's inherent irrationality and mumble sagely about the impossibility of eradicating a thousand-year tradition. But this explains nothing.

The petty bourgeoisie in the Arab world, both traditionalist and modernist, has problems which drive it to seek irrational solutions. Squeezed by foreign capital, sucked dry by parasitical and corrupt neo-colonial state bureaucracies, and profoundly disturbed by the prospect of industrial conflict, the petty bourgeoisie is highly susceptible to the reactionary nostalgia proffered by Islamic fundamentalists. The Islamists denounce all the bugbears of the petty bourgeoisie—foreign competition, "cultural imperialism," working-class upheaval and statism. Their opposition to class struggle, their call on the rich to be charitable and the poor to be patient, expresses the social standpoint of the middle layers.

In many cases the militant Islamists have received substantial financial support from traditional elites, particularly those threatened by the growth of the secular state and/or foreign capital. The radicals' interpretation of the *sharia* usually is flexible enough to allow Islamists to appeal

to more worldly motives when necessary. The Afghan *mujahedin* ignored the Quranic prohibitions on usury in their *jihād* to protect the prerogatives of the moneylenders and the landlords.

Islamic movements have often been encouraged by those in power as a bulwark against the left. Even where they are frowned upon, the state authorities find it much harder to crack down on religious dissidents than on secular radicals. The familiarity of Islamic themes and ritual have made it easier for the fundamentalists to grow among sections of the population traditionally resistant to new ideas. In societies without social welfare systems, the newly urbanized poor are often dependent on charity organized through the mosques for their very survival. This gives the Islamists the ability to mobilize large numbers of lumpenized or semi-proletarian elements in the cities.

Militant Islamic fundamentalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. When Saudi Arabia's King Faisal set up the World Muslim League in 1962 to oppose Marxism and radical Arab nationalism, it had little appeal. Instead of embracing obscurantism, young people joined the socialist and nationalist left in huge numbers. In the 1960s the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the largest Islamic organization of the day, vacillated between supporting and opposing Gamal Abdel Nasser, the main apostle of the "Arab Revolution." Qutb, Egypt's preeminent radical fundamentalist, was at that point seen as a member of a lunatic fringe. This all began to change with the defeat of Egypt and its allies in the Six Day War against Israel in 1967, when Nasser was humiliated at the hands of the Zionist state. Suddenly radical Islamist groups that had previously been no more than tiny minorities began to gain the ear of the masses.

Arab nationalism once inspired the middle classes with its promises of independence, non-alignment and democracy. But yesterday's "anti-imperialist" regimes are today's obsequious servants of the IMF and Western investment bankers. The "Arab socialist" republics are reviled as overgrown and corrupt police states. The Stalinist parties, which once played leadership roles in important sections of the workers' movement in the region, are deeply discredited by decades of opportunist adaptation to a succession of "progressive" bourgeois figures (both secular and religious). The collapse of "actually existing socialism" in the former Soviet bloc is seen by the popular masses, and much of the left, as proof that the socialist project is not a viable alternative.

The Muslim extremists have benefited from the disintegration of their secular competitors. Yet there is tremendous potential for the growth of a revolutionary current within the proletariat. A combative workers' movement would be a pole of attraction for both the sub-proletarian urban masses and the discontented petty bourgeoisie. Without this it is not surprising that the intermediate layers embrace irrational solutions to the dislocations and depredations of the imperialist world order.

Iran's Islamic Revolution: Suicide of the Left

Since the overthrow of the shah, many Western experts have asserted that Shiism is inherently more political than Sunna. But in the 1950s the Iranian mullahs were far from militant. Before his death in 1961, Ayatollah Borujerdi, Khomeini's mentor and Iran's leading cleric, preached passive acceptance of worldly authority. The Shiite *ulama* had cautiously supported the left-nationalist Mossadegh government, which was overthrown by a CIA-engineered roy-

alist coup in 1953. After the restoration of the shah, even the bolder clerics, like Khomeini, asked for no more than a return to the 1906 constitution, which accorded the *ulama* an advisory function within a constitutional monarchy.

To consolidate his grip, the shah enlisted the help of the CIA and Israeli intelligence in establishing the SAVAK, Iran's powerful political police. By the early 1960s the regime initiated a modernization drive (the so-called "White Revolution") which included a limited land reform, profit sharing for industrial workers, female suffrage and mass co-education. The modernization program was intended to broaden popular support for the regime by undercutting its secular opponents on the left. In doing so the government antagonized the large landowners, the traditional bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie of the bazaar and the *ulama*.

Khomeini, who was beginning to emerge as the shah's leading opponent, denounced the regime's "revolution" and advocated a full-fledged theocracy, under the rule of a "learned jurisprudent." He denounced the regime's venality, corruption, violations of Islamic morality and its connections to the Americans and Israelis. When Khomeini was arrested, on 5 June 1963, a wave of mass protests swept Iran, which were ruthlessly suppressed by the SAVAK and the army. An estimated 10,000 demonstrators were killed.

Khomeini was exiled in 1964. During the next fifteen years, he and the radical *ulama* hegemonized popular opposition to the shah. This was a remarkable development given the historic strength of leftist ideas and organizations within the powerful Iranian working class. It was facilitated by the repeated attempts of the Iranian Stalinist Tudeh Party to maneuver with the regime, while Khomeini intransigently called for its overthrow. In his book *Islamic Fundamentalism*, Dilip Hiro describes how the Imam established himself as the authoritative leader of the movement against the shah:

"[Khomeini] kept the alliance together during a highly turbulent period by championing the cause of each of the groups in the anti-Shah coalition, and maintaining a studied silence on such controversial issues as democracy, agrarian reform and the status of women. He aroused hopes of deliverance and improvement in different strata of society. The traditional middle class saw in Khomeini an upholder of private property, a partisan of the bazaar, and a believer in Islamic values. The modern middle class regarded Khomeini as a radical nationalist wedded to the programme adopted earlier by Mussadiq: ending royal dictatorship and foreign influences in Iran. The urban working class backed Khomeini because of his repeated commitment to social justice which, it felt, could be achieved only by transferring power and wealth from the affluent to the needy. Finally, the rural poor saw the Ayatollah as their saviour: the one to provide them with arable land, irrigation facilities, roads, schools and electricity."

Khomeini was not the only one to keep a tactful silence on topics like democracy, agrarian reform and women's rights (not to mention socialism and workers' rule)—the Iranian left also submerged these issues in favor of solidarizing with the religious opposition's denunciations of the shah and his U.S. backers. Yet it was the shah's land redistribution and introduction of female suffrage that had propelled Khomeini into intransigent opposition in the first place.

This grotesque opportunism had tragic consequences for the Iranian workers' movement. In September 1978, after the regime imposed martial law, hundreds of thou-



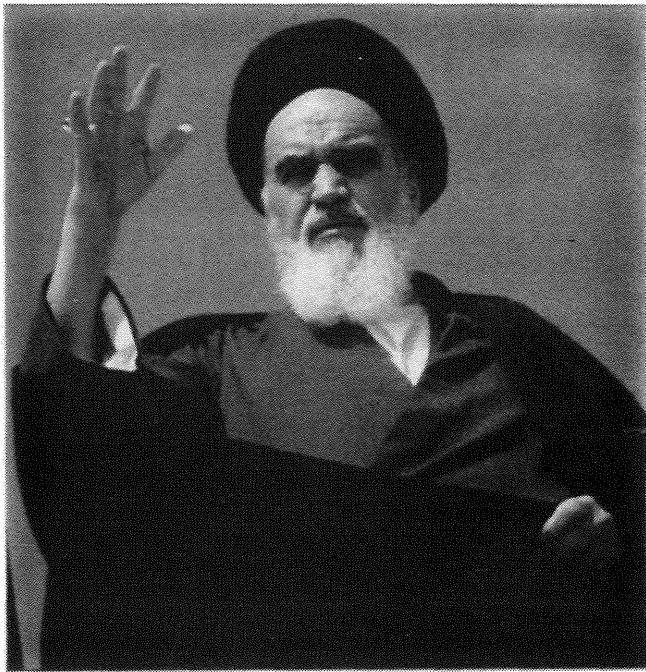
Fedayin students rally in Tehran, February 1979

sands of demonstrators marched in Tehran, chanting "Down with the Shah!" and demanding an Islamic republic. The government responded as it had in 1963, with bullets, and hundreds were slain. But this time, instead of quelling the protests, the massacre enraged millions of previously inactive citizens who suddenly poured into the streets.

The economically strategic oil workers (among whom the pro-Moscow Stalinists in the Tudeh Party had considerable influence) went on strike and were soon joined by workers in other industries. After a few months of continuing labor unrest and mass demonstrations, the Peacock Throne toppled. In the decisive confrontation with the Imperial Guard in February 1979, the New Leftist/Stalinist *Fedayin* and left-Muslim *Mujahedin* guerrillas provided the military leadership.

Yet the Iranian left had marginalized itself through its wilful political subordination to Khomeini, the supposed representative of the "progressive, anti-imperialist" petty bourgeoisie. The oil workers, leftist students, women, national and religious minorities who joined the demonstrations calling for "Down with the shah," did not want to replace the hated monarchy with a theocracy. Yet none of the left groups were prepared to "isolate" themselves from the mass movement through directly criticizing the mullahs. A genuinely revolutionary organization would have sought to drive forward the workers' struggles against the regime, while, at the same time, politically counterposing the perspective of a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government to the Khomeinites' call for an Islamic republic.

The Iranian left saw Khomeini as the embodiment of a "first stage" in a supposedly inexorable revolutionary process, and closed their eyes to the fundamentally reactionary character of his Islamic Revolution. The mullahs had no equivalent illusions. They immediately organized "Revolutionary Guards," and began to attack leftists, unveiled



GAMMASTUDIO X

Ayatollah Khomeini: Islamic reaction personified

women, homosexuals, unionists and other "enemies of Islam." In March 1979, a mass demonstration of women protesting the imposition of the Islamic code was attacked by government-sponsored mobs and then fired upon by "revolutionary" troops. As Khomeini's regime consolidated, the badly disoriented leftist organizations were isolated and crushed one by one. Some eventually attempted to resist, while others continued to proclaim their fealty to their hangman all the way to the gallows.

One would expect that the attitude of professed Marxists toward religious theocrats (whether Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic or whatever) would be one of total and irreconcilable hostility. Yet various Western leftists, not themselves believers, have purported to discern a progressive or partially progressive character in Islamist movements. This is a product of an invidious Third Worldism, which at bottom boils down to simple liberalism. Many socialists, who are alert to the dangers of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S., seek to prettify radical Islamic movements as egalitarian and anti-imperialist. When the Iranian left made the fatal mistake of bowing to Khomeini, it was mimicked by every major international socialist current, both Stalinist and ostensibly Trotskyist, with the single exception of the then-revolutionary international Spartacist tendency (iSt), which alone refused to hail the triumph of Islamic reaction over the shah.

Afghanistan: State Department Jihad

While Iran's Islamists were loudly proclaiming their enmity for American imperialism, their Afghan brethren were aligning with the "Great Satan" in a U.S.-sponsored *jihad* against that country's pro-Soviet secular regime. In April 1978 the People's Democratic Party (PDPA) took power in a defensive coup, promising radical reform and modernization. It passed laws redistributing land to those who tilled it and cancelling old debts, an extremely important reform in a country where debt bondage and usury were the preeminent forms of exploitation. The exploiters' resistance to these measures quickly took on an Islamic

coloration. As Hiro explains:

"Decree 6 abolished all pre-1973 mortgages and debts, and drastically reduced the excessive interest (often 100 per cent a year) on later loans....More often than not village mullahs, having blood ties with landlord-moneylenders, ruled that cancellation of debts amounted to stealing, and was therefore unIslamic. (On the other hand the pro-regime minority among clerics cited the Quranic verse against *riba*, usury.) Many rural mullahs began preaching against the government in an environment where armed resistance against the regime took the form of murdering Marxist teachers and civil servants."

The mullahs were equally appalled by Decree 7, which granted women equal legal rights, abolished child marriage and reduced the bride price to a nominal amount. While the PDPA maintained state payments to mullahs who refrained from denouncing it, the clergy provided much of the leadership for the U.S.-funded and equipped counterrevolutionary revolt. The opposition included traditionalist fundamentalists aligned with the Pakistani and Saudi governments, but the largest single group was Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e Islami*, which sought to create an Islamic republic like the one in Iran.

The Soviet intervention in 1979 posed the possibility of major social progress in Afghanistan through extension of Soviet social relations. Yet that possibility was never realized. From the outset, the Kremlin pressured its Kabul client into making concessions to the traditionalist reactionaries. The PDPA built mosques, propagated Islam on state television and watered down its reforms. When Mikhail Gorbachev withdrew Soviet troops in 1989, the Afghan regime adopted Islam as the state religion. None of this appeased the Islamic reactionaries or their imperialist backers.

Nonetheless, the Afghan Stalinists survived their Soviet patrons and were only finally overthrown in April 1992. They lasted as long as they did in the face of overwhelming odds largely because of the determination of much of the urban population, including most of the working class, to resist Islamic rule and avoid the inevitable bloodbath after the *mujahedin* took power. Even before the PDPA was overthrown and its social reforms demolished, the Afghan "freedom fighters" fell out among themselves. The Western media, which spent a decade lionizing these reactionaries and their resistance to "Soviet imperialism," have long since lost interest in Afghanistan, which continues to be torn apart by squalid factional feuding among the various Islamic militias.

Algeria: IMF Austerity & Religious Reaction

For the past four years Algeria has been gripped by a brutal conflict between the bonapartist military regime, backed by French imperialism, and a powerful Islamist movement. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in a conflict whose origins can be traced back to the early 1980s, when slumping oil prices saddled Algeria with an enormous debt. The National Liberation Front (FLN) government, headed by President Chadli Benjedid, responded with austerity, privatization and destruction of Algeria's elaborate system of state subsidies for consumer necessities. To counteract his regime's resulting unpopularity, Benjedid turned to "Islamization." In 1984 the FLN promulgated a Family Law incorporating the *sharia* into Algerian civil law, legalizing polygamy and giving men legal authority over their wives and unmarried daughters. These changes were vigorously opposed by women's organizations and leftists.

The FLN countered by turning to the *ulama* and encouraging them to organize disaffected youth against the opponents of god's law. Soon gangs of young fundamentalist thugs were roaming around, breaking up meetings of leftists and feminists, and terrorizing Algeria's French and Berber-speaking minorities, as the police looked the other way.

Over time the regime's growing economic dependence on France and the International Monetary Fund led much of the population to regard it as a stooge for foreign imperialism. In October 1988 hundreds of thousands of youths rioted, demanding the democracy and egalitarianism which were part of the FLN's "socialist" rhetoric. The regime responded with a combination of sticks and carrots. In 1989, a new, pseudo-democratic constitution was approved by referendum. Political parties were legalized. This opened up possibilities for the left, but it also permitted the Islamists to coalesce under the banner of the ultra-reactionary Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which emerged as the strongest opposition group.

From its origins, the FIS, which regards both democracy and socialism as "Jewish-Masonic plots," has been deeply hostile to the labor movement. In 1991, when the UGTA labor federation (based among oil and chemical workers, dockers and other skilled workers) called a general strike demanding a price freeze, FIS-organized gangs attacked the unionists.

In late 1991 the FIS appeared to be on the verge of winning the first multi-party parliamentary election ever held in post-colonial Algeria. To prevent this, the military, which had for decades been the real power in the country, launched a preemptive coup in January 1992. The generals forced Algeria's long-time president and FLN-head Ben-jedid to resign, suspended the constitution and declared a state of emergency. Thousands of FIS sympathizers were placed in desert detention camps. The death penalty was reintroduced and torture was used to extract confessions (*Amnesty International Annual Report 1993*). In addition thousands of fundamentalists were killed in extra-judicial executions.

After the coup, the FIS split, with the "moderates" looking for some imperialist-sponsored deal which would allow them to share power and impose the *sharia* on the population. The more intransigent Islamists coalesced in the rival Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) and Armed Islamic Groups (GIA), which launched large-scale terror campaigns against secular intellectuals, feminists, leftists, Berbers, Western tourists, and each other, in addition to the state authorities.

The remnants of the deposed FLN attempted to act as a mediator for a government of "national reconciliation" which was to include the FIS. This approach was favored by U.S. imperialism, while France stuck by the military regime, as a reward for its loyal service in protecting French investments. The military was also supported by those sectors of the population which had the most to fear from an Islamist takeover. In the early days of the conflict, UGTA-initiated demonstrations supporting the generals against Islamist terrorism drew hundreds of thousands of protesters.

It has long been clear that the military, which made various overtures to the Islamists on the basis of a shared anti-communism, could at any time strike some kind of deal with the FIS "moderates" and turn its guns on the workers' movement. In the aftermath of the November 1995 elections, in which three-quarters of eligible voters reportedly

participated (despite threats by the Islamist terrorists and a boycott by the bourgeois "Berber Rights" Front of Socialist Forces, the FLN and the FIS), representatives of the FIS have agreed to sit down and negotiate a "global solution" with the military.

A precondition for successful proletarian-centered struggle in Algeria is establishing the complete independence of the labor movement from the bourgeois state and bourgeois parties. This is a very real question in a country where, for decades, the union leadership functioned as a partner of the FLN regime. The organized workers' movement can begin to break the hold of the Islamists on sections of the urban plebeian masses through using the leverage of the existing unions to aid the struggles of the poor, the unemployed, the unskilled and semi-skilled urban workers and the rural semi-proletariat.

A revolutionary program for Algeria must include democratic demands for the separation of mosque and state and for the defense of women, Berbers, homosexuals, religious minorities and all other victims and potential victims of the Islamic reactionaries. The response to terrorist attacks by the fundamentalists on the Algerian left and workers' movement must be to organize effective united-front defense, independent of the repressive state. In contrast to FIS leader Madani's empty denunciation of "Western infidels," a revolutionary party would advocate the cancellation of the imperialist debt and link the expropriation of foreign capital to the struggle to overturn the rule of the Algerian bourgeoisie.

Anti-Muslim Hysteria and Imperialist Hypocrisy

Ever since Khomeini's unanticipated triumph over the shah destroyed one of American imperialism's key strategic assets, the Western media have been busy churning out anti-Muslim propaganda. With the collapse of the USSR, Arab terrorists have replaced Russians as Hollywood's favorite bad guys. Pro-imperialist liberals have used incidents such as the Iranian mullahs' threat to assassinate Salman Rushdie to contrast Islamic barbarism with the "civilized" West. The promotion of anti-Arab racism is particularly useful as a justification for contemporary crusades to "rescue" the modern equivalent of the Holy Sepulchre: the oil fields of the Middle East.

Concerns about Islamic fundamentalism also provide an acceptable cover for U.S. State Department intellectuals to express their fascination with the possibility of future race wars. In the Summer 1993 issue of the influential American publication, *Foreign Affairs*, Samuel Huntington conjured up the specter of a "Confucian-Islamic" alliance between a Japanese/Chinese/East Asia bloc and a resurgent Islamic fundamentalist Middle East, directed against Western Christian hegemony. While the existence of such a pact is completely hallucinatory, Huntington's piece (entitled "The Clash of Civilizations") is symptomatic of the American bourgeoisie's anxiety about one day being displaced from its current position atop the imperialist world order.

The hysterical opposition to Islam has translated into a wave of chauvinist attacks on Muslims living in Western countries. One example was the recent decision of the French government to ban the wearing of the *hi jab* in public schools. Britain's National Union of Students has come out in support of banning Islamic organizations on campuses. In the immediate aftermath of the criminal bombing of a federal government building in Oklahoma (apparently by



M. GRAFFENRIED

Algerians at the polls, November 1995

Christian rightists), the U.S. media reflexively blamed Muslim extremists. This led to an outbreak of ugly racist attacks across the country. The labor movement in the imperialist countries must intransigently defend the democratic rights and religious freedom of Muslims, and oppose each and every instance of chauvinist behavior.

The hue and cry about Islamic religious extremism is particularly hypocritical coming from the U.S. rulers. Every recent American president, Democrat or Republican, has played to the backwardness of the American masses with professions of his own deeply-held Christian faith. At one point during his first term in the White House, Ronald Reagan remarked that he believed that the apocalypse prophesied in the Book of Revelations could be drawing very near. Unlike the most fanatic Islamic extremist, Reagan possessed the means to turn apocalyptic religious delusions into reality. Prior to launching the 1991 Gulf War, George Bush wheeled out Billy Graham, the all-purpose evangelical charlatan, to bless the U.S. military as it prepared the massacre of tens of thousands of defenseless Iraqis.

While Muslim fundamentalism may be widely denounced in the popular media, in the last analysis there is no necessary contradiction between imperialist interests and the Islamic theocrats. The U.S. has long maintained a cozy relationship with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, where the *sharia* is rigidly enforced. The State Department has also kept in touch with "moderate" Islamists, including elements in the Algerian FIS, and among the Iranian mullahs.

International investors are indifferent to the Islamists' persecution of women and minorities, but they are impressed by their anti-communism and commitment to private property and social order. The more sophisticated capitalist commentators on the Middle East have no trouble distinguishing between the rhetoric and the substance of the Islamic "revolutionaries":

"Too many Muslim countries are non-democracies, and too many of these non-democracies have governments that combine being inefficient and unpopular with not really having a grip on the places they supposedly rule. The status quo is not going to last. Awkwardly, the status quo is convenient for the West....

"...the source most likely to displace many existing gov-

ernments—the Islamic revival—could in the long run prove a stabler partner for the West. In the short run, though, the collapse of the status quo is going to produce some angry quarrels.

"When these endanger genuine Western interests—a free market in oil, safe traffic in the air and on the sea, the security of decent allies [i.e., Israel]—the West must be ready to defend those interests. The more visibly determined it is to defend them, the less likely that it will actually have to pull a trigger. But the West should be clear in its mind that, properly handled, these quarrels are merely the usual difficulties of a time of transition; and that the aim, when the transition is complete, should be an easier relationship with a modernised Islam."

—*Economist*, 6 August 1994

The imperialist powers had similar conflicts with an earlier generation of neo-colonial bourgeois nationalist regimes. While leftists must be prepared to bloc militarily with any indigenous elements in neo-colonial countries against imperialist intervention, the Islamists' rhetorical anti-imperialism should not be allowed to obscure their fundamentally reactionary character.

British SWP: 'With the Islamists, Sometimes...'

In the November 1994 issue of *Socialist Review*, Chris Harman, a senior figure in Tony Cliff's British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), correctly criticized the French *Lutte Ouvriere* organization for refusing to defend Muslim schoolgirls expelled for wearing the *hijab*. Yet Harman went beyond simply opposing such manifestations of religious (and racial) persecution by the French state, to suggest that the Islamists' message is "two-sided." He wrote that Islam is attractive to:

"many women for whom modern city life seems to offer little more than poverty and sexual harassment. They believe the Islamic code can somehow protect them from the commodification of their bodies, even if it also enforces a certain style of dress and enjoins them to respect the authority of their fathers and husbands. It certainly seems better than the society of the sex shop and the world bank, of rich women in western dresses and expensive make-up driving air conditioned cars while poor women watch their children die of hunger or diarrhoea."

Unlike Islamic fanatics, Marxists are not opposed to sex shops, Western dresses, make-up or air conditioning. We know that the children of the poor die because of the imperatives of an irrational and exploitative economic world order. Harman's suggestion that wearing the veil "seems better than the society of the sex shop" implies that Muslim women make a free and deliberate choice to exchange personal freedom for protection from the roving eyes of strange and lustful men. In fact the Islamic dress code is generally enforced through terrorizing those who dare defy it.

In "The Prophet and the Proletariat," a major article in *International Socialism* (IS—Autumn 1994), the SWP's theoretical journal, Harman quotes Ali Belhadj, leader of the extreme wing of the FIS, as saying:

"Can you conceive of any violence greater than that of this woman who burns the scarf in a public place, in the eyes of everyone, saying the Family Code penalises women and finding support from the effeminated, the half-men and the transsexuals..."

"It is not violence to demand that woman stays at home, in an atmosphere of chastity, reserve and humility and that she only goes out in cases of necessity defined by the

legislator...to demand the segregation of sexes among school students and the absence of that stinking mixing that causes sexual violence..."

Harman places very little emphasis on the urgent necessity to combat the lethal danger posed by the FIS and its offshoots to unveiled women, "half men," Berbers and Francophones. Toward the end of his 55-page article, he comments that, "as well as defending Islamists against the state we will also be involved in defending women, gays, Berbers or Copts against some Islamists." But this reference to opposition to the excesses by "some" Islamists (presented in the context of defense of the Islamists) contrasts with the tilt of the rest of the article, in which the would-be theocrats, who inspire and organize the attacks against the "infidels," are depicted as "petty bourgeois utopians":

"Radical Islamism, with its project of reconstituting society on the model established by Mohammed in 7th century Arabia, is, in fact, a 'utopia' emanating from an impoverished section of the new middle class..."

"Socialists cannot regard petty bourgeois utopians as our prime enemies."

Who then does Harman consider to be the "prime enemy" of Iran's workers, leftists, Kurds, gays and women? From the safety of his English study he reassures his readers that: "Islamism cannot freeze economic and therefore social development any more than any other ideology can." Cold comfort for Algerian Berbers, Coptic Christians in Egypt, blacks in Sudan, as well as homosexuals and leftists throughout the region.

Cliffites & Iran's 'Revolutionary' Mullahs

Harman's detached, philosophical attitude toward the Islamic fundamentalists is not a matter of an individual blindspot. In general the SWP leadership, motivated by a combination of Third Worldist pseudo-anti-imperialism and anti-Sovietism, has tended to view the Islamists favorably. Harman tut-tuts about how "the great bulk of the Iranian left" initially portrayed the "Islamist movements as 'progressive', 'anti-imperialist' movements of the oppressed," yet, at the time, the SWP itself was downplaying the danger of the Islamic reactionaries:

"The most prominent leaders of the opposition are the Muslim leaders. The press plays this up. For all his brutality, runs the argument, the Shah is preferable to the backward religious 'freaks'. This only highlights the ignorance of the press.

"Iran has never been a hot-bed of Muslim fanaticism. Unlike other Arab states, there are no extreme right wing organisations with religious links here. Quite the opposite. They are at the head of the mass opposition movement because there is no alternative. Both the left and the nationalists are too weak to challenge their leadership."

—*Socialist Worker*, 16 September 1978

The essential "weakness" of the Iranian left was *political*—it closed its eyes to the reality of the Khomeinites and went along with their "revolutionary" mass movement against the shah. In his *International Socialism* article Harman finds it necessary to devote an extensive footnote criticizing an earlier article, "Islamic Fundamentalism—Oppression and Revolution," that appeared in the Autumn 1988 issue of the same journal. Harman criticizes its author, Phil Marshall, for depicting the Islamists as those who simply "express the struggle against imperialism," for his failure "to see the petty bourgeoisie [sic] limitations of Islamist movements" and for mistakenly equating them

with "the rising, anti-colonialist movements of the early 1920s."

But Marshall was only expressing the line of the SWP leadership. Harman is uncomfortably aware that his criticism of other leftists for adapting politically to the mullahs can also be applied to the SWP. In an article on the Iran/Iraq war, published at the same time as Marshall's (almost ten years after Khomeini came to power), Alex Callinicos, regarded as the group's most able theorist, explained the SWP's idea of a revolutionary strategy for the Iranian left:

"It would have meant revolutionaries demanding that the mullahs wage a *revolutionary* war against the US and its allies, that, as I wrote at the beginning of the war, they 'make Tehran the beacon of *genuine* revolution throughout the region—granting the right of self-determination to the Kurds, Arabs and other national minorities, establishing organs of popular power, fighting for the liberation of women from the Islamic yoke'. (*Socialist Worker*, 4 October 1980)"

—*Socialist Worker Review*, September 1988, emphasis in original

Presumably the SWP would not demand that the mullahs act as "the beacon of *genuine* revolution" unless they considered them to be leading "'progressive,' 'anti-imperialist' movements of the oppressed."

In attempting to clean up the SWP's record, Harman downplays the centrality of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the events leading up to the overthrow of the shah. Yet the facts are well established. In *The Wrath of Allah*, published in 1983 by Pluto Press, Ramy Nima (an associate of Mike Kidron, a long-time Cliff supporter) recounted how the cycle of protests that ultimately toppled the shah began with a January 1978 article in the regime's semi-official press that:

"labelled the clergy as 'black reactionaries' and charged Khomeini with being a British spy receiving funds from England and with being really a foreigner ('this Indian Sayyed') who had written love poems of an erotic nature. "This article was the spark that ignited a series of explosive events which shook the Pahlavi regime to its foundations. Theology students in Qom staged a massive demonstration. The bazaar closed down in protest...In the ensuing two days of fighting some 70 people were killed and over and 500 injured.

"The incident at Qom marks the point from which the religious opposition, under the leadership of the militant clergy and the mosque, moved towards an Islamic revolution and an inevitable collision with the forces of the state."

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Vol. 5, No.4

Through Fascism, War and Revolution: Trotskyism and Left Communism in Italy

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Harman acknowledges that Khomeini's name "had come to symbolise opposition to the monarchy," but minimizes the extent to which Islamist ideology characterized the protests:

"On his return to Teheran in January 1979 he [Khomeini] became the symbolic leader of the revolution.

"Yet at this stage he was far from controlling events, even though he had an acute sense of political tactics. The key events that brought the Shah down—the spread of strikes, the mutiny inside the armed forces—occurred completely independently of him."

Harman is attempting a bit of political sleight-of-hand here. Khomeini was the central figure (as well as the "symbolic leader") long before he stepped off the airplane in January 1979, but this does not mean that he personally controlled events in every barrack, school and factory. His political program, codified in the demand for an "Islamic Republic," was the axis of the upheavals; his clerics organized the mass protests and his slogan, "Allah Akbar" (god is great) predominated. One need only look at photos of the demonstrations with their pictures of the Imam, their veiled women, and the slogans, to understand that the Iranian Revolution that so excited the SWP was politically hegemonized by the mullahs.

The Cliffites explicitly compared the situation in Iran to "the two great revolutionary upsurges in Chile and Portugal in the early Seventies," (*Socialist Worker* [SW] 24 February 1979), portraying it as a situation in which a rising workers' movement confronted the capitalist state power. Khomeini was treated as a figure who had only a marginal connection to events—a sort of Father Gapon. The 3 February 1979 *Socialist Worker* wrote: "Khomeini arises out of a vacuum, left by the absence of any party to which workers can give support and which can support them."

Picking up on this, Cliff's Canadian supporters publish-

ed an article in the February 1979 issue of their paper entitled "The form—religion; The spirit—revolution." It commented:

"Khomeini has many reactionary views. He is an absolute anti-communist. But, for the time being Khomeini is a symbolic focus for a revolt....

"But to believe the people of Iran are fighting and dying in their hundreds and thousands only to let one reactionary leader be replaced by another is absurd."

With the benefit of hindsight Harman now considers that:

"The victory of Khomeini's forces in Iran was not, then, inevitable and neither does it prove that Islamism is a uniquely reactionary force....It merely confirms that, in the absence of independent working class leadership, revolutionary upheaval can give way to more than one form of the restabilisation of bourgeois rule...."

—*International Socialism*, Autumn 1994

Khomeini's victory over the working class was only "inevitable" because his leftist opponents closed their eyes to the dangers posed by the Islamists. They passively acquiesced to his leadership and consoled themselves with the same kind of celebration of the Islamic Revolution that Cliff's followers were retailing abroad. In all this, the role of the socialist vanguard was entrusted to the unfolding of some inexorable historical process.

It is not enough to abstractly invoke the desirability of an "independent working class leadership" as Harman does. It was necessary to specify what programmatic positions such an "independent" formation should advance. The Iranian workers needed to be told the simple truth that life under the mullahs would be as bad as under the SAVAK, and that they should oppose the Khomeinites' attempts to establish an Islamic republic and counterpose the fight for a workers' republic.

Marxism and Religion

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels began their political careers as radical democrats, calling for, among other things, the secularization of the state and freedom of conscience. Marx criticized the inadequacy of mere anticlericalism on the grounds that, even relegated to the private sphere, religion is still a reflection of social oppression—a veil (or "opiate") that conceals the real workings of an irrational social order. The main task, Marx said, is not to criticize the religious illusion, but to abolish the "condition that requires illusions."

Marxists are uncompromising opponents of all forms of religious mysticism, and advocates of the complete separation of church and state. At the same time they defend religious freedom and insist on equal rights for all. As Lenin put it:

"Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connection with governmental authority. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion whatever, i.e., to be an atheist, which every socialist is, as a rule. Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly intolerable. Even the bare mention of a citizen's religion in official documents should unquestionably be eliminated. No subsidies should be granted to the established church nor state allowances made to ecclesiastical and religious

societies....Complete separation of Church and State is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church."

—"Socialism and Religion," 1905

Marxism is based on a scientific and materialist worldview. Those who preach doctrines of divine intervention in human affairs and promise an afterlife are generally among the promoters of resignation to oppression and exploitation in this one. The holy texts of Islam, Christianity and Judaism have all been used, at one time or another, to justify slavery, male supremacy, racism, homophobia and genocide.

Marxists see class struggle, rather than anti-religious education, as the principal vehicle for progress. Once social oppression has been eliminated in this life, belief in the next one will tend to wither away of itself. We call on workers of all religions (and of none) to join together in common struggle. While Marxists generally attempt to avoid gratuitously offending those workers who hold religious convictions of one sort or another, the battle against religious oppression, for a secular state, for women's liberation and homosexual rights are key elements of the Marxist program of social liberation. This is why religious fanatics, like the powerful economic elites whose support they often enjoy, regard communists as their most intransigent enemies.

Throughout the critical months, *Socialist Worker* was busy asking questions like "Iran: Can Soldiers Beat the Generals?" (10 February 1979) and advising that, "If they are to be won over they must be convinced that the revolution will bring an improvement in their life back home." The next week, after the mullahs triumphed, *Socialist Worker's* headline read "Iran: The glory" (17 February 1979). The same week the headline on the front page of *Workers Vanguard*, the main organ of the international Spartacist tendency (from which the International Bolshevik Tendency derives) had a different message: "Down with Khomeini! For Workers Revolution! Mullahs Win." For the SWP and the rest of the opportunists, this was absurd "sectarianism."

It is remarkable how closely the SWP's explanations for its political adaptation parallel those of the Iranian Stalinists, who distinguished themselves on the Iranian left as the most craven apologists for the mullahs' political revolution.

"The Tudeh Party of Iran considered the formation of a united popular front the main pre-condition for the victory of the revolution and it was with such a strategy and tactics that it actively participated in the February 1979 Revolution. The victory of the Revolution and the character it assumed proved the correctness of the Party's analysis. The 1979 Revolution was a national-democratic revolution with a popular, anti-monarchical, anti-dictatorial and anti-imperialist content. Despite the current regime's propaganda the Revolution did not have an Islamic content. The February Revolution had a class and social character. At the same time, it is also a fact that the revolutionary movement in the country had, for specific reasons, a religious form."

—"Assessment of the Policies of the Tudeh Party of Iran during the years 1979-83," *Documents of the National Conference of the Tudeh Party of Iran* (1986), emphasis in original

Following Khomeini's victory, the SWP joined the Tudeh and the rest of the Iranian left in backing Tehran in its squalid war with Sadaam Hussein's Iraq. And, of course, Cliff & Co. also fulsomely supported the reactionary CIA-funded Afghan *mujahedin* in its war against the modernizing PDPA government and their Soviet backers. Harman's slogan summarizing the Cliffites' policy ("With the Islamists sometimes, with the state never") represents a generalization of the earlier disastrous support to the Khomeinists against the shah.

Down With Islamic Reaction!

Harman sagely opines that leftists tend to make symmetrical errors on Islamism: they either regard it as reactionary or as progressive and anti-imperialist. Harman seeks the middle ground and suggests that the doctrines of political Islam are sufficiently contradictory that they can be given virtually any class content:

"[Islamists] grow on the soil of very large social groups that suffer under existing society, and whose feeling of revolt could be tapped for progressive purposes, providing a lead came from a rising level of workers' struggle. And even short of such a rise in the struggle, many of the individuals attracted to radical versions of Islamism can be influenced by socialists—provided socialists combine complete political independence from all forms of Islamism with a willingness to seize opportunities to draw individual Islamists into genuinely radical forms of struggle alongside them.

"Radical Islamism is full of contradictions. The petty bourgeoisie is always pulled in two directions—towards

radical rebellion against existing society and towards compromise with it. And so Islamism is always caught between rebelling in order to bring about a complete resurrection of the Islamic community, and compromising in order to impose Islamic 'reforms'."

Every variety of false consciousness is full of contradictions. But the Islamists' "radical rebellion" is not aimed at the oppressive and exploitative social relations of the existing order; rather, they oppose the very limited freedoms the downtrodden have won for themselves. The radical fundamentalists are in no way preferable to their more moderate brethren; they merely use more extreme tactics in pursuit of essentially the same anti-working class goals.

The Islamist movement has been used as a battering ram to destroy proletarian institutions, break strikes and persecute the specially oppressed. Harman quotes Algeria's FIS leader, Abassi Madani, explaining why he helped break a garbage workers' strike in March 1991:

"There are strikes of trade unions that have become terrains for action by the corrupters, the enemies of Allah and the fatherland, communists and others, who are spreading everywhere because the cadre of the FLN have retreated."

Yet Harman treats the FIS leadership's strikebreaking as if it somehow contradicted its desire for state power:

"In reality, the more powerful the FIS became, the more it was caught between respectability and insurrectionism, telling the masses they could not strike in March 1991 and then calling on them to overthrow the state two months later in May."

The confusion is Harman's, not Madani's. The FIS's insurrectionism, like that of other extreme Islamist groups, is directly connected to its hostility to the labor movement. The "masses" Madani was appealing to—desperate petty bourgeois and lumpen youth—did not include the workers, whose strikes he opposed; in fact, the FIS's whole project was to mobilize the former to smash the latter.

Harman's reasoning reflects the same "optimistic" objectivism that led the SWP leadership (and the rest of the impressionistic left) to support Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in 1978. The basic idea is simple—any mobilization against the state, even with an avowedly reactionary leadership and intent, is to be welcomed because it will encourage mass self-activity, which must eventually take a socialist direction.

Harman does concede that:

"There is no automatic progression from seeing the limitations of Islamic reformism to moving to revolutionary politics. Rather the limitations of reformism lead either to the terrorism and guerrillaism of groups that try to act without a mass base, or in the direction of a reactionary attack on scapegoats for the problems of the system."

However he also suggests that "Islamic reformists" who turn militant can play a positive role, and criticizes those leftists who, "fail to take into account the destabilising effect of the [Islamist] movements on capital's interests right across the Middle East," and concludes:

"Islamism...both mobilises popular bitterness and paralyzes it; both builds up people's feelings that something must be done and directs those feelings into blind alleys; both destabilises the state and limits the real struggle against the state."

What Harman does not (and cannot) explain is why socialists should welcome destabilization by reactionary, theocratic movements. In the January 1994 issue of *Socialist*

Review, the SWP has no trouble labelling the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), notorious for organizing pogroms against India's Muslim community, as "near fascist." Yet he applies different criteria to the essentially similar Islamic fundamentalists.

Harman argues that the Islamists should not be considered as reactionaries *per se*:

"The aspiration to recreate a mythical past involves not leaving existing society intact, but recasting it. What is more, the recasting cannot aim to produce a carbon copy of 7th century Islam, since the Islamists do not reject every feature of existing society. By and large they accept modern industry, modern technology and much of the science on which it is based—indeed, they argue that Islam, as a more rational and less superstitious doctrine than Christianity, is more in tune with modern science. And so the 'revivalists' are, in fact, trying to bring about something which has never existed before, which fuses ancient traditions and the forms of modern social life.

"This means it is wrong simply to refer to all Islamists as 'reactionary' or to equate 'Islamic fundamentalism' as a whole with the sort of Christian fundamentalism which is the bastion of the right wing of the Republican Party in the US."

Reactionary appeals for a return to traditional values inevitably invoke a golden age that never actually existed. Pat Robertson, and the rest of the Christian reactionaries in the Republican Party, may dream of turning back the clock 80 or 100 years, but they do not want to recreate the America in which the radical Knights of Labor and the Wobblies commanded the allegiance of many working people. Like their Muslim counterparts, Christian fundamentalists "accept modern industry, modern technology and much of the

science on which it is based," and only reject those parts of science which conflict with holy scripture. They are downright enthusiastic about digital communications, satellite technology and new missile delivery systems.

There is of course an important distinction between the character of political reaction in a dependent capitalist country like Iran or Algeria, and an imperialist superpower. But Harman's objection to "equating" the ideologies of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism would only make sense if he considers Islam somehow closer to truth than Christianity. Surely it is no more rational to believe that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets than that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Swimming Against the Stream

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a response to a century of imperialist domination. It is, among other things, an attempt by a section of the people of the region—particularly the petty-bourgeois elements—to assert their identity against the economically and culturally dominant Western powers. But much of the left refuses to learn—even when the lesson is written in its own blood—that every response to oppression is not necessarily healthy or progressive. Obscurantism, radical particularism, the celebration of the most backward aspects of traditional cultures and a rejection of social progress, science and enlightenment as "Western decadence"—these are among the familiar reactionary byproducts of the imperialist age. And they are no less reactionary because they are embraced by multitudes of imperialism's victims. Marxists must understand the genesis of such mass pathologies without themselves being infected by them.

The SWP's inability to draw the simple lesson from its opportunism over the Iranian Revolution—that Islamic fundamentalism is reactionary—is shared by the United Secretariat and most of the smaller groupings in the international "Trotskyist" left. All these groups swear by Trotsky's opposition to the Stalinized Comintern's support for the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) in the 1920s. Yet Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, purported to be heading a revolutionary struggle to dispossess the feudal landowners, win democratic rights for working people and liberate women from their oppression. In fact Chiang was so "left" that he signed on as an honorary member of the Communist International, and loudly praised the Bolshevik Revolution. In short, he appeared far to the left of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the leaders of the reactionary Islamic fundamentalists of today. Yet the Left Opposition, headed by Trotsky, warned that in supporting the KMT, the Chinese communists were putting their heads on the chopping block.

Unlike the KMT, contemporary Islamists make no pretense of leftism, or pushing forward the rights of women or the oppressed. They do not deign to conceal their reactionary views and aims. The social base of the Islamic revival, which so impresses the opportunist left, ultimately derives from the economic deformations inflicted on neo-colonial countries by imperialism. The only way to establish the economic foundations for the social liberation of the masses of the Muslim world is through the revolutionary victory of the working class, at the head of all the oppressed and exploited, committed to expropriating the imperialists and their local allies. Forging the kind of party capable of leading such a social revolution requires, as a precondition, intransigent opposition to religious reaction. ■

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Labourism...

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nish its "radical" image. Labour became a party with individual membership (open initially to workers of all political stripes, though Communists were soon excluded), and a formal commitment to "socialism," as embodied in Clause IV. The constituency parties provided a playground for the left, but the real balance of power lay always with the party's two more substantial components: the trade-union bureaucracy (with a guaranteed bloc of votes), and the parliamentary caucus.

Even the gains Labour achieved—e.g., the free National Health Service, introduced after the Second World War by Clement Atlee's government—were conceived by Labour chiefs as a way to "protect" British workers from communist influence. In fact, the National Health Service was the brainchild not of the Labour Party, but of a Liberal aristocrat, Viscount Beveridge.

In recent years we have seen a concerted drive by the ruling classes in the imperialist countries to raise profit margins through the wholesale destruction of social gains won by the workers. Margaret Thatcher's attacks on trade-union rights and on the "welfare state" went hand in hand with a military buildup aimed at the Soviet bloc. The Labour leadership's support for these measures led to a long string of electoral defeats, and ensured the ascendancy of Thatcher and her colorless successor, John Major. Capitalist triumphalism over the collapse of the USSR, coming after a decade of domestic defeats (most notably the 1984-85 miners' strike) drove the Labourite bureaucracy to despair, and opened the door for the far right of the party under Tony Blair. The Blairites wholeheartedly embrace the Thatcherite "free market," and regard Labour's historic link with the unions as a source of embarrassment.

But Thatcherism and Blairism did not arise in a vacuum. Attempts to break the power of the trade unions can be traced to the 1964-70 Labour government of Harold Wilson, which imposed compulsory wage controls and attempted to introduce anti-union legislation outlined in a 1969 White Paper entitled "In Place of Strife." The British workers' movement was then at the peak of its post-war strength, and a storm of protest from the BLP and the unions soon led Wilson to abandon the idea. But British capital continued to lose ground to its competitors throughout this period, and the Tory government of Edward Heath, which succeeded Wilson's, re-introduced a package of anti-union legislation known as the Industrial Relations Act. This imposed compulsory cooling-off periods and ballots before strikes, outlawed effective picketing, and set up a special court empowered to fine or imprison trade unionists. The Heath government's attempts to crush the unions fueled a working-class radicalization. Faced with a powerful miners' strike, in January 1974 Heath called a general election on the issue, "Who rules the country, the government or the unions?" The government lost.

The BLP bureaucracy responded to the radicalization at its base by shifting markedly to the left. It adopted a paper program of widespread nationalization, and advocated a National Enterprise Board with the power to buy government shares in profitable industries. Originally proposed by the muddle-headed parliamentary lefts, this scheme took the reformist conception of the state to its absurd logical conclusion: using the "democratic" state to buy out gradually the ruling class. The mainstream Labourite bu-



PA/DPA

Tony Blair: 'New Realist'

reaucracy went along with these policies in order to ride out the working-class radicalization.

The election of February 1974 pitted the Labour Party's policy of accommodation to the miners against Tory attempts to defeat them. The workers saw the Labour Party as standing, at least in a parliamentary sense, for their interests *against* the bosses. This is why, in that election (and the subsequent election of October 1974, called by Wilson to get a working majority in parliament), Marxists should have given critical support to the Labour Party to put it to the test of office, while continuing to criticize its reformist politics and warning of its capacity for betrayal.

The betrayal was not long in coming. The 1974-79 Labour government, led by Wilson and James Callaghan, carried out attacks on the British working class more savage than any since the 1930s. Through its "Social Contract" deal with the Trades Union Congress, which agreed to police workers' strike action during a period of rampant inflation, workers' living standards dropped by 20 percent. The bitter disillusionment of the working class produced opposition on the right and the left. The fascist National Front (NF) suddenly emerged as a significant force in British politics, and began to receive some alarmingly high votes in by-elections. At the same time there were a number of explosions of working-class militancy against the Labour government, as well as growing militant anti-fascist activity. Labour's anti-working-class politics also produced a cleavage between a rightist section of the parliamentary wing and trade-union bureaucracy, on the one hand, and its working-class base on the other. As popular resentment grew, a section of the Labourite bureaucracy began to regard the connection to the unions, which made Labour, even in government, vulnerable to pressure from the working class, as a distinct liability. When Labour lost the 1979 general election, this tension exploded into a right/left conflict within the party.

Revolt of the Labour Lefts

The revolt by the Labour lefts headed by Tony Benn in the early 1980s was a fight in which Marxists had a side. It pitted the lefts (with a probable majority of working-class



MARTIN SHAKESHAF

Mass picket at Orgreave during 1984-85 Miners Strike: militant class struggle betrayed by Labour Party leadership

Labour supporters behind them) against the most venal sections of the bureaucracy, those who regarded Labour's working-class roots as an obstacle to their political careers. The domestic questions that split the bureaucracy were exacerbated by the renewal of the Cold War in the 1980s. The rightists predictably took a hard pro-NATO line, whereas the Bennite left opposed the U.S./NATO war drive, if only from the standpoint of "Little England" pacifism.

The anti-union right actually split the party: the "Gang of Four" (Williams, Jenkins, Owen and Rogers) broke from the workers' movement altogether to form the bourgeois Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981, and went on to fuse with the Liberal Party after the 1987 election. In 1981 Tony Benn, representing Labour's left wing, ran for deputy leader. He lost by a margin of less than one percent. Had he won, there would undoubtedly have been much larger defections by members of the openly anti-working-class right. This was reason enough for Marxists to have given critical support to Tony Benn against the pro-NATO right winger, Denis Healey.

Despite the SDP split, the bulk of Labour's right wing remained within the party. After a few years spent fighting a rearguard action against the left in the early 1980s, they went over to the offensive under the leadership of ex-left renegade Neil Kinnock. Their object was, in words now frequently heard in the British labor movement, to transform Labour into an "SDP Mark II."

Marxists take sides in factional conflicts within the workers' movement only when one side is superior in some decisive programmatic sense to the other. The Labour left had traditionally served as a safety valve for left-wing sentiment within the party, mouthing militant platitudes at the yearly Blackpool Conference, only to turn around and urge unity behind the rightist parliamentary wing at the

polls. The job of Marxists is to expose the lefts to the working class for what they are: a cover for the overtly pro-capitalist policies of the right. We do not side with the left merely on the basis of its hypocritical phrases.

The Benn/Healey fight, however, was more than the typical charade staged for the benefit of the galleries. Benn represented a faction that favored genuine, albeit reformist, opposition to Thatcher's attempts to break the unions, and counterposed a utopian social-pacifist unilateralism to NATO's Cold War drive. Healey, on the other hand, stood for utter capitulation to Thatcher's union-busting and open support for NATO. Many of Healey's supporters were toying with the idea of breaking with the workers' movement altogether. This fight involved real stakes, and Marxists were obliged to give the Benn wing critical support against Healey *et al.*

The 1981 Benn/Healey contest stands in marked contrast to the usual left/right divisions in the British workers' movement. An example of the latter was the recent campaign for the top job in the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G). Jack Dromey, a right-wing religious bigot and Blair supporter, stood against Bill Morris, who presented himself as some sort of leftist. Virtually every left group supported Morris on the grounds that a victory for Dromey would mean a takeover of the T&G by Blairites. But Morris is *also* a Blairite—he "personally" favors the abolition of Clause IV. His left talk of repealing anti-union laws and demanding a minimum wage is so vague as to be worth nothing.

'New Realism' & Neo-Thatcherism

Blair and the hard right of the trade-union bureaucracy subscribe to a policy they call "new realism." Their arguments are quite unlike those of classical reformism. The

latter—first articulated 100 years ago by Eduard Bernstein of the German Social Democracy, and taken up after World War II by such figures as Hugh Gaitskell and Anthony Crosland—held that socialist revolution was obsolete because capitalism was gradually shedding class distinctions and transforming itself into an egalitarian society. All that was necessary was to nudge it along. Few make such arguments today. Rather, the “new realists” claim that the capitalist market is so mighty that all attempts to resist it are futile. Only those who accept its assumptions and prostrate themselves before it can hope to survive. Tony Blair prattles about the “rigours of competition,” and tells the workers not to concern themselves with trying to advance their distinctive class interests, but rather collaborate with their employers for the good of their firms and, ultimately, society as a whole. Blair hopes that such declarations may soften the hearts of the rulers sufficiently to allow Labour to retain a few vestiges of the old welfare state and perhaps even introduce one or two paltry reforms—the best that can be hoped for in this vale of tears.

But the reforms of the past have only been won through mass social struggles. Why then is it “realistic” to think that, in the absence of such struggle, the ruling class will suddenly respond to grovelling? Those who abandon all hope of any fundamental change, and set their sights instead on a few reforms, forget that historically most reforms have only been granted in order to undercut the growth of revolutionary sentiment in the population. As the potential revolutionary danger recedes, so too do the possibilities of reform. There is, in short, very little that is realistic about the “new realism.” It is little more than a synonym for surrender.

“New realism” has translated politically into a concerted campaign against the left and the more militant sectors of the working class. Labour’s right wing carried out a two-pronged strategy: first, brazen strikebreaking to weaken struggles led by the left (particularly the 1984–85 miners’ strike), and, second, witchhunts of leftists in the Labour Party. The muddled leftism of Benn proved politically incapable of defeating the right wingers. Anti-communist business unionists, basing themselves on the aristocracy of labor, followed Thatcher’s example and attacked militant unions on behalf of the bosses. This offensive could not be defeated with the tame parliamentarism of the Labour lefts.

A determined fight by the labor movement could have broken the self-confidence of the bosses and turned the tide in favor of the workers. But such a policy demanded a break with Labourite reformism and a political struggle inside the unions to isolate and defeat the rightists. Such a perspective was not on offer—not from Benn, nor even from Arthur Scargill, the “hard left” leader of the mine workers. For all his trade-union militancy, Scargill’s program did not go beyond the formation of a left parliamentary reformist government.

Since the defeat of the miners’ strike, the “new realists” have become hegemonic in the unions. The quintessential expression of their dominance is Tony Blair. From a Tory family, Blair has no particular attachment to the unions or even to the labor bureaucracy. He came to prominence after Kinnock managed to lose the 1992 election despite the disarray of the Tories over economic policy, the Poll Tax and the European Union. In the eyes of the “new realists,” Kinnock lost because he had not grovelled enough to Thatcher’s social base. So after a short interregnum with the nondescript “traditionalist” John Smith, Blair succeeded to the Labour crown.

Blair’s successful drive to get rid of Clause IV capped Labour’s turn away from nationalization, the welfare state, unilateral disarmament, and all the other nostrums traditionally associated with British social democracy. For the past decade the Labour leaders have been indicating that, if elected, they would keep most of Thatcher’s anti-union laws on the books. So wretched has Labour become that the Liberal Democrats, the bourgeois third party of British politics, now often finds itself criticizing Labour from the left. The bourgeois Scottish National Party (SNP) sounds even more radical. In the Littleborough and Saddleworth by-election in July 1995, Labour campaigned against the Liberal Democrats using Tory slogans, and attacking the Liberals for being “soft on drugs” and being “the party of tax and spend.”

The politics of “New” Labour were spelled out by shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown on the eve of the conference where Clause IV was dumped. Alongside a profusion of liberal rhetoric about “fairness” and “social justice,” he stated their bottom line:

“[F]or the first time also the Labour Party has set down its commitment to a market economy, to living with the rigours of competition, and to nurturing enterprise.

“Conservatives have claimed that Labour opposes the private sector, and markets....Now, with our clear statement of aims, no one can ever again question our commitment to a healthy and successful private sector, or to competition and enterprise.

“The people know we will be tough on crime and on the causes of crime. The Labour Party is now the party of law and order in Britain.

“Our task is nothing less than equipping the British people and their industries to meet global competition in this decade and beyond.”

—*Evening Standard* (London), 28 April 1995

Labour’s current political stance is only distinguishable from that of the Tories in minor details. This open embrace of Thatcherism is a negation of *any* claim of the Labour leadership to stand for the independent interests of workers as a class. It has been a long time coming.

Labour Loyalists & Pseudo-Trotskyists

It should be an elementary reflex for anyone identifying with the tradition of revolutionary Marxism that such a party, under such a leadership, does not deserve electoral support. But the British left is organically linked by a kind of umbilical cord to social democracy. Many ostensibly Trotskyist organizations in Britain engage in some form of deep, strategic entrism into the Labour Party. Even those tendencies that acknowledge the necessity to stand left candidates against Labour in elections generally react with horror to the very idea of not voting Labour where there is no credible leftist alternative.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are various “Third World” Stalinist types who refuse to call for a vote for the Labour Party on the grounds that it is a bourgeois party, pure and simple. While reaching a different conclusion, they share the methodology of the ostensibly Trotskyist reformist and centrist left—that one must give electoral support to a bourgeois workers’ party *no matter what it does*. To withhold support, they must deny that Labour is a workers’ party of any kind. Such notions have nothing in common with the classical Leninist tactic of critical support, which is aimed at undercutting the influence of the social-democratic betrayers over the working class. Viewed from

this perspective, the question of whether or not to advocate a vote for Labour in a given election is not a matter of principle, but rather one of tactics.

The most consistent expression of the "support-Labour-no-matter-what" approach is put forward by the reformist Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL):

"Marxists worked in the Labour Party before it adopted Clause Four. We will continue to work inside Labour if Clause IV is abandoned.

"We do so because of what Labour is.

"Labour is the political wing of the multi-millioned trade union movement. Despite all its many limitations it represent[s] the first faltering steps of the working class movement on the road to political independence.

"Though all Labour governments have—fundamentally—served the interest of capital the party remains rooted in the bedrock organisations of the working class. "It provides the *only* actually existing governmental alternative available to the working class movement here and now.

"If our politics are centred on the working class and the fight for its self-liberation then they, necessarily, relate to the working class, and to its organisations as they actually exist. Therefore serious socialists have to relate to the Labour Party. If Blair is successful in winning the abolition of Clause Four none of this will change.

"The fact that the party had written into its constitution a formal commitment to common ownership, which is one pre-requisite of socialism, did not make the Labour Party socialist. On the contrary, the party's overall contradictory nature is defined on the one side by its actions in government and by policies and on the other side by its social base."

—*Workers Liberty*, May 1995

As "the political wing" of the trade unions, the Labour Party does not express the interests of the millions at the base, but rather those of the bureaucrats at the top. When the AWL asserts that "serious socialists have to relate to the Labour Party," they mean total immersion in the increasingly middle-class dominated constituency parties, and slavish electoral support to *proven and tested* betrayers of the working class such as Kinnock and Blair. The logic of their

liquidationism was clear in the AWL's strident denunciations of those who were driven out in the witchhunts for daring to stand against the "SDP Mark II."

The duty of Marxists is to restate the fundamental truth that the venal, counterrevolutionary, pro-capitalist bureaucracy that dominates the labor movement is the *mortal enemy* of the working class, albeit an enemy within. Electoral endorsement of the Blairites by supposed revolutionaries does nothing to break the bureaucracy's stranglehold on the workers' movement. It merely gives a left cover to people who are already widely derided by the more advanced workers as crypto-Tories. The AWL is among the most abject examples of the British left's loyalty to Her Majesty's Labour Party, but their perpetual electoral support to Labour is common throughout most of the British left. Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which postures as *the* revolutionary socialist alternative, nevertheless routinely calls for voting Labour at election time.

Contradictions of 'Militant Labour'

The Militant Labour group, which spent decades buried in the Labour Party, now regularly stands candidates against Labour in both national and local elections. They recently made the following estimate of the present political consciousness of Labour voters:

"Most politically advanced workers entertain few illusions as to what a Labour government will mean. At best they hope for a more favourable, less hostile, framework within which to struggle. But they are already conscious, or half-conscious, of the fact that it will be down to the strength and combativity of workers in action, and not the actions of a Labour government, if the Tory attacks of the past are to be reversed and new conquests made."

—*Militant International Review*, Summer 1995

In other words, while hoping that Blair will be a bit softer than Thatcher or Major, "politically advanced workers" don't see Labour as in any way representing them *as a class* against the bosses. Hardly surprising, as Blair has pointed out *ad nauseam* that his ambition is to "serve my country" irrespective of class. His praise for Margaret Thatcher and Rupert Murdoch should remove all ambiguity about what

Critical Support & Marxist Tactics

In Ontario, Canada's largest province, the right-wing social-democrats of the New Democratic Party (NDP) were in power from 1990 until June 1995. During that time they worked hard to please big business at the expense of working people. They cut back health care and raised tuition, whipped up sentiment against "welfare fraud" and de-indexed payments for injured workers. Their worst betrayal however was to enact an unprecedented anti-labor law (perversely dubbed the "Social Contract") that tore up union contracts and drove down wages for public sector workers.

While most of the left, including the International Socialists and Labour Militant, called for a vote to the NDP union-bashers in the June 1995 election, our comrades in Toronto issued a statement (15 May 1995) that noted:

"In some circumstances revolutionaries could call for a vote for [the NDP]—when such a vote would advance the class struggle. But that does not include situations where the NDP is running on its record of

attacking the unions and the other constituencies it pretends to defend."

Our comrades called for a vote and actively supported two independent labor candidates running against NDP incumbents in Toronto, despite the fact that, "their programs do not go beyond reformist/utopian calls to 'tax the rich' and lower interest rates." We campaigned for them because they opposed the NDP's union bashing—the key issue in the election. We also called for support to the four NDP parliamentary deputies who had defied their leaders:

"The NDP MPPs who opposed the social contract are not Marxists. They do not represent a fundamental alternative to the NDP leadership. For them, as for [NDP leader Bob] Rae, the limits of the possible are set by the profit system. Yet their vote against the government's open class treason draws an important line between them and the rest of the NDP caucus. As a result, class-conscious workers should be prepared to vote for them in this election."

that means. Yet the political conclusions drawn by Militant Labour contradict its analysis:

"Militant Labour supports the coming to power of a Labour government, not because there will be a fundamental change in the policies pursued by that government compared to the Tories, but because it would lift the yoke of 16 years of Tory rule off the back of the working class. It would release the pent-up frustrations which have built up over this period. Moreover it would test out in action, and thus expose, Blair and the right wing, which in turn would prepare the ground for the acceptance of genuine socialist and Marxist ideas in a mass form."

—*Ibid.*

There will not be a fundamental change in the government's policies—Blair says it, Militant Labour knows it, and so do "most politically conscious workers." So how exactly will Blair's election "lift the yoke of 16 years of Tory rule off the back of the working class?" He promises in advance to carry out Thatcherite policies, and does not even pretend that he will fight for the interests of the working class.

Militant Labour is in a difficult predicament. Since it broke from the Labour Party a few years ago after a determined witchhunt against it, Militant has moved leftwards in posture, if not in program. Militant cadres well know the bitter disillusionment and alienation that exists in the working class about Kinnock and Blair's crypto-Toryism. Yet Militant has not broken from its traditional reformist program—it still has as its crowning demand a call for a left Labour government to pass an enabling act and nationalize the top 200 monopolies. It proposes to introduce socialism via parliament, with mass extra-parliamentary pressure from the union movement, but without *overturning* the existing bourgeois state and creating new, proletarian, institutions of state power. This left-Labourite utopianism prevents it from drawing the obvious conclusion: that class-conscious workers have no reason whatsoever to vote for a Thatcherite Labour Party.

Workers Power's Labourite Habit

If Militant Labour has produced one of the clearest statements of the existing consciousness in Labour's traditional working-class base, the prize for the most straightforward justification for continuing to vote for today's neo-Thatcherite Labour Party goes to the centrist Workers Power group (WP). In an article written just before the 1992 General Election, they wrote:

"Labour's 1992 manifesto is a monument to Neil Kinnock's transformation of the Labour Party into a pale pink version of the Tories. When John Major refers to Labour as the 'Socialists' Kinnock could justifiably sue him for libel. The word socialism doesn't get a mention in the 1992 manifesto. The entire set of policies outlined have nothing whatsoever to do with socialism.

"Labour's economic recovery plan is directed at the bosses. Labour will be 'a government which business can do business with'. Not one penny is promised to cut the obscene unemployment figures, but the bosses are promised—in the very first point of the plan for 'national recovery'—'enhanced capital allowances' and 'an investment tax incentive'."

—*Workers Power*, March 1992

Yet after this accurate description, WP, true to form, draws a programmatic conclusion that is completely opposed to their analysis: "Nevertheless we say: Vote Labour." This patent incongruity is rationalized as follows:

"Of course, in policy terms Labour may not differ much

with the Tories, Liberals or SNP but it remains a working class-based party. Nearly ever[y] penny it is spending in the election campaign comes from the pockets of ordinary workers through the trade unions. The trade unions still have a decisive say over Labour Party policy—even though Kinnock has won the right to ignore that policy when he chooses to. The vast majority of those who vote for Labour and run the local parties are workers."

—*Ibid.*

For all its leftist criticism, WP ends up agreeing with the rest of the British fake left that Labour's political program is irrelevant, the fact that it is the party of the labor bureaucracy is reason enough. For WP, like Militant Labour, the AWL, the SWP and the rest, voting for Labour is a matter of principle rather than a tactic aimed at splitting the base from the top. As a drug addict in a lucid moment may be able to give a thousand good reasons for kicking the habit, so the reformist/centrist left can cite multiple examples of the rottenness of Blair & Co. But, just as reason is usually powerless in the end against the addict's craving, so all the betrayals of the Labour brass are never sufficient to prevent the pseudo-Trotskyists from marking their ballots for Labour on election day. The habit is just too strong.

A key reason for Marxists to give critical electoral support to a bourgeois workers' party is to draw a class line against the bosses. It is all very well to say the workers have illusions in the Kinnock/Blair Labour Party. Many of them undoubtedly do, but those workers who vote for the Liberal Democrats and even the Tories also have "illusions" in the parties *they* vote for. The purpose of the Leninist tactic of critical support is to exploit the contradiction created by the existence of a particular type of illusion—the notion that the bourgeois workers' party represents the working class *against* the bosses. As Militant Labour admits, most politically advanced workers have few illusions on *that* score. It follows, therefore, that the contradiction between Labour's working-class base and its pro-capitalist leadership cannot be exploited by a tactic of critical support. Electoral support to Labour, in the present circumstances, can serve no purpose except to provide "Tory" Blair with a left cover.

Weathervane 'Tactics'

The issue of critical support was clearly posed after Kinnock's purge of Militant supporters (including two members of parliament, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields) led to Militant Labour's decision to stand candidates against Labour. The first to run was Lesley Mahmood who stood in a Liverpool by-election in 1991 on a program that included these demands:

"An immediate end to the poll tax and writing off all poll tax debts. I support people who can't pay and will defend their homes from bailiffs.

"The restoration of the £57 billion stolen from councils since 1979. Take back into council control all services handed to private sharks.

"Not one job to be lost. A 35-hour week without loss of pay to create a million new jobs and use the skills of the unemployed to build better homes, schools and environment.

"A minimum wage of £175 a week. Labour has just cut its commitment to only half the average wage.

"A Labour government that really runs the country, not one told what to do by the overpaid big business bosses."

—*Militant*, 28 June 1991

In the general election the following year, Militant Labour stood candidates on a similar program. Dave Nellist



ALEXANDRA AVAKJIAN—WOODFIN CAMP

Anti-poll tax protester collared by cop, March 1990

and Terry Fields, the two Militant-supporting Labour MPs, stood as "Real Labour" candidates against the Kinnock-stooge contenders; Tommy Sheridan of Scottish Militant Labour, a leader of the anti-poll-tax campaign who was not an MP, stood against Labour in a Glasgow seat.

Theirs was not a revolutionary, but rather a left-reformist Labourite program which is *ultimately* counterposed to the historic interests of the working class. Yet, in contrast to the neo-Thatcherite Labour chiefs who had just purged them, the Militant supporters appealed to workers *as a class* and proposed to fight to defend and advance their interests. On the basis of this distinction, it was appropriate for Marxists to critically support the Militant candidates against Labour and the bourgeois parties.

The decision of Militant Labour to run against Labour posed a test for the British left. In the 1992 general election the Workers Power group called for votes to Nellist and Fields just as they had previously supported Mahmood. But they refused to give critical support to Tommy Sheridan on the grounds that he did not have enough of a base in the working class of the area:

"However the reasons for supporting Nellist, Fields and Mahmood do not apply with Tommy Sheridan, the Scottish Militant Labour candidate in Glasgow (Pollock). Like Nellist and Fields he will be standing on a left reformist programme. Unlike them he does not represent either major sections of the working class engaged in a struggle or a fight against the witch-hunt."

—*Workers Power*, March 1992

When Sheridan got a very respectable 19.3 percent of the vote, Workers Power had to eat its words, and issue an embarrassed correction entitled "We were wrong about Sheridan," admitting that the previous position:

"was clearly a false estimate of the conditions in Pollock...By any fair estimate this is a substantial proportion of the working class vote, beating the Tories into third

place.

"Clearly this level of support was related to the leadership given by Tommy Sheridan to the Anti-Poll Tax struggle on Strathclyde. It may have been related as well to popular indignation at his incarceration in Saughton prison. We were unable to assess the strength of this support given our lack of implantation in the area. It would have been principled for Trotskyists to give critical support to Tommy Sheridan on the same basis as we supported Dave Nellist and Terry Fields."

—*Workers Power*, April 1992

Workers Power's flip-flop displayed tactical ineptitude as well as geographical distance from Glasgow. But it also illustrated their centrist methodology in which electoral support is based primarily on considerations of popularity, rather than political program. WP extended support to Militant Labour candidates on the same basis as to the official ones—an estimate of the number of votes they were likely to get.

'Only the Spartacist League...'

The Militant Labour campaign also provided the Spartacist League/Britain (SL/B) with the opportunity to provide a vivid example of their own "uniquely correct" brand of sectarianism. The SL/B quite correctly refuses to give any electoral support to Kinnock/Blair's Labour Party. But when Militant Labour finally emerged from the LP and stood Mahmood in Liverpool, the headline of the SL/B's *Workers Hammer* (July/August 1991) screamed: "No vote to Kilfoyle, Mahmood!" The article explained:

"A qualitative and decisive reason for our position of non-support is that, while claiming to oppose Kinnock's yes-man on issues such as cuts, redundancies and the poll tax, the Broad Left and Militant have made clear their advocacy of a Labour Party victory in the general election, i.e. support for a Kinnock government....Thus, while claiming to challenge Kinnock's puppet in Liverpool, the Militant/Broad Left have not broken in any fashion from support to the puppeteer Kinnock. So much for their 'independent' campaign—the tooth bites down on nothing.

"Far from counterposing the need for a class-struggle workers party, Mahmood's leaflets, in Labour's red and yellow colours, describe her as the 'real Labour' candidate. This is of a piece with Militant's insistence that it is seeking to return Labour to its 'socialist roots'. Clearly they want to appear before the voters as loyal Labourites. But the 'real' Labour Party they swear fealty to is the party of class betrayal, from Labour's support to the imperialist war in the Gulf to its scabberding on the heroic 1984-85 miners strike."

The SL/B admitted that Mahmood claimed to oppose the Kinnockites "on issues such as cuts, redundancies and [enforcing] the poll tax." The fact that Militant claimed to stand for the working class on these issues clearly demarcated it from Kinnock's party, which made no such claims. Of course it is necessary to point out the illusions in the Labourite traitors and other aspects of the reformist utopianism of Militant's program. At a different juncture the persistence of its illusions in transforming the Labour Party and inability to break decisively with it could assume great importance. But in the concrete circumstances, the Militant candidate stood in *opposition* to the right-wing capitulations of the Labour bureaucracy, not as a stalking horse for it. The Leninist tactic of critical support for candidates of parties in the workers' movement does not require

that they first embrace a consistently revolutionary program, but rather that they represent, in some programmatically meaningful way, an expression of the interests of the working class. Mahmood's campaign met that criterion.

The SL/B's sterile rigidity is not *simply* a matter of formalistic thinking on the part of its leading cadres. It is primarily the result of the fact that the supreme leadership of James Robertson's U.S.-based International Communist League (of which the SL/B is the British affiliate), operates in a manner which puts the highest priority on preventing the emergence of indigenous leaderships capable of determining tactics for intervention in the class struggle in their own countries. Such cadres could, in time, acquire authority of their own, and come to challenge the infallibility of the "center." The SL/B's sometimes hysterical sectarianism also has the benefit of cutting members off from serious political interaction with other tendencies, thereby minimizing the chances that they might begin to question some of the behavior or proposals of their own leadership. The Robertsonites' indifference to intersecting leftist splits from mainstream social democracy, such as Militant Labour, is a demonstration of their incapacity to fight for revolutionary politics out in the big world.

Against Opportunism and Sectarianism— For Leninist Tactics

The future course of the Labour Party is not entirely clear at the moment. It is possible that a split may result from a clash between its working-class base and the Thatcher-style government Blair intends to lead. This could take the form of a Ramsay MacDonald-style shearing off of the topmost layers of the party, leaving the bulk behind to reconstitute the Labour Party as in the 1930s. Or, perhaps more likely, there could be a smaller split to form a more left-wing reformist party. Indeed, the news that miners' leader Arthur Scargill is seeking to launch a breakaway "Socialist Labour Party" by next May Day points in such a direction. It is conceivable that Blair could succeed in completely severing Labour's links with the workers' movement, thus creating a "new" liberal bourgeois party to compete with the Tories as the party of the British bosses. This appears to be what he wants. But it will be difficult, and would in any case likely result in an attempt to re-found a labor party by the trade unions.

However it is resolved, the current situation cannot last indefinitely. A bourgeois workers' party that renounces any pretense of seeking to reform the existing social order cannot long maintain itself atop a working class dissatisfied with its lot. The anger and alienation growing in Britain today as the result of decades of capitalist decay ensures that Blair's "New" Labour Party is heading for a fall. The ensuing eruption of class struggle could present a Marxist organization with important opportunities to intervene and grow.

The Labour Party question is at present *the* strategic question for Marxists in Britain. Opportunism toward the Labour Party, particularly its left wing, runs deep in the ostensible Trotskyist movement, and has played a major role in derailing more than one serious attempt to forge a revolutionary party. The sterile sectarianism exemplified by the Spartacist League is a complement to this opportunism—the opposite side of the same coin. The sectarian, like the opportunist, fears confrontation with the reformist misleaders in front of the working class. Reformists capitulate to the prevailing illusions; sectarians take refuge from any

real fight in the safety of their own little sandbox, where all the variables can be controlled. The comrades who have recently launched the British section of the International Bolshevik Tendency are committed to struggle against both false alternatives, and to root the program of revolutionary Marxism once more in the British workers' movement. ■

Protest French Nuclear Tests!

The French government's renewed round of nuclear weapons testing on the South Pacific Mururoa atoll provoked large-scale protests across the region and around the world. Our comrades in New Zealand's Permanent Revolution Group (PRG) played a prominent role in building a united front demonstration around the slogan "Stop the French Tests at Mururoa!" On 7 September 1995 almost 1,000 people protested in Wellington. Among the endorsers of the demonstration were the Socialist Workers Organization (followers of Tony Cliff) as well as Greenpeace and a number of anarchists. The PRG was instrumental in securing support for the demonstration from both of the country's rival trade-union federations—the NZ Council of Trade Unions and the Trade Union Federation.

Unlike most of the speakers at the rally whose remarks had an NZ-nationalist, anti-French tilt, our comrade Adaire H. put forward an internationalist position:

"The Permanent Revolution Group opposes the French nuclear tests at Mururoa as an act of imperialism. Calls on the New Zealand government to take strong action against Chirac and his cronies create illusions in New Zealand's capitalist rulers as a progressive force.

"Helen Clarke [Labour Party leader] and Jim Arderton's [Alliance leader] reliance on the World Court to stop French imperialism's tests also attempts to create faith in international capitalist rulers. These very rulers, along with the New Zealand government, are presently backing French, British and German (that is NATO) bombing of Bosnian Serbs—Imperialists out of Bosnia!

"NZ governments have consistently supported major imperialist attacks—Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Haiti—to mention a few. The present government is also responsible for attacks on the workers of New Zealand—e.g., the Employment Contracts Act. This government is no friend of workers here or overseas: French and New Zealand imperialists: Hands Off the Pacific!

"What is needed to stop these atrocities is international working-class unity against the test. Not consumer boycotts—which pit French and New Zealand workers against each other, but industrial action against the tests from France, to New Caledonia, to Tahiti, to New Zealand.

"Finally, it is important to remember, it is only the imperialists who have used the bomb. We have no illusions in the corrupt bureaucratic Stalinist regimes of China, or North Korea, but we defend their right to defend themselves with nuclear weapons against imperialist threats."

Blair's Bogus Bolsheviks

Labourism & the British Left



LIONEL CHERRAULT

Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill: Labour lefts of 1980s

Buoyed by favorable opinion polls and salivating at the prospect of electoral victory after more than fifteen years in the wilderness, in April 1995 the British Labour Party voted to abolish the famous Clause IV of its constitution, which committed it, at least on paper, to fighting for "social ownership" of the major means of production and exchange. With this obsequious bow before the "free market," Labour at long last joined its social-democratic counterparts on the continent in abandoning any pretense of standing for socialism.

The vote was also a milestone in the career of Tony Blair, who had risen to the post of party leader the previous year vowing to make Labour a respectable "party of government," i.e., one that would be acceptable to a capitalist class on the attack. Dumping Clause IV was the culmination of Labour's long retreat in the face of the Thatcherite offensive. The Labour Party betrayed the miners' strike of 1984-85 and then purged itself of leftists—all with the "pragmatic" objective of getting back into 10 Downing Street. Now Tony Blair has taken the next logical step on the road of political "realism": assuring the country's capitalist rulers that, once in government, his party will do nothing very different from the Tories he aims to replace.

Although the scuttling of Clause IV is a new low, it represents no fundamental change in the character of the Labour Party. From its inception, Labour has always been a classical example of what Lenin called a "bourgeois workers' party." Founded on a recognition of the necessity for working-class political independence, and based upon the organizations of the working class, it has always nevertheless been dominated by bourgeois ideology, and run by people whose fundamental loyalty to the existing social

order was never in doubt. Labour has always acted as a prop for capitalism, and an obstacle to the development of revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat. The abolition of Clause IV thus only makes explicit what was implicit in the Labour Party from its formation.

The Labour Party arose in response to a deep working-class radicalization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as British capitalism faced serious competition from powerful German and U.S. imperialist rivals. The resulting economic insecurity was sufficient to detach the more advanced sections of the proletariat from the bourgeois Liberal Party as recognition spread that the workers needed their own party separate from, and counterposed to, the parties of the bosses in order to defend their interests.

Yet this organizational step forward was not matched by an equivalent political advance. Even while separating from the organizations of the bourgeoisie, Labour remained firmly within the *political* tradition of British liberalism. It has always remained slavishly loyal to the parliamentary system, that "democratic" mask for the rule of capital. While formally calling for socialism, the party insisted that this goal would have to be attained by parliamentary, rather than revolutionary, methods. Labour's leaders invariably grovelled before the monarchy and supported the British ruling class in all its imperialist adventures—from world wars to colonialist interventions in Ireland, India, Africa and elsewhere. Labour eagerly supported the UN's counterrevolutionary war against North Korea in the 1950s. Under Harold Wilson in the 1960s, it dutifully backed American imperialism's failed attempt to crush the Vietnamese revolution.

Labour Party: Pillar of Capitalist Rule

The Labour Party, like social-democratic parties everywhere, serves as an essential pillar of "democratic" capitalist rule. While the impulse for its existence comes from the working class, the Labour Party acts as a mechanism for promoting bourgeois ideology among working people. In times of political crisis, when bourgeois parties and politicians are discredited in the eyes of the masses, the capitalists are glad to have some experienced operators with enough political authority within the workers' movement to control outbreaks of class struggle.

Labour leaders, including the so-called trade-union lefts, played a key role in the defeat of the 1926 General Strike. In 1931, Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald defected to a Tory "National Government" in order to carry out massive austerity attacks, including cuts in already near-starvation-level unemployment benefits. During the past fifteen years of Tory reaction, the latter-day MacDonalds have once again been stabbing the working-class movement in the back.

From its inception, the Labour Party has been formally committed to achieving, by parliamentary means, the piecemeal nationalization of *parts* of the British economy, and to ameliorating the worst ravages of capitalism. In order to head off the growth of communism after the Russian Revolution, the party brass thought it prudent to bur-

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