

TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL

Issue number 3 Summer 1989 Price £1.50

China: repression and revolution

Women's oppression

Left republicanism in Ireland

Debate with Lutte Ouvrière

*The Izquierda Unida and the Argentine
elections*



政治革命

The English language Journal of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL

Issue number 3 Summer 1989

Contents

<i>In this issue . . .</i>	2
<i>China: revolution and repression</i> Resolution passed at the MRCI conference, June 1989	3
<i>International Secretariat statement on China</i>	11
<i>MRCI theses on women's oppression</i> Passed at the MRCI conference, April 1989	13
<i>At the graveside of Imre Nagy</i> A leaflet by Arbeiterstandpunkt, June 1989	42
<i>"Left" republicanism in Ireland</i> By James Kennedy	46
<i>Trotskyism versus economism on Ireland: a reply to Lutte Ouvrière</i> By Aileen O'Doherty	51
<i>The MAS, Izquierda Unida and the Argentine elections</i> By Juan Arienti	58
<i>Reviews</i>	63

The MRCI:

Arbeiterstandpunkt (Austria)
Poder Obrero (Peru)
Pouvoir Ouvrier (France)
Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany)
Irish Workers Group
Workers Power (Britain)

Guia Obrera (Bolivia) is a group in the process of discussions with the MRCI with the aim of becoming an affiliated section.

The slogan on the front cover reads "Political Revolution!"

Basic documents of the MRCI, the "Declaration of fraternal relations", "22 Theses in defence of Trotskyism" and others, are available, many in French, German and Spanish as well as English, on request (see inside back cover for details).

For subscription rates see inside back cover



Published by the
International
Secretariat of the
Movement for a
Revolutionary
Communist
International

BCM 7750
London
WC1N 3XX
England

Printed by
Dot Press (TU)
Oxford
England

ISSN 0953-7554
© MRCI 1989

In this issue . . .

An important part of *Trotskyist International 3* is devoted to two documents recently adopted by the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI).

The first resolution deals with the revolutionary crisis which gripped China between April and June 1989. Workers all over the world were deeply moved by the courage and audacity of the Chinese workers and students faced with Deng Xiaoping's murderous military repression. In our resolution we explain the movement's origins in the economic crisis which grips China's bureaucratically planned economy, and analyse the way in which the threat of political revolution finally united the bureaucracy and the army in their bloody attack.

We also outline the key elements of the programme for political revolution in China and explain what steps need to be taken today by Chinese revolutionaries on the road to the construction of a revolutionary communist party in China.

The second document is the MRCI theses on women's oppression. Our theses start by looking at the analysis that Marx and Engels made of the relationship between the oppression of women and the development of class society, its strengths and weaknesses in the light of modern research, and its relevance today. They analyse the various currents within bourgeois and petit bourgeois feminism and situate these tendencies within a period that has seen the enormous growth in the number of women entering the labour force in the industrialised world.

The theses also examine the problems of working women both in the semi-colonial world and within the so-called "socialist" states, where the victory of Stalinism blocked the road to the social emancipation and liberation of women. Finally, drawing on the experience and lessons of communist work amongst women pioneered in Germany and Russia in the early part of the century, our theses outline the tactics needed to re-establish a mass working class women's movement which can struggle for socialism and the real liberation of women.

In two articles we deal with various aspects of the Irish question today. The term "left republicanism" has been very much to the fore since Gerry Adams came to the leadership of Sinn Féin. A member of the Irish Work-

ers Group (IWG) looks at these developments in the context of the re-launching of the IRSP and the emergence of Congress '86, tendencies which claim to be re-analysing the republican tradition from a Marxist perspective. Secondly, we reproduce a reply by the IWG to an article on Ireland published by the French organisation, Lutte Ouvrière (LO) in which we expose LO's economism and its inability to relate to the national question in Ireland and elsewhere.

In May this year one of the major so-called Trotskyist organisations, the Argentinian MAS (founded by the late Nahuel Moreno), won a seat in the national parliamentary elections as a member of the Izquierda Unida (IU — "United Left"), an electoral front formed by the MAS and the Argentinian Communist Party. We reprint the electoral platform of the IU and show how the MAS's supposed victory for "Trotskyism" in fact represents not only a complete capitulation to the reformist politics of the CP, but also yet another example of the historic electoral cretinism of this rightward-moving centrist current.

Current events in Eastern Europe and in the USSR are of enormous significance. Our journal addresses various aspects of this crisis in Stalinism: we print a translation from the Hungarian of a leaflet produced by our Austrian section, Arbeiterstandpunkt. 3,000 copies of this leaflet were given out in Budapest on the occasion of the reinternment of Imry Nagy, the leader of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. This leaflet explains the treacherous nature of the current official policy of "reform" in Hungary and sets out the key elements of a programme of political revolution.

We also print a polemical review of a pamphlet by a Hungarian centrist, Michel Varga, on the political revolution. We analyse his mistaken method which leads to a centrist adaptation to the supposed "left" wing of the bureaucracy in the USSR, led by Boris Yeltsin.

Readers who took out a subscription at the launch of this journal a year ago should note that their three issue subscription expires with this issue. Details of subscriptions are on page 2. We urge all our readers to support *Trotskyist International*, which is unique on the international left in terms of the range and depth of material covered. If you value our work, take out a subscription, make contact with us, discuss with us, join us!

China: revolution and repression

Passed at the MRCI delegate conference, June 1989

China has just passed through a profound political revolutionary crisis. It was a crisis which objectively posed the possibility of the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling bureaucracy. Faced with mass opposition in the cities the bureaucratic regime was paralysed. Industry ground to a halt. The bureaucracy's control of its armed forces was shaken. In that crisis decisive action by the working class could have overthrown the regime. The potential for political revolution could have been turned into the reality of proletarian political revolution itself.

The Beijing massacre will be remembered throughout the international workers' movement as one of the decisive moments of twentieth century history. Like the slaughter of the Communards in 1871, or Bloody Sunday, 1905, this will be remembered not only as a testimony to the barbarity of reaction or even the heroism of those who fight it, but as a lesson which, when learned, will hasten both vengeance and the eradication of the social orders which can produce such monstrous inhumanities.

The political revolutionary crisis in China was yet one more example of the deep crisis that is afflicting Stalinism globally. One by one the ruling bureaucracies are attempting to solve the problems of their stagnating planned economies by embracing elements of the market mechanism and retreating before imperialism. The events in China are a portent of the crisis looming for the ruling bureaucracies throughout the degenerate(d) workers' states. All of the ruling castes are capable of attempting to unleash such bloody repression should workers' struggles threaten their rule.

The crisis has also served to accelerate further the process of disintegration of world Stalinism as a monolithic tendency and the deep polarisations in its ranks. Fearful for their own political stability the ruling bureaucracies of Cuba, the GDR, CSSR and Bulgaria have openly supported the massacre of "counter-revolutionaries". The ruling Hungarian party and the Eurocommunists have condemned it. Others, like the Chilean party, were struck silent by events.

In the USSR, Gorbachev has taken great pains not to condemn the massacre in the name of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of other states. He needs to keep a free hand to use repression at home should his *perestroika* so require it. He wants to establish a precedent should he decide to follow that path. He is also keen to prevent a deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations which he was attempting to normalise at precisely the time the crisis erupted. However, mindful of his rela-

tions with imperialism, he has been careful not to appear to openly endorse the massacre. Within the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole the Chinese events will serve to strengthen the resolve of those who, like their East German, Czech and Cuban counterparts, will take them as evidence that the relaxation of bureaucratic planning and political control will surely lead to the destabilising of the regimes themselves.

China: a degenerate workers' state

Although capitalism was overthrown in China between 1951 and 1953 this was not done by a revolutionary working class which was then able to assert its own control over the economy and establish a system of planning that could mobilise the creativity and energy of the workers. On the contrary, the expropriation—in many cases, by taxation—was carried through by bureaucratic means. This left the state, controlled by the CCP, with ownership of a very backward and distorted economy which was inadequate to the needs both of the population and of the state. Since that time there have been divisions within the ruling bureaucracy over the methods to be used to develop the economy, all that has united them is a commitment to maintaining their own caste rule against all opposition. Throughout the many changes of policy the basic structure of the industrial economy has remained that copied from the Soviet Union during the first Five Year Plan: central planning agencies have laid down quantitative targets to be met by production units and this has been consistently more successful in heavy industry than in light industry.

This form of planning, in the context of a fully stultified economy, was able to achieve a significant increase in production and to re-establish a nationally integrated economy. This enabled China to overcome the systematic poverty and national disintegration which she had suffered under capitalism. Nonetheless, the inadequacies of bureaucratic planning were unable to raise production qualitatively above that needed to raise the population above a minimum standard of living. Average incomes and living standards have changed little since the 1950s.

The planned property relations in China represent a historic gain that must be defended. They represent the abolition of capitalism which is a prerequisite of the transition to socialism and communism. However, in the hands of the bureaucracy these planned property relations are not used to create an ever more classless

and egalitarian society. The necessary lifeblood of a planned economy—the democracy of the producers themselves—is systematically repressed. As a result, the planned economies stagnate and inequalities and privilege abound.

The reaction of the ruling bureaucracies, first in Yugoslavia, later in China, and now in the USSR, is to try to solve the problem through closer co-operation with imperialism and, most crucially, through the importation of market mechanisms. But by their nature market mechanisms tend to subvert the centralised political control of the bureaucracy. They create their own disequilibria. For that reason, the Stalinists have, to a greater or lesser extent, tried to marry elements of marketisation with their continued control over production expressed through centralised planning. Objectively this only serves to exacerbate the crisis of their rule. The impact of marketisation serves to hamper centralised planning and control even further. Attempts at centralised planning, in turn, hamper the functioning of the market.

Plan versus market

In China, as elsewhere, this tension is reflected within the bureaucracy itself between those who wish to maintain, or re-strengthen, centralised planning and those who wish to push further down the road of marketisation, a section of whom favour the restoration of capitalism itself. These strategic poles within the bureaucracy cannot be simplistically reduced to representing a division between an authoritarian and a liberalising wing within the bureaucracy. It is true that the advocates of centralised planning and control oppose any significant relaxation of the bureaucracy's politically repressive rule. But so too do the marketeers. That Deng Xiaoping could order the bloody massacre in Beijing while reaffirming his intention to press ahead with market reforms and further openings for foreign capital is proof of this.

Where the so called "liberalisers" in the bureaucracy do call for a relaxation of political control they mean this only to apply to the managerial and technocratic layers of society for whom freedom to discuss the future course of political and economic development is a necessity. None of the bureaucratic factions are genuinely committed to removal of the dictatorial regime over the mass of Chinese workers and peasants.

The present crisis cannot be separated off from the sequence of factional struggles which have centred on this problem of economic growth since the mid-1950s. The "Great Leap Forward", an attempt by Mao to solve the problem voluntaristically, led to a huge drop in output in all sectors. The consequent famine was overcome by allowing a considerable degree of privatised production in agriculture and a return to centralised planning in industry. In an attempt to reverse the social and political consequences of this "capitalist road" the Mao faction resorted to controlled mass mobilisation against their opponents in the mis-named "Proletarian Cultural Revolution". The scale of the factional dispute can be judged by the willingness of the Maoists to allow three years of increasingly independent student and

working class activity in a movement which destabilised much of the state administration. Nonetheless, when those mobilisations threatened to go beyond the control of the Mao faction the army was used to restore order. In the aftermath, as the factions fought behind closed doors, the economy stagnated under the increasingly authoritarian rule of the ageing Mao and the "Gang of Four".

Factional divisions

After the death of Mao in 1976, the faction led by Deng Xiaoping fought to regain the leadership. Within the bureaucracy they reassembled many of the leaders who had been attacked during the Cultural Revolution but, at the same time they encouraged the development of the "Democracy Wall" movement which came to a head in 1978-79. With considerable precision, Deng utilised these two forces first to remove Hua Guofeng and then to repress the democracy movement itself.

The very existence of long term factional polarities within the Chinese bureaucracy made it necessary, as well as possible, for Deng to fashion his own distinct form of Bonapartist rule over the bureaucracy. With close links to the Army High Command through the military commission that he chairs, and through the Standing Committee, he has fashioned the means of exercising his own rule over the party and state bureaucracy and for playing its component groups, including regional groupings within it, against one another when necessary. Control of the armed and security forces—the decisive levers of political repression—has enabled Deng to defeat his rivals and order the massacre on the streets of Beijing.

Roots of the present crisis

In December 1978, the new leadership embarked on its strategy of overcoming the inefficiencies and rigidities of bureaucratic planning by the re-introduction of the market. Privatisation of the communes led, initially, to a sharp increase in production. This success encouraged a similar policy in industry where, although state ownership was retained, individual enterprises were given greater freedom to trade and threatened with closure if they did not become profitable. Foreign capital was introduced extensively into China both by state borrowing and direct investment in the "Special Economic Zones". In industry, too, increases in production were registered in the first years of this programme.

However, these policies bore within them the seeds of the insoluble contradictions which have led to the present crisis. As well as opening the economy to the market, the bureaucracy has to retain a central sector under its own control. Without that the bureaucracy has no base in society and no means of enforcing its rule. Parts of the bureaucracy are more immediately related to, or dependent upon, this state economic sector and this is the material basis for the main factional divisions. However, a further element is supplied by the position of the army High Command which, for historic reasons, is closely integrated into the political leadership and also



strongly regionalised. Deng's strategy, which involves major concessions to the market but the retention of a powerful state controlled sector, involves distinct regional implications because the coastal provinces are to be more "marketised" than the hinterland. In sum his strategic objective, "Two Systems, One Country" is a utopia. The same state cannot defend both capitalist and post-capitalist property relations.

The demands of the state sector conflict with the priorities of the "marketised sector" in industry, the procurement prices in agriculture are set below those of the market and this encourages corruption. Peasant production of industrial crops replaces food production for the domestic market. Accumulation of capital in the countryside leads to social class differentiation amongst the peasantry and the emergence of a *kulak* class. Rapid capital investment and incentive bonuses stimulate the highest rate of inflation since the revolution and, at the same time, the "iron rice bowl", the guarantee of employment to workers which applies to over 96% of the industrial workforce, sets limits to the productivity targets of the market sector. Commitments to overseas trade lead to shortages and bottlenecks in domestic production.

Throughout the Chinese economy, all attempts to carry out the market-strategy lead directly to conflict

with the bureaucracy's political and economic imperatives. This expresses itself in the demands, by those most closely identified with the market both within the bureaucracy and industry, for further relaxation of state and party controls, for the separation of the party from the state and for the introduction of political pluralism, by which is meant openly restorationist parties. As early as 1986, these had led to a renewal of the "Democracy Movement" amongst professionals and students. The General Secretary of the Party, Hu Yaobang was identified with this movement and, in January 1987, Hu was ousted and replaced by Zhao Ziyang—also a protégé of Deng.

The factional struggle, however, did not abate. By the Thirteenth Congress of the CCP, October 1987, the faction in favour of further liberalisation was in the ascendant. It was backed by Deng who insisted that the campaign against the Democracy Movement had to be limited to the political sphere and should not be allowed to affect economic policy. Nonetheless, throughout 1988 the economic problems of the regime multiplied and with them the depth of factional divisions in the highest ranks of the bureaucracy. This culminated in the September 1988 Party Plenum which was so evenly balanced as to be paralysed and unable to ratify the politburo's proposals for radical price reform.

It was this political vacuum which ensured the re-emergence of the Democracy Movement. This was at first restricted to specialised publications, where coded arguments about the economy fuelled discussion and debate within the managerial strata and the intelligentsia. The death of Hu Yaobang (15 April, 1989) provided the pretext for this underground movement to break into the light of day.

The Democracy Movement in crisis

For decades faction fights within the CCP have been accompanied by bureaucratically controlled mass mobilisations and by attempts to manipulate spontaneous movements. The student demonstrations at the time of Hu's funeral were called by the Democracy Movement under slogans calculated to avoid charges of political disloyalty and with the hope of pressurising elements of the leading caste.

As the movement grew, sections of the bureaucracy no doubt hoped to try and use it to further their factional ends. However, the strength of the movement and the enthusiastic support of the people of Beijing, meant that there was never any possibility of the movement remaining within limits imposed from above.

Although *The People's Daily* condemned the students for conspiracy against the party and the socialist system this did not prevent their central demands—for a free press, against corruption and recognition of unofficial student organisations—from being taken up by students throughout China. By 4 May, the anniversary of the first revolutionary nationalist movement, the movement was able to march tens of thousands of students into Tiananmen Square without opposition from the state. These demonstrations were cheered by thousands of onlookers. In response to this, Zhao Ziyang announced that many of the ideas of the students "coincided with those of the party". This was interpreted to mean that Zhao, unlike Deng, was willing to tolerate the Democracy Movement. At the same time, after 4 May, the movement subsided. Apart from Beida, most universities were re-opened the following day.

This, however, proved to be a lull in the movement, not an end to it. Having taken stock of what they had achieved, the Beijing students decided to go further and to organise mass demonstrations at the time of the visit of Gorbachev on 15 May. This resulted in huge demonstrations during Gorbachev's visit. The Chinese bureaucracy was forced to change schedules time and again because of the sheer scale of the mobilisations, which now included large numbers of workers and also protesting journalists who demanded the right to report accurately what was happening. It was in this context that the student hunger strike began and Tiananmen Square became permanently occupied by tens of thousands of students.

In response to this, the Standing Committee of the Politburo met on 18 May to discuss a proposal from Zhao that concessions be made to the students. The proposal was defeated. Zhao signalled his dissent by visiting the students in Tiananmen Square. This act broke the discipline of the bureaucratic caste and led to the downfall of Zhao. Li Peng, the premier declared

martial law in Beijing the following morning. Within hours an estimated one million people had occupied central Beijing. When troops tried to enter the centre they were forced back. On the same day, as strikes paralysed the capital, the Autonomous Workers' Organisation was founded in Beijing.

From stalemate to repression

For the next two weeks a stalemate existed between the students in Tiananmen Square and the deeply divided bureaucracy. Increasing fraternisation between troops and protesters led to the removal of the troops from central Beijing. Rumours abounded of splits in both the army and the bureaucracy as strikes spread throughout China. By the weekend of 27-28 May, the student occupation of Tiananmen Square was beginning to subside and it appeared that a possible compromise had been reached between Beijing student leaders and the bureaucracy: the troops would not be used if the students wound down the demonstrations and ended the hunger strike. However, the arrival of provincial students and the increasing involvement of workers in Tiananmen Square revived the movement within a few days. It was this latter development in particular that concentrated the minds of the ruling bureaucracy and determined it to take decisive repressive action.

On 31 May, leaders of the Autonomous Workers' Organisation were arrested in Beijing and workers were publicly threatened and ordered not to support the Tiananmen occupation. Strikes to protest at this took place and several thousand protesters demonstrated outside the Interior Ministry. The following day troops appeared throughout central Beijing. They were unarmed but located at strategic intersections and buildings. On 2 June, thousands of unarmed troops were marched into central Beijing but mass demonstrations prevented their progress and most returned to their garisons.

Bureaucratic terror

The scale of the opposition to troop mobilisations in Beijing, coupled with the increasingly nationwide nature of the democracy movement, convinced the core of the bureaucracy, the security services and the army under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the "paramount leader", of the necessity for a ruthless attack on their opponents. On 3 and 4 June this took the form of the Beijing massacre, in which the majority of victims were from the working class of the city who went to the defence of the students and workers in Tiananmen Square. In the days that followed this was extended across the country as general strikes and barricades expressed the outrage and the solidarity of the workers of China.

Although factional disagreements must have contributed to both the delay in imposing this barbarous repression and provided a material substance for the rumours of actual armed conflict between different army groups, there is no evidence of consciously directed armed actions of this sort. The decision to act na-

tionally, and to utilise inexperienced troops from every section of the regionally-based army, contributed to the barbarism but, ultimately, demonstrated the agreement of the bureaucratic factions to the bloody suppression of the opponents of their dictatorship. Those factions who initially opposed this strategy were rendered powerless by the determination of the Deng faction, to oppose that could only have meant civil war and this would have implied a choice between siding with an insurgent working class or, longer term, with agents of capitalist restoration in, for example, Taiwan. There was no group willing or able to make either of these choices.

The political revolutionary crisis

The mass mobilisations in China had a clear and indisputable political revolutionary potential. This was most sharply expressed by those components of it that gave mass voice to egalitarian, anti-corruption and anti-privilege demands. It represented a mighty struggle against the deeply privileged and secluded bureaucratic leadership and, very noticeably, against their offspring. Note the charges aimed at Li Peng as the adopted son of Zhou Enlai, and at the opulent business career of Deng Xiaoping's son.

Trotsky predicted that the political revolutionary struggle would take the initial form of precisely such a struggle against bureaucratic privilege and also against bureaucratic political oppression. As in all revolutionary crises, the mass mobilisations and the organisations

which they created, were far from being politically homogenous or of a nationally uniform character. This was reflected in the political ambiguity of many of the slogans and demands raised by the movement. Nonetheless, the demands for, "democracy" and against corruption expressed, fundamentally, a deep hatred of political oppression and of their own political expropriation on the part of the urban masses. In giving voice to their hatred of the bureaucracy's material privileges they were also voicing their own anger at the extreme hardship of life for the overwhelming majority of the Chinese proletariat.

The political revolutionary potential of the movement was graphically demonstrated by the fact that it mobilised the mighty Chinese working class itself into mass resistance to the bureaucracy through mass strikes and the formation of independent working class organisations. One of the most important features of the entire crisis was the remarkable uniformity of the working class response to the Beijing massacre throughout the major cities of China. In addition, and very importantly, we also saw the formation of joint worker-student organisations of an open, and later after the repression, an underground character.

For these reasons we recognise the politically revolutionary potential of the events themselves. From the point of view of the future they have given the Chinese working class a taste of its own potential strength and its collective identity after years of repression and profound atomisation at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It has created a river of blood between the Chinese

Imperialist reaction

The major imperialist powers have used the Chinese events to try and prove that "communism" is dying. Part of their ideological offensive has been directed at countering the illusions that exist that Gorbachev's measures can reform that system. The reaction of the major imperialist powers has, however, been conditioned above all by their strategic political and economic interests in China. Bush, Thatcher, Uno all immediately issued "restrained" criticism of the CCP leadership. Bush counselled caution declaring that reaction had to "take into account both our long term interests and the complex internal situation" in China. All the imperialists are waiting for the policy of the new regime to become clear. If the "open door" is reaffirmed it will be business as usual for these hypocrites who spout about "democracy" and "freedom".

Since the 1971 Mao-Nixon summit, China has been a key strategic counter-weight to the Soviet Union for US imperialism, e.g. Kampuchea, Vietnam. Since the end of the 1970s Deng Xiaoping's policies of encouraging foreign capitalist investment in China has added an economic importance to this alliance. Deng was Reagan and Thatcher's favourite "communist" not just because of the profitable investment opportunities he opened up, but because of the long term possibilities his policies appeared to offer for undermining the post-capitalist property relations in China through the penetration of imperialist capital.

While imperialist commitments to China remain small relative to the size of China's economy they have grown dramatically in the last decade. In 1979-82 China received \$10.7 billion in foreign loans and \$1.2 billion in direct investment. Today the cumulative totals stand at \$26.6 billion and \$9 billion respectively. Hong Kong, through which British and Taiwanese investment flows into China, accounts for 30% of China's foreign trade and almost half the foreign investment in China. Japan the next biggest investor and trading partner with China invested \$500 million in 1988 alone and is the biggest provider of foreign aid. The EEC and the USA follow in order of trading importance.

With such a political and economic investment in China it is little wonder that the imperialists have been so reluctant to take any action which would threaten these links. Their concern right the way through the student struggles has been the restoration of "stability". While the Hong Kong stock exchange fell 22% in a day after the military intervention it rose again as it became clear that the bureaucracy had re-established its bloody dictatorship. While the imperialists seek the long term overthrow of the CCP regime in China they are united against the dangers of a revolutionary overthrow of that regime. Thus they justify the "restoring of order" but complain about the "unnecessary violence" used. The student and worker organisations will look in vain for any help from these capitalist hyenas.

workers and their murderous Stalinist rulers. For that reason it has the potential of playing, for the Chinese working class, the role that the 1905 Revolution in Russia played, despite its eventual defeat, in forging the independent class and political consciousness of the Russian working class.

However, the movement also displayed profound weaknesses and contradictions that precisely prevented the revolutionary potential of the mobilisations being realised and allowed the bureaucracy to ruthlessly reassert its power. These weaknesses were manifested in several different ways.

Firstly, in the initial social composition of the movement itself. As a movement of the students and the intelligentsia it had neither the social nor political weight to mount a challenge to the bureaucracy that could destroy its armed might and fundamentally challenge its political rule. Its non-proletarian character also meant that its initial focus was on an abstract demand for "democracy" and on pacifist tactics supposed to realise that objective.

"Democracy" was posed in a manner that was capable of having several meanings. On the one hand it involved demands to remove the existing inner clique of the bureaucratic leadership and replace it with one that was supposedly more democratic and less corrupt. This allowed sections of the initial student movement to pose their demands in the form of a homage to Hu Yaobang against the existing leadership that had ousted him. And it allowed them later to concretise their demands in terms of support for Zhao against Li Peng. At certain key junctures this opened the road for Zhao to attempt to, or even perhaps to succeed in, mobilising broad sections of the movement behind one particular wing in the bureaucratic faction fight.

The "democracy" that placed its hopes in bureaucratic reformers and expressed illusions in them had

equally crippling illusions in the Peoples Liberation Army itself. This was expressed in a naïve and ultimately calamitous belief that the PLA, as the "people's army", would never attack the "people".

Much of this reflected not only the social composition of the original leadership of the movement, (i.e. students) but also the influence of Aquino type notions of "people's power". The latter was conceived and articulated in terms of the ousting of the present party leadership through the moral pressure of the display of "people's power" in Tiananmen Square.

This was to take the form of a passive occupation of the Square, followed by the hunger strike to which the population in general, as the "people", were asked to give their visible, but still passive, moral support. Only when the movement faced stalemate and the hunger strike failed to achieve its goals and was abandoned, did the leadership of the movement begin to recognise, in a limited way, the potential strength of the working class.

But even then, the working class was still seen only as an auxiliary, although extremely powerful, support to the movement. Despite its massive strength and preparedness to struggle, the leaders of the Chinese Democracy Movement looked to the general strike of the working class as an adjunct to their protests not as the only force that could effectively destabilise bureaucratic rule prior to its insurrectionary overthrow.

While the "democratic movement" called on the working class to give it support as it became increasingly evident that the ruling bureaucracy was refusing to budge, it remained the case that the dominant trends in that movement remained trapped in pacifist, abstract and ultimately profoundly incoherent notions of democratism. This was symbolised both by their enthusiasm for Gorbachev and the construction of a "Statue of Liberty" in Tiananmen Square.

For some sections of that movement, demands for

Hong Kong

The events in China have had major repercussions in Hong Kong which threatens serious problems for the British ruling class (similar problems face the Portuguese and Macao authorities). While spouting about "communist dictatorships" and the need for "freedom and democracy" the British imperialists have happily denied the masses of Hong Kong even the semblance of democracy for 150 years. The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration agreed by Thatcher with Deng Xiaoping was an agreement made between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the British Tories over the heads of the Hong Kong workers.

It aimed a "smooth" handover of a capitalist Hong Kong to Chinese rule, the CCP offering long term guarantees for continued capitalist exploitation, while continuing the denial of even basic bourgeois democratic rights to the people of Hong Kong before or after 1997.

The mass demonstrations and general strike protest involving over a million Hong Kong people out of a population of six million (actions themselves illegal under the Hong Kong Public Order Ordinance!) have shaken the Deng/Thatcher agreement and thrown the

Hong Kong capitalists into disarray. The so-called "pro-democracy movement" in Hong Kong, a largely petit bourgeois led formation which only calls for half the legislature to be elected by 1997, is similarly in danger of being overtaken by events.

Revolutionary communists must seize the opportunity to build a movement which not only mobilises concrete solidarity with mainland Chinese students and workers, but also aims at destroying the Deng/Thatcher agreement and mobilising the Hong Kong workers for power.

- Down with the Deng/Thatcher agreement!
- No to a capitalist Hong Kong under a Stalinist dictatorship!
- Immediate elections to a constituent assembly of Hong Kong!
- One person, one vote!
- Forward to the Hong Kong workers' commune!
- Solidarity in struggle with the mainland workers and students against the blood-soaked Deng regime!
- For political revolution in China!
- For the revolutionary re-unification of all China including Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao under workers' democracy!



democracy were also combined with demands for further marketisation and the ultimate restoration of capitalism in China. The very policies of Deng himself in the economic sphere and the pressure of imperialism and Chinese capitalism outside mainland China served to strengthen the pressure on sections of the movement to conceive of the realisation of their democratic demands also in terms of hastening the restoration of capitalism in China.

On the other hand, the foundation of the Autonomous Workers' Organisations on 21 May, starting in Beijing, was an important step forward for the Chinese working class and represented the awakening of genuine independent class organisation even though its founding statements did not clearly express its own class (social and economic) interests.

The road to power

In truth, therefore, the movement was fundamentally inadequate to the task objectively posed, the overthrow of bureaucratic rule. The armed forces remained fundamentally at the disposal of the ruling bureaucratic regime, within whose top ranks the PLA generals are closely integrated; against that armed might, and the determination of the ruling bureaucracy to hold on to power, the tactics of passive protest, in its variety of forms, was absolutely bound to fail. There was not, and could not have been, any section of the ruling bureaucracy prepared to lead a mass struggle to put an end to bureaucratic oppression and material privileges. Equally, the economic programmes of rival wings within the bureaucracy are neither capable of ending, nor intended to end the material hardship and inequalities suffered by the masses of China.

This is not to say that the victory of the bureaucracy was inevitable or that lessons cannot be learned from this round of struggle that can ensure victory in the next round of struggle.

The key to victory lay in mobilising the working class as an independent force that, far from being subordinate to the emocratic movement, was hegemonic in the struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy. The strike wave of the working class could have been, and in future must be, the basis for the forging of workers' councils (sovi-

ets) in all the industrial centres. Such councils would bring together delegates from all major workplaces as well as from the workers' districts of the cities and would take on the tasks, not only of co-ordinating strikes and demonstrations, but also imposing working class control over production and distribution, transport, broadcasting and publishing, as well as the arming of the working class to defend itself. Such is the determination of the ruling bureaucracy to hold on to power that it was, and will always be, necessary for the working class to arm itself in organised workers' militias. Those militias must be trained and prepared for direct military confrontation with the Stalinist regime in order to defend their organisations and destroy the ability of the ruling bureaucracy to deploy its armed bodies of men.

However, the working class has other weapons at its disposal to break up the primarily peasant PLA. It has the weapon of physical force to concentrate the minds of the armed forces as to which side they are on. It has the weapon of fraternisation to attempt to actively win the troops to its side. To focus its campaign to win over the rank and file soldiers the working class needs to commit itself to support for the formation of soldiers' councils with the right to take their place alongside the workers in the soviets. Those soldiers' councils will become an active component in breaking the power of the central bureaucracy, in arming the workers and in actively assisting the armed insurrection that alone can put an end to bureaucratic rule.

The successful political revolution in China requires that the working class takes up as its own, and hegemonises, the struggles of key non-proletarian sectors of society and that it gives a proletarian class content to such demands as equality, democracy and political freedom. Against corruption it must demand, and impose, workers' inspection of all public, industrial and financial dealings and appointments. Against inflation it must demand a sliding scale of wages calculated by working class organisations. Against economic dislocation and sabotage it must fight for workers' control.

It must take up in its programme the rights of Chinese youth and all sectors of society to an education system, a press and a media that is freed from the stranglehold of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Equally vital to working class unity and strength is the need to champion all measures which liberate women from inequality and oppression and which socialise domestic toil.

To counteract attempts at "divide and rule" tactics, the working class must champion the granting of genuine equal and democratic rights to national minorities.

Of vital importance in China will be the linking of proletarian struggles with those of the increasingly impoverished poor and middle peasants against the emerging *kulak* and rural capitalist class, patronised and enriched by the policies of Deng Xiaoping. Because of the historical circumstances in which the CCP was able to seize power, the peasantry has always been its major point of social stability. Indeed, Deng justified taking the risk of attacking Tiananmen Square by declaring that, "the countryside is behind us". To destroy that solid support, the proletariat must advance a land pro-

gramme that will exploit the differentiation caused by marketisation.

This will, necessarily, vary in detail from region to region but its central component will be demands for state support for the poor farmers, for expropriation of *kulak* land and mechanical equipment, turned over for use by co-operatives, for public works to employ the rural unemployed and the creation of worker-peasant commissions to oversee prices and deliveries to the cities.

Only in this way can a class alliance be cemented which, after the victory of the political revolution, can make real the introduction of planning and more advanced techniques without either disadvantaging or antagonising the mass of the rural population.

In order to win the working class to such a programme it is necessary to build a revolutionary party in conditions that, while they will be ripe in terms of the potential for thousands of workers to be persuaded on the basis of experience, will also be extremely hazardous given the scale of brutality the bureaucracy is inflicting on working class militants in particular. However, such is the popular hatred of the regime and such was the mass scale of the movement against it, that the bureaucracy can be challenged by a popularly protected underground revolutionary party. That party must steel the proletarian vanguard ready for the inevitable struggles ahead. Workers must be won to see the need to be organised independently and ready to lead. The best young intellectuals must be won to this argument, to strengthening their links with the workers as their political priority and to the recognition that their programme must be one that is based on the needs and the struggles of the workers.

The alternative, particularly amongst the intelligentsia, is that pro-capitalist ideas will strengthen as the intelligentsia despairs of winning any democratic liberties except in conjunction with imperialism and its agents who are, no doubt, already active in the fertile conditions created by Deng's policies. Against this it is vital that the reformed revolutionary communist party defends planned property relations as the prerequisite of developing China's productive forces in a rounded

way sufficient to benefit all the masses and to ensure ever greater equality and put an end to bureaucratic privilege.

The bloody terror with which the bureaucracy reasserted its rule has solved none of the fundamental issues that led to the crisis of its rule. A retreat into autarchy, national isolation and further state control of the economy offers no way out. It will meet with the apathy or resistance of the Chinese workers, as will the attempt to step up production by bureaucratic decree. Even if this were accompanied by a rapprochement with the USSR, involving greater trade, it would still not haul China out of its present stagnation.

On the other hand, if the "open door" policy is reaffirmed and deepened this would lead to further disproportions and dislocations in the economy as has been experienced throughout the 1980s. If the "open door" policy were to eventually allow the "capitalist roaders"—in alliance with the Chinese capitalists abroad—to undermine and overthrow the Bonapartist leaders, then the Chinese masses will learn to their cost that capitalism in China will not lead to prosperity for them.

China, back under the yoke of world imperialism, would not for one moment enjoy the democratic liberties and living standards of the advanced, imperialist, nations. On the contrary she would rapidly be plunged back into the desperate poverty, starvation and national disintegration that she suffered in the 1920s and 1930s. Her present population, a quarter of humanity, could not survive a free market and an open door for the goods of the imperialists.

It is the experience of, for example, the Latin American countries under "liberal economics" that would await her, not that of North America or Western Europe. Similarly, aspirations towards political freedom and "democratic rights" will never be fulfilled by a return to unbridled capitalism. In China, the masses would find themselves denied virtually all rights as is the case throughout most of the semi-colonial world. The only road to political and social emancipation is the road of overthrowing the bureaucracy, the road of political revolution.

Solidarity with Chinese workers and students!

The immediate task is for the working class movements throughout the world to take whatever action they can in solidarity with the Chinese students and workers. Cancel all trade union visits and exchanges with the Chinese bureaucrats, fight for unions and federations to send aid and assistance to any autonomous workers' and students' organisations still functioning. Organise demonstrations against the continuing repression.

In the present period of active repression of workers and students we are for immediate workers' sanctions to turn back Chinese ships and trade. We reject all popular frontist/class collaborationist solidarity actions. We do not participate in any joint action with any

bourgeois administration or any bourgeois figures or parties. We fight in the solidarity movements against any illusions that the imperialist governments will aid the students' and workers' struggles in China. Their interests at the moment lie with Deng Xiaoping not the masses. We fight against any anti-communist tendencies which argue for an imperialist blockade of China as a means of restoring capitalism.

For the right of every student from China to have automatic right of abode in the country in which they are studying if they request it. For the right of every citizen of Hong Kong to enter any foreign country if they so wish.

MRCI statement on China

Issued by the MRCI International Secretariat, 6 June 1989

**Down with Stalinist butchery in Beijing!
For political revolution in China!**

Words are too weak to express the horror and outrage at events in Beijing on 3 and 4 June. A brutal and pitiless army was let loose on the unarmed students and workers of the capital with the clear and deliberate intention of drowning in blood the movement for democratic reform.

The mighty heroism of the young people of Beijing in the face of this carnage has moved the whole world. Any regime that has to resort to this to sustain its hold on power is condemned by history and doomed to destruction.

Yet events in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and in Kampuchea (1975) indicate that this monstrous crime is neither unique nor a special Chinese phenomenon. No, it is a crime of Stalinism. It is a product of the deadly inner contradictions of the rule of the bureaucratic caste which usurped political power from the working class and peasantry.

Although capitalism was overthrown and imperialism excluded in China by 1953, the Chinese Stalinists then and now act to block the road to socialism and maintain their power and privileges over the masses.

Isolated in a single country—even one so vast as China—socialist construction is impossible. The CCP was never a force for world revolution, that is, for the spreading of the proletarian revolution to other countries. Despite the initial advances which were the product of excluding the imperialist plunderers, crushing the capitalists and setting up a centralised command economy, China has writhed in the contradictions of the bureaucracy's inability to direct that plan due to the fact that the Chinese masses are excluded from participation in the determination of their needs.

In 1978 the bureaucracy elevated Deng Xiaoping to the role of supreme leader on a programme of opening China to world capitalist forces, restoring private ownership in the countryside and using imperialist capital to discipline China's workers through unemployment and rising prices.

Yet the bureaucratic caste and its upper clique still had enormous internal divisions. The long term existence of this caste is bound up with the existence of the planned property relations. Any unreversible process of their disintegration spells doom for this caste.

On the other hand since the bureaucracy's power and privileges cannot allow them to submit themselves to the democracy of the workers and poor peasants, they cannot solve the crisis of their system by utilising the conscious creativity of these classes. Indeed, they had to

suppress even public discussion of the existence of economic crisis.

The bureaucracy is polarised between factions who wish to make repeated concessions to capitalism and to allow a certain democratisation and those who see in this the danger that their caste dictatorship will come under a mass challenge as a result.

Deng Xiaoping and his clique have balanced between these factions, favouring repeated and far reaching concessions to capitalism but determined to give the workers no democratic scope to oppose the effects of these concessions. Deng precisely reflects the contradictions of bureaucratic rule.

The student movement of recent years represents an attempt by sections of the "liberalising" bureaucrats to mobilise mass pressure to pursue a Gorbachev style policy of *glasnost* as a necessary condition for economic liberalisation.

Yet this faction fight in the bureaucracy opened the way for the participation of the masses; students at first and then increasingly the workers. The intransigence of Deng and Li Peng obliged the student leaders to broaden their movement. Initially unwilling to draw in the workers, self-defence made them do so. Yet the main student leaders believed that involving the working class was a last resort and concentrated their attention on pursuing the hunger strike to force changes in the actions of the CCP leadership.

Deng decided in favour of the "conservative", pro-repression faction and rallied the army commanders of the rural hinterland of China. Having restored unfettered private ownership to China's peasants and allowed for the growth of a rich peasant class, Deng sought to use the indifference and even hostility of the countryside to crush the workers and intelligentsia.

The first phase of the movement has been ended by the bloody carnage of Tienanmen Square. Now Canton students are reported as saying there is a need for a General Strike. This is the right instinct. Peaceful pressure on the bureaucracy, submission to its "liberal" faction is a disastrous policy. Only the working class can paralyse the repression with an all-China General Strike. Only this working class action can lay the basis for winning over the poor peasants in the countryside and the workers and poor peasants in army uniform.

The students and the workers who have formed autonomous trade unions however must go beyond calls for democracy in the abstract. In reality this means to identify with bourgeois, capitalist democracy which will mean unemployment, poverty and renewed imperialist exploitation for China's millions.

A new political force—a revolutionary party—must

arise which openly stands for the maintenance of the nationalised industry of China and its subjection to the control and planning of the toilers not the dictates of the bureaucracy. Such a party must stand for workers democracy in China.

In the struggle to smash the murderers of the people, in the fight to co-ordinate a powerful strike movement, to win over the troops and reach out to the peasantry, strike committees and councils must be formed. These bodies can be the organs of democracy and political power for the workers.

This strategy for victory means total and unreserved identification with the interests of the working class and a total break with the pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist forces in China and beyond it. Dangers exist in the students' fight for an abstract form of democracy which can lead to a reactionary bloc with pro-capitalist forces. But the use of the Red Flag, their singing of the Internationale and their turn to the working class are all evidence that the movement is not, as the Stalinist slanderers claim, a movement for restoring capitalism in China.

- Down with the murderers, the parasitic bureaucracy! For proletarian political revolution in China!
- For the revolutionary re-unification of all China including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao under workers' democracy!
- Down with the hypocrisy of the imperialist bourgeoisie who will only take action when they have identified where their own interests lie!
- Down with the cant of the British government who dare to speak of democracy even as they maintain their garrison in undemocratic Hong Kong. Chinese workers and students abroad: do not appeal to Thatcher and Bush but to the working class for international class solidarity!
- Workers throughout the world must take action to boycott or embargo Chinese trade and transport whilst the slaughter and the strike wave continues!
- Force the imperialist governments to recognise the right of students to have political refugee status! No enforced repatriations!

MRCI Theses on Women's Oppression

Passed at the MRCI conference, April 1989

The origins and changing nature of women's oppression

1. The systematic social oppression of women is inextricably linked to the existence of class society. It was as a direct result of the development of private property and the cleavage of society into different classes that women came to be denied full social, economic and political equality with men. There is nothing "natural" or "eternal" about the subordination of women. Human societies have existed during the stage of development that Engels terms "primitive communism", when women's contribution to, and role within, these societies were regarded as equal to (in some cases superior to) those of men. The proven existence of such societies by anthropologists and archaeologists confounds those who defend the subordination of women on the grounds that it "has always been so" and must, therefore, always be so. It also exposes the errors of those feminists who regard the existence of women's oppression in different class societies as proof that this oppression is not based on the division of societies into classes.

Class society and its corresponding forms of property resulted from the disbanding of the gentile society. Kinship groups held possessions collectively or on a communal basis and it was households rather than families which formed the fundamental units of social organisation. The kinship groups were often structured in a matrilineal way, but some were patrilineal. The basis of production for the communities was primarily agriculture and in part cattle breeding and herding. The oldest forms of human societies, however, were represented by foraging hordes who did not yet use the soil as a means of labour but only as an object of labour. The land was not property even in a communal sense. These early human groups were initially based on hunting and gathering. Later horticulture and the domestication of animals became the basis for subsistence.

Within such societies there were various divisions of labour on the basis of sex and age. These were neither rigid nor formalised through ritual or custom. Such divisions were not identical in every group, but several common features emerged with regard to the roles adopted by males and females within this period of human society. In general females were more likely to be involved in gathering than hunting. This stemmed from their role as the reproducers of the species. Pregnancy and the subsequent suckling of infants (which was often very prolonged) explain why women tended towards gathering as the main element of their work. Although

arduous, gathering was more compatible with carrying infants who were suckling. Males were involved in hunting and activities which involved wider mobility from the home base.

Exceptions exist (and there are many cases of younger women, prior to their involvement in reproduction, being involved in the hunt) but the same general features are found in most hunter-gatherer societies which have been studied. However, this emerging division of labour was not either then, or inherently, oppressive. Women's contribution through gathering was no less valued than that of men engaged in hunting. A rough equality between the sexes existed. In some situations in small clans where the reproduction of the clan was endangered by a shortage of women, women, because of their ability to bear children, were the intended victims of raiding parties, whilst male prisoners of war were mostly killed immediately. In order to protect themselves against such seizure, women were reliant upon the protection of men of their own clan because they themselves were less practised in the arts of war. These facts are held by feminist writers to prove the oppression of women in primitive communist society. This is not true. Rather, this reliance formed one element of the interdependency of males and females in primitive society.

The decisiveness of reproduction in determining the nature of the division of labour does not mean that oppression was biologically determined. Reproductive roles played their part in shaping an initially non-oppressive division of labour. The development of the forces of production and the changing relationship of reproduction to them, not the fact of women's reproductive role in and of itself, was central to the transformation of the division of labour into an oppressive one.

As the forces of production expanded with the development of horticulture, and later agriculture, the domestication and breeding of animals, and the development of metalworking leading to the production of better tools (and weapons) for carrying out such tasks, the conditions were created for the production of a surplus, i.e. more food and means of subsistence than were required for immediate consumption by the group. The existence of a surplus stimulated a struggle within the kinship groups. A stratum of individuals (emerging out of the complex ranking systems that prevailed in kinship groups) began to assert their direct control over the surplus in contradiction to the norms of communal possession that had previously held sway. Individuals acquiring and controlling an embryonic

form of private property were thrown into conflict with the kinship group as a whole.

This struggle was not yet a class struggle, but rather the birth pangs of class society. The death knell of "primitive communism" had been sounded. It was during this period that the kinship group was replaced by the individual family and monogamy was imposed on women. It was as a result of this process that women became systematically socially oppressed.

Of course all sorts of "oppression" existed even during these early stages of human development—captives, male and female, for example, were often oppressed. And it was also here that the oppression of sexuality, above all of women, had its origin.

In societies struggling to maintain their existence within the framework of a subsistence economy, particular factors, such as demographic problems, resulted in the establishment of rituals and taboos that often had brutal consequences for women because of their role in reproduction, e.g. the Australian Aborigines. However, such examples remain exceptions explained by contingent material causes and are not proof of the generalised social oppression of women. The oppression of women in societies on the threshold of class division was very far from being a coherent system of gender-specific oppression and discrimination. The dissolution of the original primitive communist equality of the sexes took place over the course of thousands of years and in many tribal societies it was accompanied by counter-tendencies to maintain the old order.

The systematic social oppression of women as a sex was a consequence of the struggle between communal possession and private property (or in the case of the Asiatic mode, property held by the state) and the triumph of the latter over the former. This social oppression meant that women were systematically excluded from an equitable claim on the communal social product and denied control over the product of their own labour. This form of oppression, social oppression, can only develop where there has been prolonged production of a social surplus, where struggle for control over that surplus necessitates control of women's productive and reproductive functions. The social oppression of women was a result of the emergence of class society. As such it can only be consigned to the dustbin of history with the destruction of class society.

As the surplus was produced the process of exchange between groups, rather than the simple distribution for consumption which had occurred within the kinship groups, became more and more important. Trade developed and the value of the surplus became clear in terms of the ability to acquire produce from other groups. The groups that came to control this surplus, and thereby developed into the ruling class of the new societies, were in general male due to their existing role in production. That is, the pre-existing division of labour although initially non-oppressive, was to be central in the creation of a ruling class. The legacy of men's role in hunting was decisive in three ways. Firstly it meant men were in control of domesticated animals, a dynamic sphere of production in terms of the expansion of the surplus. Secondly, the increased importance of the land as a valuable resource led to struggles for land. Men had, by virtue of their hunting role, control over the weap-

onry (and related to this, tools) and had developed the skills in making and using it. Their role in warfare was not only to defeat rival kinship groups but also to destroy female control of the land. Women still worked the land but men seized new lands and controlled the produce from it. The third advantage for men was that they tended to be the members of the group who travelled. With the expansion of the forces of production travel involved not only war but trade. From early on men generally controlled trade (although there are exceptions such as certain tribes in West Africa).

Men enjoyed advantages in both production and exchange. Therefore a section of men who were best placed to take control of the distribution of the surplus product of the collective group became an embryonic ruling class. In the earliest class societies the transformation of the communal surplus into private property was often given a religious guise, with the owners being a priestly caste. The idea that private property was in fact merely communal possessions controlled by representatives of the "gods" was a legacy of the kinship group traditions that had only recently been overthrown and an ideological justification for the new regime that had replaced them.

This process shaped the economic order of the private household. The division of labour between men and women became profoundly oppressive to women. The formerly social labour of women—gathering, agriculture and household management—was transformed into privatised labour in the service of the household unit, the early monogamous family.

It was women's role in production which consigned them to a subordinate position in society. Within this process the conflict between communal possessions and private property had a transforming effect on the social organisation and ensured in the systematic social oppression of women. The accumulation of private property by a small caste required an end to the egalitarian distribution system which had existed in the kinship groups. The extensive network of claimants to the produce within the kinship group (a wide range of fairly distant relatives having equal claim) had to be ended if the surplus was to be concentrated.

A smaller social unit, within which direct descendants were the only legitimate heirs, was created as a result of the contradiction between communal possessions and private property. This group, the family as we now recognise it, developed through the transformation of what had been a temporary, easily dissolved, "pairing marriage" between a man and a woman of different kinship groups, into the permanent basis for the new household. The pairing marriage became permanent, and for women this was, sexually, exclusive. This meant that all her children were necessarily those of her husband and therefore legitimate heirs to his wealth. As this became the predominant form of social organisation so codes and laws were introduced which enforced the subordination of women and resulted in the loss of any equal rights either to possessions/property or within political and social life. The collective household of the kinship group was transformed into the prison house of the monogamous family. Patrilineality became the norm and matrilineality was overthrown.

The clash between the kinship groups (gentile society) and the family, reflecting the clash between primitive communism and private property, created the objective need for a public power to adjudicate in the struggle. The material basis for the state was created. Within the kinship groups no external power was required since the groups themselves operated co-operatively with all members having equal rights and responsibilities. The external state reinforced the patriarchal nature of the family and inheritance. These developments—occurring over many thousands of years and in a profoundly combined and uneven way—created the earliest class societies (the ancient city kingdoms of Mesopotamia, Egypt etc). These class societies were patriarchal. Women had suffered an historic defeat.

Engels' analysis of the origins of women's oppression was correct in its fundamentals. New anthropological evidence has called into question certain details of his analysis which we are therefore obliged to modify or supplement. These are as follows:

i) Engels' acceptance of mother-right as a universal stage of society and his implication that this stage involved a period of female domination in society is not borne out by modern archaeological and anthropological evidence. While there is extensive evidence of matrilineal kinship groups there is little evidence to suggest that they were socially dominated by women. Rough equality existed. Moreover this equality prevailed in the patrilineal kinship groups that also existed in the earliest phase of human society. However, insofar as the obliteration of matrilineality is always a feature of the development of class societies, Engels is right to refer to a historic defeat for women. The point is that this defeat occurred as a result of a process rather than as a conscious and cataclysmic act against women, by men.

ii) Engels' emphasis on cattle production as the primary area for the accumulation of a surplus should not blind us to the importance of the struggle over control of the land as a component of the process whereby women became oppressed as a sex. The development of horticulture into agriculture made the land a vital source of surplus produce. While in many hoe-farming societies, women more or less maintained their equality, the later-developed nomadic herding societies represented the opposite extreme. In them, cattle-herding, controlled by men, contributed more to the social product than did the labour of women. In this context, essential features of patriarchy and the oppression of women were established, and in the course of wars and invasions, were imposed on defeated hoe-farming cultures. Male domination of warfare ensured that men were the chief beneficiaries of the struggles that took place over land.

iii) Engels identifies slave society as the first fully fledged class society in which the subordination of women is legally enshrined. In fact the urban civilisations of Mesopotamia were class societies—dominated by large landowners and a priestly caste who extracted tribute from the mass of servile farmers—in which the patriarchal family was established and recognised in the laws of the state. Their difference with the slave societies of the classical world was that they exhibited more and clearer traces of the communal kinship groups from which they had sprung (e.g. the idea that property belonged to the gods, rather than individuals and the

priests were merely its administrators, the ability of women to escape aspects of their legal oppression through buying themselves into temple service etc).

iv) We must add to Engels' analysis an explanation of why it was women who were subordinated as a sex. This stems from the transformation of the original hunter-gathering division of labour from a predominantly co-operative one into a systematically oppressive one. The conflict between the developing family unit and the kinship group was the reason for this transformation.

v) One main idea of Engels' understanding of the origin of women's oppression was based on Darwin's principle of natural selection. Engels saw this principle as being realised in a universally generalised incest-taboo. Consequently, Engels understood the development of mankind as one of progressive stages: starting with the promiscuous ancient horde, via the Punalua-family and gentes to the coupling marriage, which was welcomed by the dominant patriarchs as fertile ground on which to establish the monogamous marriage by force. However progressive it was for Engels to place the monogamous marriage as a later stage of human history, his given sequence of family forms was far from universal. On this point Engels did not fully transcend the biological determinism because he could not link the development of reproduction and production according to the level of development of the social formation. The development of family forms has to be studied with the historical-materialist method in the same way as the sphere of immediate production is, but not in a Darwinian way; incest-taboo and marriage rules have to be understood socially, i.e. as arising from the level of the forces and relations of production.

With these modifications and additions the origins of women's oppression can still be explained by the method of dialectical materialism utilised by Engels, and the woman question can be understood as, fundamentally, a class question.

2. The emergence of class society brought with it the monogamous (for the woman) family. The nature of marriage in primitive societies varied. Pairing marriages and group marriages were common. In the former case it was generally relatively easy to dissolve the marriage at the request of one partner. While the degree of sexual freedom in these marital arrangements varied enormously in primitive society, monogamy could not be said to be the prevailing norm. Its appearance as a prevailing norm in the earliest class societies marked a new historic period for both the family and for women. It also added a new dimension to the sexual division of labour which intensified women's oppression and became a common feature of that oppression in every subsequent class society. That dimension was the privatisation, within the individual family unit, of domestic labour. As the anthropologist, Eleanor Leacock put it:

"The subordination of the female sex was based in the transformation of their socially necessary labour into a private service through the separation of the family from the clan. It was in this context that women's domestic and other work came to be performed under conditions of virtual slavery."

Despite the massive expansion in the productive



forces since the time of the ancient cultures, women are still domestic slaves.

In slave society the family was not simply (or even primarily) parents and their children. In fifth century Athens the family of the newly emerging ruling class (the large slaveholders and land owners of Attica) was organised around the household, the *oikos*. Within this framework women managed the household and engaged in weaving (for consumption and trade) while men conducted public affairs, trade, matters of state etc. Women were legally restricted from engaging in substantial trading themselves. While they could, formally, own property, they could not control it. Control was recognised as belonging to their husbands or, in the case of daughters who had, because of a lack of sons, inherited the family wealth, male guardians (*kyrios*). The woman's father or guardian arranged marriages in order to attract wealth into the family. Needless to say, slave women were oppressed at the hands of this fiercely patriarchal society by being used for the economic benefit and sexual pleasure of ruling class men. They were denied all rights to having any family of their own, since the children of slaves were simply the possessions of the master.

This economic subordination was matched by a ruthless regime in social matters. Women in Athens (Sparta

was less rigid in its attitudes, though the warrior culture was oppressive to women in a number of other ways) were segregated into their own areas within the household and regarded by their husbands as breeding machines. Individual sex-love played no role in the matter. A cynical fourth century Greek orator summed up the attitude of the most highly developed slave society (Athens) before the Roman Empire:

"We resort to courtesans for our pleasure, keep concubines to look after our daily needs, and marry wives to give us legitimate children and be the faithful guardians of our hearth."

In ancient Rome women (of the ruling strata) did enjoy more personal freedom than their Athenian forebears. However, relative personal freedom in some matters did not mean that social oppression ceased to exist. In all essentials the Roman family, the *familia*, was, like the *oikos*, a household, within which women were responsible for all domestic concerns while having no independent control over the produce of the household.

The collapse of the Roman Empire and the slow and painful transition to feudalism altered the family structure considerably. The triumph of the barbarians meant:

a) the end of slavery as the dominant mode of production

b) the fusion of the barbarian family, still by and large harmonious with the clan, with the individual family unit of the conquered empire.

Over a period of several centuries this process gave rise to a new mode of production and a new type of family. Feudalism, a mode of production that emerged out of the period of transition transformed the clan property of the Germanic tribes into the property of feudal lords and princes. The serf household, working a plot of land on a feudal estate, worked co-operatively as a unit of production, constantly striving to improve the margin of produce they were able to enjoy after fulfilling their obligations to the feudal lord. Of course life was miserable for the serfs and feudal lords sought to deny them anything other than the barest means of subsistence, but by eliminating slavery as the dominant mode of production and by transforming the serf family into a productive household, feudalism, a dynamic agrarian economy as compared with the late Roman Empire and with the primitive farming methods of the Germanic clans, played an important role in taking society forward after the collapse of the ancient world.

In this situation the form of women's oppression changed. For ruling class women household management became management of servants and was less decisive to the economy than the *oikos* or *familia*. In addition daughters of the ruling class were valuable assets in the construction of alliances, estate enlargement etc, through arranged marriages. For the serfs, on the other hand, the family was the basic unit of production.

The husband, wife and the children worked the land co-operatively to produce the means of subsistence for themselves and a surplus for their lord. However, the pre-existing displacement of women from equal control of either the surplus or the means of subsistence could not be reversed by the serfs. The ideology of the feudal lords, refined and expressed by the church, consigned all women to an inferior status.

In medieval Europe sexual oppression applied differentially to women of different classes. Amongst the ruling class "courtly love" between a woman and a (noble/knightly) man other than her husband, was widely tolerated. For the great mass of serf women, on the other hand, the strictures of christian morality meant that sexual activity other than within marriage, was stigmatised. In particular adultery was punishable by torture or even death. The implementation of rules by the church, such as the obligation to attend confession at least annually (a measure introduced in the middle ages), ensured that local priests could interfere directly in the private lives of the serfs. Of course, reality was more complex than christian morality and "deviant" sexual activity, including that of the priests with various married women of the village, often went unpunished.

On the economic plain serf women were still regarded as the property of the lord (a clear carry over from slavery) and in many places in feudal Europe male serfs were obliged to present their would-be wives to the lord so that he could exercise his "right of the first night". The maintenance of privatised domestic slavery alongside co-operative social production in one and the same serf family was a decisive material factor in the perpetuation of oppression for the great mass of women during the feudal mode of production.

The serf household could only survive as long as feudalism itself did. Taking Britain as an example (since it was the first modern industrial nation) the dissolution of feudalism led to the eventual destruction of the country's peasantry. Landowners drove the small tenant farmers from the land and laid the basis for the creation of a class of free labourers, proletarians. Dislocated from the land they worked co-operatively. Peasant families ceased to be households engaged in social production (although cottage industries did retain aspects of the household during the earliest phases of manufacture).

In the cities and towns during the industrial revolution the peasant family was undermined as all members of it were drawn into the factories or mines as individual proletarians working for an employer rather than for the maintenance of the household. Although the transition from feudalism to capitalism has not always followed this British model in every country, its essential features and their impact on the nature of the family have been generally the same.

For example, in the German lands and central Europe, a greater part of the serfs, who worked as servants on the manor, often had no families. The feudal lord had the right to allow marriage, deny it or require it. Capitalism first dissolved these fetters of personal dependence. This led to loose forms of cohabitation which engendered a massive population explosion. Only later did the capitalist state grant most people the legal right of sexual activity but then only in the form of enforcing bourgeois monogamous marriage.

The pattern of development and transition described here is a predominantly European one. Clearly the forms and extent of women's subordination outside of Europe were shaped by the differing sets of social relations that existed (for example in the Asiatic mode of production). Nevertheless, the oppression of women,

located in their position within the family, is common to all class societies

3. Industrial capitalism revolutionised the nature of human production and with it the specific form of women's oppression. The household ceased to be the basic unit of production and was replaced by the capitalist factory and farm. The working class family no longer produced the means of subsistence for themselves, they no longer owned any means of production. Capitalism thus created the proletariat, a class owning nothing but its capacity to labour. The sale of labour power became the only way for proletarians to survive. The introduction of machinery in industrial production allowed for all members of the working class—regardless of sex or age—to be used in the processes of production.

In the early period of industrial capitalism, first developed most clearly in Britain, the new productive relations broke up the old form of the family and household by drawing all members in to the factories, mines and mills. The capacity of the workers to survive and reproduce was damaged by this development, since the time for the household labour necessary to reproduce labour power had been taken into capitalist production. This led to working class struggles over the length of the working day and the setting of limits on the labour done by children and women.

Although the household as the basic unit of social production had been destroyed by capitalism the family had not. It remained the means by which the new class of proletarians reproduced themselves and their labour power. Capitalism was undermining the proletariat's capacity to do this. It was, by forcing every member of every proletarian family to work under appalling conditions for long hours, undermining the family itself. In the face of a determined struggle by the proletariat sections of the capitalist class recognised the need to act.

Objectively the maintenance of the proletarian family as a means of reproducing labour power and the proletariat itself was in the interests of the bosses. However, the profit motive blinds capitalists to their own long term objective interests. Only when the action of the working class forces splits within their own ranks are sections of the ruling class compelled to override the objections of "reactionary" bosses and grant reforms that are designed to preserve the rule of capital itself. Thus in nineteenth century Britain, the prototype of modern industrial capitalism, the liberal bourgeoisie succumbed to the pressure of the proletariat and granted a reform that they themselves had come to recognise the need for.

There was nothing automatic about capitalism's sudden outburst of "enlightenment" when it conceded legislation restricting the working day. It was split and granted a reform to avoid something worse—the revolutionary action of the working class. Hence Marx rightly recognised these legislative reforms as a decisive victory for the political economy of the working class.

The introduction of legislation which limited the length of the working day for all workers, and specifically restricted the labour of women and children, allowed the working class the time needed for the reproduction of labour power. This was one factor re-



Sans-culottes women played a leading role in the French revolution

ducing women's participation in production and taking responsibility for domestic labour. The result was that the family unit, which had been shattered by the brutality of early industrialisation, was reformed, with the altered and limited function of ensuring the reproduction of labour power. This did not result in the total exclusion of women from socialised, capitalist production, but did result in this having a secondary role, co-incidentally providing a flexible reserve army of labour.

In the period of the mid to late nineteenth century in Britain the implementation of the protective legislation and the re-creation of the family was used by sections of the labour aristocracy in the craft unions to exclude women from production in a way that went beyond that which was necessary to preserve the reproduction of the class. In this way the factory legislation, though both progressive and necessary for the working class, was implemented at the expense of women playing a fuller role in the employed workforce. The family became the only means of physical and social survival for the working class within the brutal capitalist system and was therefore defended by the class. However, this haven was also a prison for women. It had become institutionalised as the means of reproducing labour power. This meant that the already existing division between domestic labour and social production was accentuated, and women's oppression was, thereby, reinforced. The proletarian family unit was in this period, therefore, profoundly contradictory (and remains so to this day). On the one hand, it was the only place that workers—men and women—could retreat into for physical regeneration, relaxation and emotional sustenance. On the other hand its inherently oppressive structure very often negated its ability to truly satisfy these needs. It was therefore only a limited protection against capitalist devastation.

In countries such as Britain the prosperity of the labour aristocracy enabled them to have full-time housewives at home, replicating the "ideal" of the bourgeois family. Through the labour aristocracy this ideal was transmitted into the whole working class. Defence of this ideal became inscribed on the banner of

political reformism. Defence of the family as a means of survival was thus transformed by the reformist leaders based on the labour aristocracy into a defence of the reactionary bourgeois ideal of the family. This partly explains why, contrary to Marx and Engels' expectations, the family of the proletariat did not disappear. Another reason, however, was that capitalism itself could not conceive of any other social structure capable of fulfilling its needs in relation to labour power and the labour force.

With the development of capitalism on a world scale, and in particular with the development of imperialism, the destruction of the family inherited from pre-capitalist periods has been repeated. In the course of its development capitalism has continually contradicted its "ideal" of the family. In circumstances such as the African slave trade to the Americas the destruction of the family and of the ideology of family life took place. In the imperialised countries where in times of rapid industrialisation men, women and children are drawn into wage labour with little protection and scant regard for their ability to maintain any home or family life. Similarly in times of economic crisis in industrialised societies, unemployment, poverty and the physical division of families caused by migration, undermines the bourgeois family "norm". However, the bourgeois state recognises the general social interest of the bourgeoisie in the maintenance of the family, and 'modernising' states promote the ideal of the family whilst often actually undermining its capacity to function as a unit for reproducing labour power.

In imperialist South Africa families are physically divided in order to facilitate the exploitation of black workers. With virtually no welfare provision to protect the working class family it is being torn apart in the shanty towns and ghettos that surround the urban industrial centres in the semi-colonies. From the bands of homeless, foraging youth in São Paulo and Mexico City through to the ruthlessly exploited children who labour as semi-slaves in the sweatshops of Thailand, proof of capitalism's preparedness to sacrifice the working class family for the sake of profit abounds.

Only the struggle of the working class can stop this brutal process. Marx recognised the victory of the *European* workers in securing a legal limit to the working day, a measure of protection that facilitated the re-creation of the family, as a victory for the political economy of the working class over the capitalists. Such a victory is necessary in the semi-colonies, but its achievement there will be inextricably linked with the destruction of imperialist domination through the achievement of working class power. This in turn can ensure that the working class does not seek recourse from misery in the bourgeois family, within which the woman is enslaved.

4. The family of the bourgeoisie emerged in capitalism with a different role to that of the proletarian family. Its primary functions are the reproduction of the next generation of the ruling class and the transmission of wealth in a patrilineal fashion. These functions required the continued control over women's sexuality and monogamy remained essential for the wife if the paternity of the husband was to be guaranteed. The bourgeois marriage was often used to secure the aggregation of capital by the most wealthy families. Bourgeois marriage was different from marriage in preceding epochs.

Up to the triumph of capitalism marriage had always been arranged by people other than the partners involved. Even to this day arranged marriages are prevalent in a number of semi-colonial countries, a mark of the backwardness such countries remain trapped in during this, the epoch of imperialism.

For the emerging bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century arranged marriages were supplanted by the marriage contract, a contract signed by two free individuals who have made up their own minds as to who should be their partner. To justify this new arrangement in their struggle against the feudal aristocracy the bourgeoisie seized upon and romanticised the notion of individual sex-love as the motive for marriage. However this notion was a hypocritical disguise for the real motives of the rising bourgeoisie. It provided them with moral cover against the "dissolute" aristocracy and, at the same time, enabled them to place their own particularly vicious stamp on the monogamous marriage.

The "contract" entered into freely by both parties, enshrined the dominance of the man within the family and ensured that individual sex-love was the means for guaranteeing a wife's fidelity within marriage. The contract still left the man free to practice individual sex-love with other women, particularly, as capitalism developed, with prostitutes. However, the early development of capitalism also included the bourgeois democratic revolutions which broke the economic and political fetters which hampered capitalist production. These revolutions proclaimed the "rights of man" yet signally failed to grant, in practice, the "equality of woman", even though bourgeois revolutionaries were occasionally prepared to inscribe it on their banners for the purposes of enlisting the support of the whole people.

The continuing legal restrictions on women denied them many things, such as their right to hold and control property, their right to vote, hold public office, divorce, gain admission to education and the profes-

sions and to have access to available methods of controlling their own fertility. This was in clear contradiction to the proclaimed ideals of bourgeois democracy.

The struggle for these rights was the basis for the bourgeois women's movement of the late nineteenth century. Despite exceptions the general resistance from the ruling class to grant these limited rights even to women of their own class reflects their need to defend the family form which produced heirs to inherit their property, and their reluctance to extend democratic rights which might be taken up by the subordinate classes and then used in their struggle against the bourgeoisie.

In most imperialist countries, during the twentieth century, women were granted many, if not all, of these formal, legal, democratic rights. However, these formal rights remain limited and open to frequent attack as capitalist crises require the bourgeoisie to reinforce the ideology of the family and women's unequal position. Whilst this is primarily required to ensure that the working class family takes on increasing responsibility for care of its members, bourgeois women may be required to act as a model for the "natural" family role. The rights gained by bourgeois women fall short of true equality, even for themselves, since they fail to attack the heart of their own, and working class women's oppression which remains the existence of the family.

Women's systematic oppression under capitalism

5. Under the capitalist mode of production all women suffer from oppression. This is a result of their unequal relationship to production. For the vast majority of women, i.e. those who are part of the working class, their oppression is a result of their responsibilities within the family. The material root of their oppression is the continued existence of domestic slavery. The allocation to women of the task of caring for children and performing the bulk of household work leads to women being unable to play a full and equal role within socialised production. Women are either excluded from social life, locked away in the domestic household, or where they are involved in social labour, they are often directed into areas of work closely allied to the domestic economy and its skills.

Thus in the major imperialist countries, despite the presence of large numbers of women in industry "women's work" is predominantly in the fields of retail distribution, clothing, catering, social and health services, cleaning etc. Where women work alongside men in factories and offices they tend to be restricted to the unskilled, semi-skilled and lowest paid sectors. The education and training of girls and women is designed to reinforce this "specialisation". Above all, the family is presented as the centre, the first responsibility of women, to which waged work is subordinated.

The jobs which women perform have remained highly segregated, despite their increasing numbers. Women rarely work in jobs alongside men of the same grade. Pay and conditions reflect this segregation, so that equal pay legislation has failed to substantially improve women's average wages in most countries, and in some the average full-time wage of women has

gone down relative to male wages over the past decades. In the public sector there are also large numbers of non-manual white collar female workers who are concentrated in the lowest clerical grades. In some countries most of the increase in women's employment has been through part time working, which can fit in with domestic responsibilities, but also confines women to very low pay and poor conditions such as job security. In other countries, the expansion of part time work is less significant (e.g. France), and there are much higher levels of state child care which enable women with young children to work.

The picture in the semi-colonies is somewhat different. Imperialism is based on the super-exploitation of such countries and, in co-operation with rapacious indigenous capitalists, it is quite prepared to employ vast numbers of women, working long hours for very little pay, in manufacturing industry. This "subversion" of its own ideological views on the role of women is necessary for imperialist capital's super profits and is compensated for by its political and economic domination of the semi-colonial countries.

6. The family of the working class is the *dominant* arena within which the commodity labour power is reproduced, both through the daily restoration of the labour power of each worker, the reproduction of the commodity labour power, and also through the raising of future generations of workers. The labour necessary to produce this labour power is centred on the home, outside of socialised production. This domestic labour is overwhelmingly done by women, for which they receive no direct payment. Rather, the working class as a whole receives a wage which provides for the reproduction of labour power. Where a woman is not employed in wage labour herself, it is assumed that her husband's wage will be used to provide for the whole family. This leads to an extreme economic dependence of non-waged women on their husbands. The division of labour between the domestic labour of the household and the rest of socialised labour for capital which occurs in the factories etc, is the root of women's unequal position.

The nature of the work done in the home is generally repetitive, labour intensive and done by women in isolation from others in a similar position. This leads to their being separated off from the social nature of work under capitalism, a socialisation which is essential to the development of the working class as a collective, conscious class capable of carrying out social change. This remains true for women, children and some men engaged in productive labour in the home. Such labour is normally exacting, done in addition to domestic labour and involves the super-exploitation of the home workers involved.

Capitalism has proved incapable of systematically socialising the labour done in the home. Although many elements of work which were previously done in the home such as making clothes and the preparation of food, have been turned into profitable industries under capitalism, the elements of domestic labour which relate to caring for children, the sick and other dependent members of the family, have never been adequately provided in a socialised way. It is this area of household labour which capitalism cannot fully socialise. The

potential to socialise these areas of domestic labour clearly exists. During World War Two in Britain and the USA the capitalist class, through its state, were willing and able to pay for nurseries, communal canteens, laundries etc, so that women workers could be utilised to the full while the men were in the army.

However, the capitalist class treats such periods as exceptions. If such measures became the norm the drain on the total surplus value in capitalist society would be too great for it to sustain. Those services which it is sometimes forced to provide, such as health care and welfare, are threatened as crises force the bourgeoisie to cut the "social wage" of the working class.

Another reason why capitalism will not and cannot fully socialise domestic labour is that irrespective of whether or not it can afford to do so it would undermine the family completely. The family is no mere decoration for capitalism. It is a social structure within which the oppression of women and youth is perpetuated and because of which the oppression of lesbians and gay men takes place. It is fundamental to the existence of capitalism itself.

7. Since World War Two the proportion of women who work outside the home has increased dramatically in the imperialist countries. The increased proportion of women drawn into social production has a tendency to undermine some aspects of women's oppression, giving women who work some economic support and social contact with the rest of their class. However, this tendency has not altered the fundamental features of women's oppression, which rest upon the continued existence of the family as a sphere of private labour for the reproduction of labour power.

Since women are still responsible for the rearing of children, and still perform most household labour, this has remained their primary responsibility. There is no alternative.

The state has provided certain services such as schools, nurseries, hospitals etc, to relieve women from some of the tasks they previously had to carry out in the home, but none of these replace the need for a central person in the family who takes responsibility for the social well-being of the rest. The fact that women still have to perform this role means that their ability to participate equally in the labour force is undermined.

Women have to take time off, not only to give birth, but often to look after young children during school holidays, members of the family who are sick etc. The fact that so many women with dependents do work does not indicate a real reduction in the household responsibilities of women. Rather it shows the increasing dependence of the working class family on the wage of two adults where previously they could manage, for periods of their lives at least, on the income of one.

Women with children need to work in order to support their families. The work they do is generally organised to fit in with home responsibilities—the shifts women work, such as evenings, nights, school hours—to allow women to combine their two roles at the expense of social time for themselves and their family. When a child is ill, or a relative becomes more dependent (such as the elderly and invalids), it is generally women who have to give up their jobs.

8. The family plays another important role for capitalism. It is an institution through which capitalism's ideology is transmitted to the working class. It is the social structure in which discipline, obedience, uncritical attitudes, faith in authority and subordination to social domination, modelled on patriarchal authority and female oppression, are imparted to and bred into children from the earliest age and in which, in the everyday life of married partners, this relationship of subjection is maintained and renewed.

The family represses resistance and ensures conformity with bourgeois morals. It is through the patriarchal family that the first identification of sex and gender roles occurs. The maltreatment of women and children within the family and its toleration by bourgeois society are also means of imposing reactionary morality, repressive sexuality and gender role identification within the family. The repression of sexuality is an integral part of early character development, and as such plays a key role in the acceptance of reactionary bourgeois ideology and passivity in the heads of the ruled. Sexual repression takes place in the practice of gender-specific social behaviour, the denial of child sexuality, discrimination against female sexuality and the oppression of homosexuality.

The ideal nuclear family, although not the predominant "family" unit in society, is held up by the church, state, the mass media and schools, as being the model which all must aspire to attain. The family's role as a transmitter of ideology is made all the more effective because it is, or appears as, a haven for the working class in particular, a source of comfort, of emotional and material aid, a defence against the ravages of capitalist society.

We reject the notion that women in the family *objectively* create their own oppression or consciously collude with it. Their isolated situation in the home atomises working class women and leaves them vulnerable to backward ideas, perpetuated daily in the press, television and radio. For these reasons housewives, their horizons limited by the immediate needs of maintaining the family, often express reactionary ideas and play a vital role in transmitting these backward and oppressive ideas to their children, especially their daughters who are brought up by mothers according to the sexist rules laid down by capitalist society.

But this is a reflection of their position in society, not an expression of their conscious collusion. It is a backwardness born of their oppression. But this should not obscure the true relations of authority within the family. It is paternal authority, supported by school, church and the dominant cultural norms, which determines the rearing of future generations, even if most of the practical work of child-rearing is done by the mother.

A further aspect which contributes to the political backwardness of women, and is found most strongly amongst those who are solely housewives, is that their husbands (even the politically active) obstruct their participation in political organisations and political struggle even if they do not actually seek to prevent it. The political backwardness of housewives, just like male chauvinism, are unavoidable for the majority without a mass movement for socialist revolution, or that revolution itself, whose influence would reach

right into the family, siding with women and children struggling against patriarchal relations.

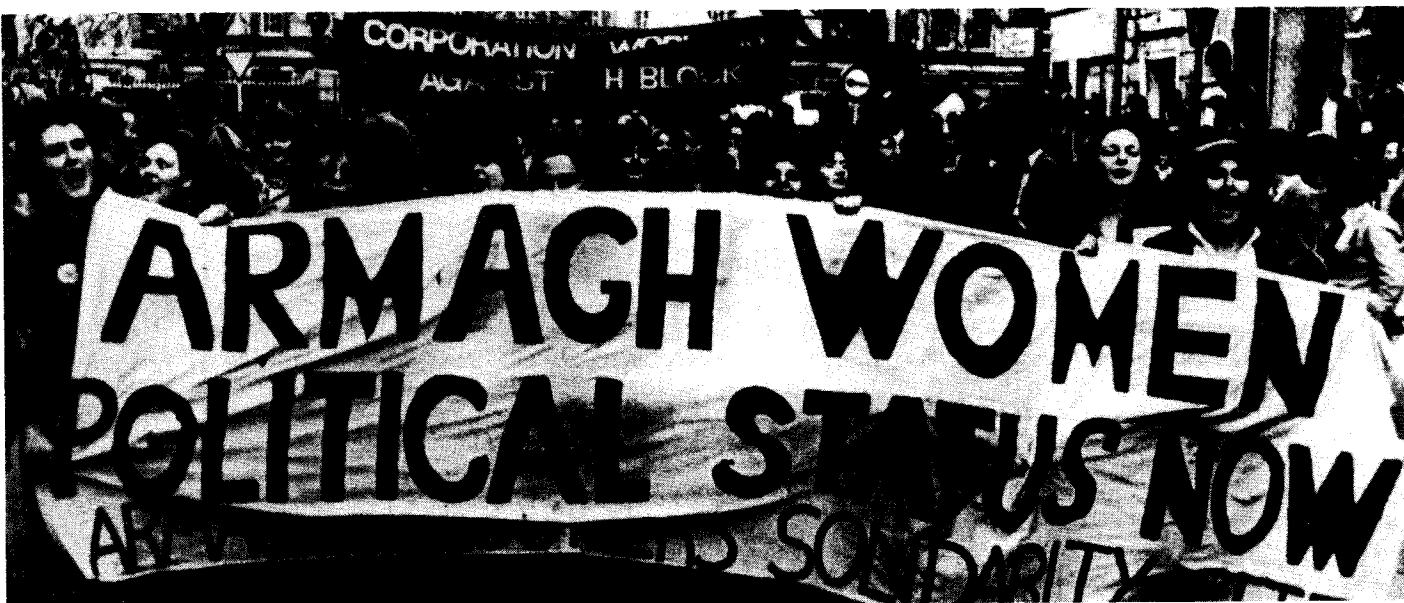
9. The imposition of monogamy for women, which came with the development of private property and class society, has meant that women are sexually, as well as socially, oppressed. The monogamy required of women in the working class is necessary for the maintenance of a stable family unit for the reproduction of labour power. The monogamous model of the bourgeois family, necessary for the ruling class in the transmission of wealth, is thus imposed on the working class but with a different social function.

The sexual oppression of women is *primarily* a consequence, not a cause, of their subordination within class society. The same applies for our understanding of the construction of gender roles. Although the processes by which gender roles are created have a profound psychological effect on people and are often carried through by a variety of subtle psychological means they cannot be overcome by purely psychological or therapeutic methods. It is utopian to believe that a social/psychological liberatory practice inside the party or other workers' organisations can resolve the profound contradictions that arise from gender role construction in capitalist society.

These gender roles, above all, serve a social purpose. They are a necessary means of maintaining the family under capitalism. Unless this is understood then we will lapse into a struggle to create the perfect personality, free of the constraints of a constructed gender role, on a purely individual basis. This is utopian and diversionary. While it is necessary to overcome some of the constraints of our gender roles, in order to make us better fighters against capitalism (an achievement that generally results from the collective solidarity of the party rather than from efforts of individual will or psychological treatment) our personalities will bear the scars of the society we live in. We must transform that society before we can hope to fully transform our personalities and destroy the material basis for the gender roles that capitalism has imposed on us. Sexual oppression and character formation are, however, at the same time, means to maintain class society in general. They make an important contribution in creating preparedness for subordination and obedience to authority.

Sexual oppression also plays a regressive role in transforming class struggle aggression into frustration and even neuroses which find their expression in various forms of, from the standpoint of the class struggle, irrational behaviour, or passivity in the face of the reformist leaders. However, even if these psychological factors play such a role, the "false consciousness" of the working class cannot be reduced to the level of psychology. The atomising effects of capitalism and the demoralising consequences of the reformist leaders are, for us, the decisive political factors.

For these reasons we reject the claim by many feminists that the major battlefield in the struggle for liberation is around issues of sexuality. This view leads to an emphasis on personal politics, to the belief in individual solutions to oppression and to utopian schemes for sexual liberation. Furthermore it is a view which presents medical science, in particular psychoanalysis, as



equal, if not superior to, collective class struggle as a means of ending oppression.

Marxists do not ignore the valuable contributions to human understanding that advances in the field of psychology have made. Personal problems can be alleviated by various forms of psychological treatment. However, we insist that psychological insights cannot resolve the fundamental social contradictions that actually lead to personal and sexual unhappiness. The key to understanding these contradictions and to resolving them lies in the study of the history of classes. Case studies of individuals have to be understood in their historical contexts and are of supplementary value in eradicating sexual oppression. The same is true of mass and politico-psychological analyses.

The limits of a psychoanalytical approach were shown by the career of Wilhelm Reich. By identifying the importance of sexual politics as one element of capitalism's oppression of the masses Reich paved the way to various insights into the way in which capitalism shapes, or rather distorts, the human personality. However his failure to understand the relationship between social life, the class struggle and sexuality led him into fatal errors. He elevated sexual politics above the economic and political class struggle and began to define the key to liberation in purely sexual terms (hence his later obsession with the orgone as a source of energy). In reality just as sexual oppression is a consequence of class society and women's oppression within that society, so complete sexual liberation will come as a consequence of the socialist revolution, not in advance of it.

Each class society has developed ideologies that justify exploitation and oppression. A reactionary ideology with regards to sexuality has always, to one degree or another, been a feature of societies in which women are oppressed. The dominant moral values of a particular society are, like its ideas as a whole, the moral values of (or rather that serve) the ruling class. As class society has developed so too have the means for perpetuating

and enforcing a morality that is profoundly oppressive to women. Within the family itself this morality is enforced on women by their husbands and on children by their parents. At a society-wide level the church and, increasingly, the mass media are powerful propaganda machines for reactionary morality. They lay down the pernicious moral laws on sexuality that determine what is "normal" or "abnormal" and they stigmatise, often with savage results, those who do not conform to these laws (in particular lesbians and gay men).

In capitalist society bourgeois morality is, despite its occasional liberal periods, a means of oppressing women. In bourgeois society the free and full gratification of the sexual appetite is thwarted or distorted. While all people suffer sexual misery as a result of bourgeois morality, women are particularly affected. The restrictions placed on women's sexual activity are far more extensive than those placed on men. To sanctify the institution of the family capitalism denies women full control of their own fertility and attacks female "adulterers" or single parents far more systematically than it does male equivalents. The "whore" and "stud" syndrome still exists amongst wide layers in capitalist society.

As a norm, therefore, women are discouraged from engaging in diverse sexual relationships. Their right to sexual pleasure (at times denied altogether) is defined as proper only with a single partner and within marriage. Stereotyped roles have been fashioned which clearly repress women's potential for equal and enjoyable sex lives. Women are either virtuous or immoral, whereas men are allowed to be (and granted respect when they are) sexually adventurous yet still held to be "good family men". Women's bodies are objectified and treated as things to be enjoyed by men, either freely so, in marriage, or at a price, in prostitution. Women's bodies are used to sell products that have nothing to do with their bodies at all, to men.

With such a callous attitude to the female body it is little wonder that abuse against women is so wide-

spread. Women who reject the stereotyped image and attempt to express any independent sexuality, either through lesbianism, bisexuality or by having multiple male partners are abused, denied legal rights to their children and treated as social misfits. Women without male partners or without children are pitied and regarded as inadequate. And the overwhelming majority of women are forced to conform to the norms of family life, with all the resulting frustration and unhappiness that are attendant upon those norms.

And women who earn their living as prostitutes are stigmatised by society, treated as outcasts and in many countries as criminals, while their male clients are excused all guilt. What clear testimony to capitalist morality's stinking hypocrisy!

Despite vast differences of culture and tradition women all over the globe suffer sexual oppression. The epoch of world economy has torn down any protections that women in primitive societies might have enjoyed. In Brazil, for example, women from primitive Indian tribes in the Amazon are literally stolen and used as prostitutes to satisfy the needs of the men from a civilisation that is expanding into every corner of the rain forest. In more developed semi-colonies the sexual subjugation of women may appear more subtle, but it is nevertheless brutal, wide-ranging and degrading. As in the imperialist countries examples of institutionalised sexual oppression abound. In addition, however, in certain semi-colonial countries (Thailand and parts of East Africa for example) prostitution has been transformed into a mass industry in which thousands of women are super-exploited, forced to work in terrible conditions, and left highly vulnerable to (often fatal) sexually transmitted diseases.

10. By perpetuating the sexual misery of all and by objectifying women's bodies, class society has always rendered women vulnerable to extreme acts of aggression at the hands of men—namely systematic physical abuse, rape, and the threat of such abuse. Unlike the radical feminists, we do not regard male violence as the real essence of women's oppression or, in their terms, an expression of "male power" over women. Acts of sexual abuse and physical violence are not a simple extension of the "normal" oppressive relations between men and women. The high levels of sexual abuse of women reflect the particular influence of sexist ideology which degrades women. The relative tolerance by the state, and bourgeois ideology (including the church), of such physical, sexual and mental abuse of women in the family, at work and in social life, reflects the institutionalised sexism of class society. In the working class such abuse reflects the demoralisation and divisions which set workers against each other, combined with the general brutality characteristic of class society. The existence of oppressive, sexist restrictions and their damaging effects on human beings, give rise to rape and systematic brutality. The existence of sexual violence and physical abuse is a real factor in intimidating women (resulting in women being afraid to go out at night etc).

Sexist ideology is rampant in capitalist society. Its purpose is to legitimise women's subordination in social and sexual matters. In media images of women the

objectification of the body often leads to its degradation. A human being becomes a mere sex machine at the service of men and with no independent will of her own. The existence of such images and the extent of sexist ideology in the media has led some women to regard pornography as the quintessential expression of women's oppression. "Porn is the theory, rape is the practice" is a popular maxim amongst many feminists, radical and socialist alike. In fact targetting pornography as the number one enemy of women is wrong on several counts.

First it equates all sexual images of women with images which do degrade women. It equates all pornography with violent pornography. This is a totally subjective approach which theoretically precludes the possibility of non-oppressive erotic representations. It denies to women their potential enjoyment of the erotic representation of their sexual desires and fantasies. In a word it is a feminist form of prudery. Thus we are not in favour of calling for a legal ban on pornography regardless of whether it is defined as oppressive or non-oppressive.

The second problem with the anti-porn campaigners is that the only way of realising their goals is to call on the state to ban pornography. In practice this means strengthening the state's repressive power, its ability to interfere in people's private lives in an oppressive manner. The state, as one of the guardians of a reactionary moral code will invariably use its powers to ban porn against lesbian and gay publications. The state will be the arbiter of what is "obscene".

The third problem that making an attack on porn central to a strategy for fighting sexism, is that sexist imagery is a symptom of women's oppression, not the cause of that oppression. Campaigns against porn are therefore wrong in portraying it as "the theory", i.e. the cause, behind rape and oppression in general. These errors concerning pornography have had disastrous political consequences. In particular they have led sections of the feminist movements in Britain and the USA into alliances with the Moral Majority and the Mary Whitehouse brigade.

However, as revolutionaries we are not neutral in battles over sexist imagery inside the labour movement and the media. We are resolute fighters against sexist imagery and support all campaigns to end the publication of pin-ups in the labour movement's press, the efforts of women to get offensive posters or ads taken down in the workplace, campaigns against the sexual harassment of women at work and for concrete measures to protect women against the threat of rape, such as better lighting and transport facilities, free self-defence tuition etc. In the media we support the fight for the right to reply to articles or pictures which degrade women. We call on print workers to help realise this demand by refusing to print such articles or pictures unless the right of reply for the union, its women's section or a relevant campaign/organisation is guaranteed. These methods, the methods of direct action, actually lead to fruitful arguments with male workers on the nature of sexism and why it is divisive, as well as an actual curtailment of propaganda for the subordination or degradation of women.

11. Another important battleground against sexist ideology is in the field of religion. In all class societies

religious ideas, perpetuated by organised churches which are often tied in with the state, play a key role in sanctioning and enforcing the ideology of women's oppression. In the west Christianity and Judaism, both based on ideologies consolidated in pre-capitalist and intensely patriarchal societies, have, for centuries, preached the doctrine of women's subordination. This doctrine has practical results for millions of women.

The Catholic Church's rulings on contraception and abortion are a clear example. In the imperialist countries these rulings can produce the misery and hardship associated with unwanted pregnancies and children. In the semi-colonies these results are compounded by the greater degree of poverty that exists. In Latin America, a continent dominated by the ideology of catholicism, the church's reactionary doctrines, liberation theology notwithstanding, lead literally to the mass murder of women. For the denial of free abortion on demand does not eradicate abortion. It merely opens the door to the back street butchers and the needless deaths of many women. The purpose of such rulings against abortion and contraception is to ensure that women do not control their own fertility. Moreover, because sex is merely for the purposes of reproduction, women are taught by the church that sexual activity outside marriage and sexual activity for pleasure is forbidden.

The elaborate mythology of both Christianity and Judaism back up their reactionary teachings on women. The Eve myth, the tale of Lot's disobedient wife in the Old Testament, the cult of the Virgin Mary, all portray women as the willing servants of men's domestic needs, punished, like Lot's wife, when they disobey orders from the patriarch. The bottom line of these religious ideologies is the sanctification of the family and its structure around a dominant male. The nature of the family has changed in different class societies and religion has reflected this in subtle changes of doctrine.

But the reactionary content of religion's teachings on women and the family has not qualitatively altered over centuries. They are the clearest manifestations of the tendency of the dead past to weigh heavily on the living present. This is true even where religious ideology adopts liberatory trappings. Of late this has occurred inside the Catholic Church with the development of liberation theology, particularly in Latin America. Yet, despite justifying violence against imperialist oppression, this theology remains tied to the church's reactionary teaching on all of the key social questions affecting women. In the end all religion, regardless of nuance, is reactionary from the point of view of human progress in general and from the point of view of women's liberation in particular, because they delegate self-activity and the responsibility for human action to a power lying outside the human being, they reinforce the sense of powerlessness of humans and thereby limit the possibility of self-determination of humans.

Nor are the religions of the east an exception to this. They are not qualitatively different from those of the west. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam may differ in many respects to Christianity and Judaism, but, like all religions, which are all invented by man in order to justify the existing order of things, their teachings consign women to a subordinate role within society and within the family. Today Islam is in the vanguard of the

counter-revolution against women in North Africa and the Near East. The treatment of women as chattel in Afghanistan, where the bride price is still in force amongst the Islamic rebel tribes, and the eradication of "western" influence on women in Iran's Islamic Republic through the enforced re-introduction of the veil and laws punishing adultery, both indicate the dangers for women that Islam poses. No amount of anti-imperialist rhetoric, no amount of cant about Islam's respect for women, can alter the fact that its practical impact on women's lives is destructive.

Marxists have a clear duty to combat organised religion whilst respecting the right of individuals to freedom of religious belief and worship. We cannot regard religion as simply a private matter. We campaign to break the hold of religious ideology through militant materialist propaganda. We fight the attempt by the churches to control people's private lives by fighting for religion-free sex education, free abortion and contraception on demand for women etc. And we fight to realise the basic *bourgeois* democratic demand of the separation of all churches from all states.

12. The experience of women's oppression is different for women in the different classes. For ruling class and some professional women many aspects of life and work that were previously denied to them—such as management posts, access to the professions etc. are now more open to them. They are also able to buy certain "freedoms" through employing women workers to perform their domestic labour and raise their children. For the women of the top wealth owning families this leaves them free to be as idle as their aristocratic predecessors were.

This does not mean they are equal to the men of their class however. They are still denied many rights in law regarding inheritance and ownership, and their role remains essentially one of subservient wives or daughters, beholden to the male heads of their families. In that sense ruling class women are not excluded from the oppression of their sex. However, they remain part of a non-productive ruling class, and often play a key role in perpetuating the ideology of women's subordination through their work in churches, charities or as members of ruling or royal families upon whom the working class are supposed to model themselves.

The situation of the women of the traditional petit bourgeoisie (handicraft workers, peasants, small family businesses) is entirely different. There is wide variation within this class, but for many social exploitation and sexual oppression coincides with the personal relations between men and women. These women are often directly exploited as employees in the family firm, do the household work for husbands and children. The traditional authoritarian nuclear family structure has maintained itself without encroachment right up to today; the minority of such women face a situation of multiple exploitation and oppression which is mitigated to a small extent by a higher living standard compared with that of the average working class.

For women of the professional middle classes improved access to education, careers and property has allowed a considerable improvement in their lives. In the imperialist countries the availability of better con-

traception and safer abortion allows a degree of control over fertility which enables a career to be combined with a sexual and personal life, which in previous generations were considered mutually exclusive. In addition, those women whose incomes allow them to buy the services of other women to perform their domestic and child care tasks can now combine work with a family life.

But their apparent equality has not emancipated them completely from their oppression. Women are still very under-represented in the higher levels of the professions, promotion prospects are made difficult by the prejudice of male bosses, and careers are not usually flexible enough to allow women to have even short periods of time off to have children and yet maintain their pay and position.

Within the household these "middle class" women are still subjected to domination by their husbands, and may be subject to sexual and physical abuse. Like their truly bourgeois sisters however, their experience of oppression can be offset to a much greater extent than that of most working class women, since they can buy themselves out of much drudgery and even violent situations.

Thus the conditions for the better paid and qualified approach those of the middle class and petit bourgeoisie as far as family structure, ideology, role models and living standards are concerned. At the other extreme, within the lumpenproletariat, within the long term unemployed and the most exploited and most wretched

layers of the working class, prostitution, the break up of the family, violence and criminalisation are daily features of women's oppression. For the great mass of working class women, and this includes many non-professional women who may refer to themselves as middle class because their jobs are not manual (e.g. white collar workers, teachers, nurses etc.), their oppression is experienced in a different way. The majority have to combine work in a factory or office with primary responsibility for the housework and childcare in the home. This double shift can be arduous especially for those women who work a night shift, then come home to work most of the day doing housework and preparing meals. They end up getting inadequate sleep and no relaxation time. Working class women rarely have adequate child care arrangements to meet their needs as workers (unlike the nannies or private nurseries that bourgeois and professional women are able to hire), and their low pay and poor job security means they continue to be economically dependent on their husbands.

Obviously the increasing number of women who receive an independent wage allows some financial independence, but rarely enough to enable a woman to choose to leave her husband if she wishes and continue to keep her children without major finance and housing problems. This is even more the case for women who depend on state benefits, which in all the major imperialist countries are based on a belief that the family unit is one with a male head of household plus dependent wife and children. Hence benefits are often only able to



Peasant woman and child being terrorised by US troops in Vietnam

be claimed by the husband. Single women parents frequently have great difficulty with benefits and housing.

Peasant women, who number millions in the imperialised world, suffer extreme oppression. The idea that a Latin American peasant woman has a fundamental common cause with the women of the world's ruling classes is laughable. The oppression suffered by peasant women, especially poor peasant women, is manifold. In the course of work a peasant woman will be obliged to attend to the crops, to the animals, to the maintenance of the household and the management of its budget and to take the produce of the land she works to the market, sell it and purchase the goods she and her family need to live on. Add to this endless round of chores the functions of child bearing and rearing she performs and we can see clearly the extent of the oppression suffered by the peasant woman. The peasant woman, even more so than the peasantry in general, is indeed the "pack-horse of history".

Working class women are vulnerable to the brutality of violence and sexual abuse against them both in the home and through sexual harassment at work. Whilst sexual and physical abuse is by no means confined to working class women, they are less able to "buy" themselves out of the situation by moving out of the house, leaving their job, using cars etc, which give some security against street attacks.

Of course we do not confuse (though nor do we excuse) the occasional violence that flares up in families because of the tensions of daily life in capitalist society, with the systematic brutality of some men against some women. But, domestic brutality, however terrible for the individuals concerned, must be kept in perspective. It is not an expression of, or means of perpetuating, "male power". It is a product of the frustrations that make daily life under capitalism miserable and unrewarding. It cannot be compared with the systematic use of violence, in particular by many dictatorships in the semi-colonial world, directed against women and men and designed to maintain the power of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie and their imperialist paymasters. In these countries the dictators, not the husbands, are the real perpetrators of systematic violence against women. So, we do not overstate the question of violence against women in the imperialist countries, in the way feminists do, in order to propound the idea that male power exists and is enforced by systematic male violence.

There is nothing inherently male about violence anyway. To suggest there is to concede to the thoroughly reactionary ideology that portrays women as inevitably weak, unresisting passive objects. Women class fighters the world over, from Nicaragua during the revolution against Somoza to Britain during the miners' strike of 1984-85, have shown themselves capable of fighting physically against the real enforcers of their oppression, the capitalists and their states.

13. The relationship between men and women is also different for the working class. The family often remains the last haven for the working class where capitalism is unable to provide, through social provision, the communal support necessary for individuals and particularly dependents. It is also an arena where most social-

ising, support and love is found for working class women and men. It is therefore something which is defended by workers, male and female. Unlike professional and bourgeois women, it is not husbands or working class men in general who are the fundamental origin of their problems. For ruling class women it is their own class which produces their inequality and subordination. It is the obstruction of men which denies them true equality.

But for working class women it is not working class men who are their "enemy". It is the capitalist system, and therefore the ruling class men *and women*, that creates both the exploitation and oppression of working class women. This is demonstrated in the joint struggles of men and women, such as where women in a community are active in building support for a struggle of their husbands (the tin miners in Bolivia and the coal miners in Britain are excellent examples of this unity). For both men and women it is the bosses who are their true enemy.

However, it is true that male workers generally have better pay and working conditions than women. They also benefit from the fact that women do most of the tedious domestic chores, often in addition to waged work. The structure of the family, the male dominance within it and the overwhelmingly sexist ideology which helps perpetuate this situation, lead to men acting in ways which directly oppress women. They deny women control over their combined family lives, they determine how much of their wages are to be used for "housekeeping". In some cases they brutally physically and sexually abuse their wives and other women.

This division within the class weakens its collective strength. It has led to instances of male workers organising to prevent women having access to certain jobs, particularly crafts and other skilled work, and men scabbing on women's strikes over equal pay. These male workers believe that women workers are a threat to their own wages and conditions and therefore they can act as a reactionary obstacle to women. There is no doubt therefore that men do enjoy real material benefits as a result of the oppression of women. However, these benefits are either ephemeral (status as the man of the house), transient (access to certain jobs during certain periods) or, on a historic scale, minor (not having to do as much domestic labour).

Certainly the ideology of male dominance—the "macho identity" that often exists inside the working class and is bolstered by the material privileges that male workers do enjoy and do, on some occasions defend—needs to be constantly combatted by the revolutionary party and the mass proletarian women's movement. However, the material advantages of men do not mean that they exploit women economically. They do not appropriate and control the fruits of women's domestic labour. And as against the relative privileges male workers do enjoy in the home or at work the disadvantages that they face as a result of the social oppression of women are immense. The divisions within the working class that are opened up as a result of the oppression of women weaken the class as a whole and leave it vulnerable to economic, social and political attack from the bosses. The possibility of overthrowing the system that both exploits all workers and socially

oppresses women is retarded by these divisions.

In this sense, then, male benefits are not decisive. They do not mean that men have a historic stake in the oppression of women, any more than the benefits enjoyed by some workers as against others give them a historic stake in capitalism. On the contrary, male workers have a historic interest in overthrowing capitalism, and in so doing destroying the basis for the social oppression of women. They are then, the real strategic allies of working class women in the fight against oppression and exploitation. In fact the working class is weakened by this division, and the ability to collectively struggle to overthrow the system which produces both their exploitation and oppression is weakened.

The gains that working class men will receive from the final liberation of women from the family—the collective responsibility for welfare, freedom in relationships, sexual liberation and the economic gains of socialism—all mean that working class men ultimately draw no decisive benefit from, but rather suffer as a result of, the oppression of women. Their perceived advantages over women leads to individual men, and men collectively in the trades unions, wrongly believing that their situation will be best served by continuing to participate in the oppression of women.

Imperialism and women's oppression

14. From its inception capitalism has been expansionist. It has created a world capitalist economy. But throughout its history it has developed in a combined and uneven way. Colonialism and then imperialism (from the late nineteenth century on) divided the world amongst the great powers, plundering resources and labour, and exploiting the dominated areas—the colonies or semi-colonies—for the benefit of monopoly capital. Through its expansion and domination of the world, imperialist capital destroyed both the existing economies and the social relations of the pre-capitalist modes of production in the imperialised world. It wrecked subsistence agriculture, brought ruin to domestic textile industries, destroyed the systems of obligation and support in peasant villages and undermined feudal and religious authority. But where capitalism "beats down Chinese walls" it also tears apart the social fabric of the old societies, including the family structures, not in order to further progress, but to facilitate the colonial enslavement of the peoples it has conquered.

For women, as for the toiling masses as a whole, these developments created the material conditions for liberation from the often brutal patriarchal family structures that prevailed before the arrival of imperialist capital, yet at the same time deepened and sharpened the exploitation and oppression that they suffered. The introduction of capitalist industry, the invasion of the countryside by capitalism, the loosening of feudal ties, lead to the creation of the working class, the one class capable of ending exploitation, oppression and class society altogether. In the imperialist epoch this road has been opened to the mass of peasant and working women of the colonies and semi-colonies. Subordination to the male head of the family, superstition, igno-

rance and enslavement—the norms of family life for centuries—can be abolished once and for all.

Yet, precisely because we are in the epoch of imperialism the potential for such progress is blocked and indeed prevented altogether in some countries, areas and sectors, by imperialism's reactionary stranglehold. Combined and uneven development has created the material pre-requisites for, and the obstacles to, the liberation of women in the imperialised world. Only revolutions led by the working class and directed towards the destruction of capitalism altogether can utilise those pre-requisites and destroy those obstacles.

15. The role of women in production and reproduction is severely affected by imperialist exploitation. Proletarianisation can mean an endless hell of migrant or landless labouring, or unemployment and a shanty town home for millions of women. For women in the more developed semi-colonies, like South Korea, it can mean super-exploitation while young followed by destitution once your capacity to work has been drained from you as a result of years (often starting when you are aged ten) of long hours and miserable pay. And for millions of other women this process leads inexorably towards prostitution (a vast industry in places like Thailand) or to being exported as a servant/wife (in fact slave) of men in the west (the Filipino brides for sale and the export of young women from Sri Lanka are both sickening examples of this trade in women).

Peasant women are left with a double burden of caring for the household and working the land. Where land is seized or where class differentiation in the countryside leaves the poorest without land, women can be left to fend for the family with no means of support except the hope that some wages will be sent home from a husband working in the city.

Marriages and traditional family structures are destroyed or re-created in forms that intensify the oppression suffered by women. And proletarian women who escape the countryside often find their incomes drained anyway by the need to support the landless family they have left behind. Most frequently though, women drawn into production work for lower rates of pay than men and are often confined to seasonal work. All of this increases the risk of forcing women into prostitution or submission into actual slavery as the only alternatives to starvation.

For those women who remain in the countryside, especially in Africa, the introduction of modern agriculture, and in particular cash crops, has led to women losing control of (matrilineally inherited) land and food production, despite the fact that they still do most of the work. The compulsion to continue working in these adverse conditions is the necessity of producing the means of subsistence for young and old dependents. Previous forms of women's oppression—dowry, bride price, female circumcision, polygamy—are not eradicated by imperialism although their social basis may be undermined. Millions of women, particularly in Africa and in some Islamic countries, suffer clitidectomy or infibulation. Tens of thousands in southern Asia bear the burden of toil in the husband's family household.

The partial destruction of the traditional family structures and obligations can leave women less protected,



Women workers in a São Paulo Volkswagen plant

leading, for example, to such horrors as an increase in bride burning in India. And the advances capitalism does bring, such as education and health, really benefit only a small handful of people in the imperialised world. Women's literacy is still below men's. And, despite medical advances, the mass of women in the semi-colonies have no control over their own fertility at all. In Africa and Asia half a million women die every year in childbirth.

Given these conditions of oppression it is no wonder that women have joined, in their thousands, the struggles against imperialism in the colonies and semi-colonies. In Vietnam, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Angola and Mozambique women have taken up weapons in courageous struggles against the heavily armed imperialist or imperialist backed regimes. Yet time and again the interests of the working class and peasant women have been betrayed by either the petit bourgeois nationalist leaderships who, in power, have been driven to seek a new accord with imperialism, or by the Stalinist leaders whose bureaucratic rule reproduces many of the worst features of capitalist family life.

In some cases, such as Iran, the traditionally subservient role played by women meant that after the revolution against the Shah they were subjected to a fearful counter-revolution at the hands of the mullahs. In other cases women have made real gains, especially in terms of literacy, health care and, sometimes, even democratic rights. However, without the overthrow of capitalism or of the Stalinist rulers of the degenerate workers' states that have emerged from anti-imperialist struggles, all gains made by women will prove temporary, checked, eliminated or made meaningless by continued imperialist exploitation, the demands of the IMF or the needs

of the parasitic bureaucracy presiding over the planned economies.

The willingness of the PDPA in Afghanistan to sacrifice the women's literacy programme as part of its deal with the reactionary Islamic rebels, is but the latest example of the treachery to the cause of women's liberation that Stalinism is capable of. Petit bourgeois nationalism has and will again betray in exactly the same fashion. Only the programme of permanent revolution, in which the achievement of meaningful democratic rights and of a progressive solution to the agrarian question are inseparably linked to the achievement of working class power and socialism, can bring to women the prospect of a successful conclusion to their struggle against oppression.

16. A feature of the early colonial period was the wholesale forcible removal and enslavement of west Africans by European traders and plantation owners in the Americas. Families and communities were literally torn apart. Both the labour power and reproductive capacity were strictly controlled and exploited by the slaveholders. Enslaved women were denied all freedom of choice in sexual and personal relations and, as the property of the owners, systematically raped and abused by them. Enslaved women were almost entirely responsible for the rearing of their children but had no control over their future. Not surprisingly, black women were at the forefront of the battle against slavery in the US.

Slavery has left its mark on the societies it affected. In particular, it contributed to the growth of racism and thus to the triple burden of oppression suffered by black women of the working class in the Americas and in Europe.

The indentured labour system did not produce such extremes of subordination and oppression but it too imposed extra burdens on women who were left responsible for the family without support, when male labour was required by the imperialists.

In the twentieth century, the devastating effect of imperialism on the economies of the semi-colonies has created global migrant labour. Women in this group suffer specific forms of discrimination and a terrible weight of oppression in the "host" countries. Institutionalised racism and general manifestations of racism in the form of national chauvinism, prevent most of these women from benefitting from some of the gains that women in the imperialist heartlands have won within the context of bourgeois democracy. Racism in most cases forces these women to retreat back into the migrant communities. Wherever, for cultural or religious reasons, patriarchal ideology dominates these communities women may then face extra obstacles that prevent them claiming their full democratic rights, participating in the labour movement and struggling against their own oppression. They are therefore unable to take up issues of women's oppression within the working class organisations as a whole. Immigration controls guarantee a subordinate position for immigrant women since they are categorised as dependents of men within the context of marriage. The weight of this oppression and subordination also make it doubly difficult for these women to fight oppression within their own communities and families.

Another effect of immigration controls in imperialist countries is that it keeps thousands of women separated from their partners and therefore neither the country of origin, nor the country where the male is employed accepts responsibility for their welfare.

The weight of oppression, combined with racism within the labour movement and the failure of existing women's movements to fight consistently for the interests of black women, create the conditions in which support for strategies proposed by separatists and black nationalists can grow. These strategies propose the separation of black women's struggles from those of all black workers and the class as a whole.

But black women have, time and again, taken the lead in struggles for unionisation, welfare rights and against racism. This shows the potential for black and other migrant women to fight for a class solution to their own specific oppression

Stalinism and women's oppression

17. In the Soviet Union women remain oppressed, even though it is a workers' state resting on post-capitalist property relations. The central feature of women's oppression—the existence of a separate sphere of domestic labour within the family for which women are largely responsible—remains as prevalent in this degenerated workers' state as it does in the imperialist heartlands. This is not a result of some "natural" basis for women's oppression which is distinct from class society. Rather it reflects the way that the Soviet Union degenerated from a healthy post revolutionary period to its current stagnant condition.

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 had, as a key part of its programme, a commitment to the full liberation of women. Immediately after taking power legal changes were brought about which went further than any bourgeois "democracy" had done before, or since, in abolishing the inequalities of women at the level of political, legal or civil rights. By December 1917 civil registration of marriage and easy and free divorce was granted, abortion was legalised in 1920 and made available, free, in Soviet hospitals. In addition the Bolsheviks attempted to remove the fundamental features of women's oppression in the home. Plans were made for the socialisation of childcare, communal dining facilities, laundries etc. Propaganda encouraging communal living arrangements was disseminated.

In addition a large and active Women's Department (Zhenotdel) was built which drew millions of working class and peasant women into the discussions, decisions and practical work of trying to carry out the programme for liberation. But these plans were never realised on a really serious scale, primarily because the ravages of civil war and famine placed the young regime under enormous economic pressure. Communal canteens were established in the Civil War, not through any great plans to socialise and improve the quality of life, but rather to more efficiently distribute the scarce food supplies. After the war the period of New Economic Policy was introduced which had the effect of creating mass unemployment, with women suffering most of this.

By the mid 1930s the regime had abandoned any vestige of the Bolshevik programme for the socialisation of housework. With the growth of the bureaucracy amidst general scarcities—intensified by the first Five Year plans—the poorly equipped and staffed facilities for childcare, catering and laundry were even further restricted and the emphasis once more placed on private domestic methods of household labour.

For the bureaucratic stratum too domestic servants became common. An intensive hypocritical campaign for the building of the "new family" sought to legitimise the return to domestic slavery as a programmatic goal. Claims that the "socialist family" was based on love alone were dragged through the mud with the introduction of restrictions on love and divorce.

In fact, as Trotsky pointed out, the whole logic of Stalinism was to increase the frequency of "marriages of convenience" as a means of gaining access to privilege or scant resources. The failures of Stalinism to meet the contraception and abortion needs of the mass of women led to the growth of backstreet abortions and loss of life through septic abortion. The bureaucratic response was to illegalise abortion altogether in 1936 rather than provide adequate facilities. Only in 1955 in the context of an epidemic of septic abortion casualties was the law reformed. The dire nature of the Soviet economy has meant that many of the domestic appliances which have reduced the time needed for housework and food preparation for women in many imperialist countries are not available to Soviet women. This, combined with frequent food shortages, can make the experience of the double shift even more oppressive for Soviet women than for many women in the imperialist countries. The net result of this betrayal of the Bolshevik Revolution

has been to discredit socialism in the eyes of the working class of the world, and particularly women workers who see this "communist" society meaning more of the same for them.

The recent "reforms" under Gorbachev, far from involving a renewed attempt to socialise housework and liberate women from domestic drudgery, have been argued for in part, on the basis of strengthening still further the role of the family as a social unit, and pressure is increasingly being put on Soviet women to give up work. The bureaucracy have argued that it is the "de-feminisation" of women through their extensive role in factory and other work, that has been at least partially responsible for many of the ills of society. This reactionary ideology is being pumped out alongside reports of the appalling condition women workers face. The bureaucracy are busy pretending to be acting in the interests of women by encouraging them to stay at home.

18. Even if the ruling bureaucracies of the degenerate workers' states of the world have shown, and continue to show, an active interest in preventing the actual emancipation of women and have proved their own reactionary character through their protection of the family and maintenance of a sex-specific division of labour, the huge steps forward which have been made in these countries in comparison with their pre-revolutionary periods and the present imperialist world cannot be denied. In China and Cuba, for example, women were granted legal rights, and provided with improved health care and social services. Extreme forms of barbaric oppression, such as the sale of women and girls in China, were outlawed by the state.

Notwithstanding this the leading social positions in the party, trade union and other public organisations, remain predominantly the domain of men. Precisely this shows that the involvement of women in public production although it is a precondition for their liberation, is alone not sufficient to secure real liberation and that, in the face of the bureaucracy's mishandling of the economy, all the achievements of women are constantly put in danger. In these countries women's role has remained that of serving the state and society through domestic toil combined with other work as necessary for the regime. The role of the church in Poland, for example, has never been effectively challenged by the Stalinist bureaucracy and it continues to shape the ideological and sexual oppression of women.

Women's liberation and socialism

19. For women to achieve full political, economic and social equality with men, the social and economic basis of their oppression must be destroyed. The existence of the family as a privatised sphere of labour must be abolished. This can only be achieved by the full socialisation of child-rearing and household labour. For this reason we reject Stalinism's idealisation of the "proletarian family" which is in reality a replica of the bourgeois family in which privatised domestic labour is maintained, in this instance in the interests of the bureaucracy. The tasks of providing food, shelter and the

comfort necessary for the reproduction of labour power must be undertaken collectively by society, ending the individual responsibility of each separate family to try and cope. Only when relieved of this domestic slavery can women be drawn into socialised production fully and equally alongside men. However, this socialisation will only have a really socialist character if it is accompanied by the destruction of the gender-specific division of labour (and the corresponding roles) in socialised production. Women will not be the only historical subject for this special transformation, for the conscious dissolution of the bourgeois family and the overcoming of gender-specific forces, but they will be the section of the working class pushing forward this transformation with the greatest energy and determination.

Of course in this struggle women, as an undifferentiated mass, will not act in a uniform fashion to destroy male dominance and the bourgeois family. To believe this would be to collapse into the spontaneist idea that the very fact of oppression will automatically generate uniform resistance amongst the oppressed. In this struggle, as in all others, the vanguard will play a decisive role. The revolutionary party itself, and crucially the women members of the Party, will be in the forefront of this struggle. Communist women will organise the most advanced layers, including non-Party class fighters amongst the working class, especially women, to combat sexism, to fight for equality and to mobilise the whole mass of working women to play their role as the historical subject of socialist transformation and women's emancipation.

These tasks are inseparable from the overthrow of the private ownership of the means of production. Then, and only then, will it be possible on the basis of a planned economy, to systematically eradicate all aspects of women's oppression, legal, economic, social and political. To initiate this process the seizure of state power by the working class, armed and organised into workers' councils and workers' militias, and the suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, is necessary.

Women's subordination and the centrality of the family in everyday life have been features of all previous class societies. The true liberation of women and children from their oppression, plus the transformation of life for everyone under socialism, will require a long and difficult struggle against the ideas and norms of the past. The transformation of the personality, of the psyche, which will be necessary for people to live collectively and co-operatively, will take generations to achieve fully. The deep psychological scars of being raised and then working in a society based on profit, greed and struggle will not disappear overnight. A conscious struggle for change will be required for many years. But with the material basis for collectivity established through the creation of a workers' state, planning for need and not profit, the destruction of the lonely prison of the privatised household, the "struggle" for the new psyche, for the new, truly human being and for really liberated sexual relationships, will be possible.

In 1848 Marx and Engels raised the demand for the abolition of the bourgeois family. In Russia after October 1917, it became clear that the family relations built up by capitalism could not, however, be abolished in one stroke. The workers' state created the economic



basis upon which domestic labour could be socialised (though Stalinism has thwarted the realisation of this gain as it has so many others). By socialising many aspects of domestic labour the workers' state does not immediately abolish the bourgeois family, but provides the means by which women could free themselves from the family prison and from privatised labour.

To the extent that this process of socialisation (through communal child rearing, cleaning and eating facilities) is successful the basis for the "old" family inherited from capitalism is eradicated. In this sense the "old" family, like the state itself will wither away with the advance towards communism. However, just as we will not be drawn into predicting, in a utopian fashion, the nature of sexual relations under communism, we will not be drawn on painting a picture of what the "family" will look like under communism either.

The bourgeois family will disappear. What will replace it is something that people of the future will determine, free from the material and ideological constraints that characterise (and torment) familial relations under capitalism. By the same token the conditions for real sexual liberation, in which people are at free to determine their own sexuality, will be created.

20. The role of women in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism is essential. As part of the working class women must be involved in the struggle for power. Women all over the world have demonstrated their capacity for struggle. Indeed it is often the case that women workers, faced with the severe problems of managing a family and working, are an explosive force within the class struggle (Russia in February 1917 for example).

Moreover because women are often unorganised, or only recently organised, they can, for a period of time, combine explosive militancy with freedom from bureaucratic rules and regulations that characterise the "normal" trade union routine. Precisely because of the burdens and tasks that our bound up with housework and child-rearing, independent women's organisations such as (housewives) women's price control and food distribution committees, play a decisive role, as part of a proletarian women's movement, in the establishment of organs of workers' power in pre-revolutionary and

revolutionary periods. Failure to positively win working class women to the struggle can leave them prey to the arguments of the ruling class and allow them to act as a backward force within the working class. As the people most centrally involved in the raising of children, the provision of daily needs and as the primary "home-makers", women's experience and contribution will be vital in the planning of social provision for these tasks.

Working class women are central to the struggle for the emancipation of both women and the working class—they are the most oppressed section of their sex. Amongst women they have the most radical interest in the overthrow of their oppression in capitalism. The achievement of equal rights and opportunities, or utopian schemes for individual sexual and psychological liberation, will not satisfy the fundamental needs of proletarian women. Within the working class they have no aristocratic privileges: they are comparatively less skilled and do not have high wages that might serve to reconcile them to capitalism.

All too often, though, the best organised women workers are misled by reformist trade union leaders, who have themselves made their peace with capitalism. This, plus the traditional backwardness of many women due to their isolation in the home, prey to the ideas of the mass media and the church, indicates that intense oppression and exploitation are not sufficient on their own to throw women into the leadership of the struggle for liberation. This remains true even in the semi-colonies where the oppression of women workers and peasants is even more acute than in the imperialist countries.

However, the working class is the first exploited class capable of ending all exploitation. This is not simply because it is the most exploited and oppressed class, but because capitalism itself organised it at the centre of socialised production, enabling it to become conscious of itself as a class, to organise itself against the capitalists, to overthrow them and to re-organise production. Women form part of the working class with precisely this potential. Though capitalism has never been able to draw all proletarian women into production, women do form a vital component of the workforce and it is this section, partially released from the stultifying effects of

domestic isolation, which can act as the vanguard of all proletarian women.

Feminism

21. The term feminism describes the ideas and practices of both the modern Women's Liberation Movement (of the 1960s and 1970s) and of liberal women's rights campaigners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fundamental to the followers of these movements is the idea that the struggle for women's rights can be distinct from the fight against other inequalities, exploitation and manifestations of oppression. That is, that there is a separate "woman question", equally affecting all women regardless of their class and solvable by all women acting together, regardless of their class. This notion of a separate woman question, separate from the class struggle, is the unifying feature of all brands of feminism. Marxists, however, believe that the origins, continuation and precise forms of women's oppression are inseparably linked to class society. Since class society and women's oppression are inextricably bound together there can be no separate woman question, and therefore no distinct sphere of struggle.

The nature of feminism, although riven by splits arising from competing theories and practices, is to separate off into a distinct sphere those issues which relate to women. This does not mean that all feminists reject the issues concerning class exploitation and imperialist oppression, but their theories, and most centrally their programme for liberation, do not link the various struggles in a coherent fashion. Feminism is therefore unable to provide a revolutionary challenge to women's oppression. In attempting to provide a strategy for women's equality or liberation without a strategy for working class power, feminism remains a utopian ideology.

22. The bourgeois democratic revolutions raised the expectations of sections of the liberal bourgeoisie and intelligentsia for true equality. This was extended to women's rights and formed the stimulus for the bourgeois women's movement. The first impressive examples of this were the women's rights campaigners, under Olympe de Gouges, who, at the height of the French Revolution, demanded full juridical and political equality for all women and, as a consequence, were sent to the scaffold by the Jacobin dictatorship.

In the 1830s and 1840s this suppressed tradition of a radical-democratic women's movement allied itself with the developing labour movement as in the case of Flora Tristan and her Saint Simonian comrades. The bourgeois women's movement achieved mass influence in the 1880s and 1890s, especially in Britain, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, around women's suffrage campaigns. Despite the determination and militancy shown by the suffragettes, which brought down on them the most brutal repression from the bourgeois state, and despite the achievement of partial gains and suffrage reforms around the turn of the century, this bourgeois women's movement refused, because of its own bourgeois democratic limitations to attack the actual social roots of women's oppression.

Although these movements put forward a historically progressive set of demands, there was a contradiction between the class interests of these women, and their aspirations for sexual equality which could not be fully achieved under capitalism. Simple demands for equal rights—women's suffrage, access to education and the professions, property and divorce rights—were often militantly fought for, but the movements led by bourgeois women could never get beyond the struggle for a reform programme.

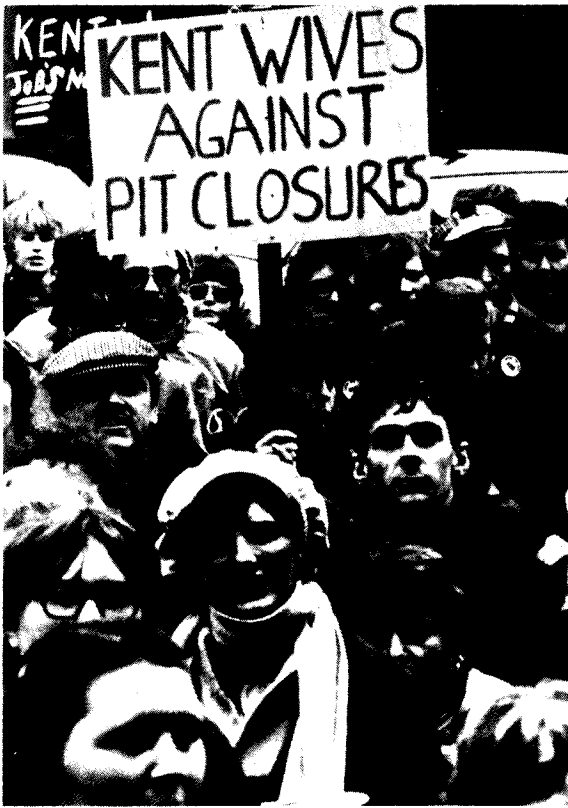
Such a programme inevitably stopped well short of tackling the real roots of women's social oppression, namely capitalist society itself. As such it was in no sense a programme for the emancipation of women. The avowed aim of improved rights for all women would destabilise the capitalist system from which bourgeois women gain their class privileges, even though these are less than those of their male counterparts. This contradiction led to the bourgeois women's movement splitting at key moments in history.

For example at the outbreak of the First World War a few women, such as Sylvia Pankhurst, were won to the side of the working class, whilst others, including Emily and Christabel Pankhurst, demonstrated that their class interests were dominant and leapt to support their "fatherland", dropping their feminist demands for the duration of the imperialist war. They were prepared to sacrifice the rights of the great mass of women to suffrage in return for sops from the capitalists that granted political rights to petit bourgeois and bourgeois women based on property qualifications.

So, in decisive historical situations the bourgeois women's movement split or, as in the case of the German women's movement, went over as a whole to defence of the fatherland. Worse still, it was characteristic of the bourgeois women's movement that it itself formed a feminist form of class collaboration which leading women's rights campaigners certainly used to demand voting rights—but for women of the ruling class, not a general right for women of all classes. They also counterposed to the paternalism of individual employers a feminist programme of social reform and guardianship for the women of the "poor and uneducated" classes. With the achievement of women's suffrage and other equal rights for women in the imperialist countries, the bourgeois women's movement in most cases faded from the political scene, the most right wing elements in Germany later going over to National Socialism.

The danger of bourgeois feminism for the working class was its attempt to incorporate all women into its ranks in the struggle for equal rights. In suffrage societies this often meant working class women being used as supporters for the campaigns for suffrage for women with property. The linking of working class women to the bourgeois women's movement was a form of class collaboration which undermines the independence of working class women struggling for their own rights. Socialist women's movements have always been in sharp opposition to the attempts of bourgeois women to utilise their proletarian "sisters" for their own aims.

In addition to the dangers of class collaboration the demands of the bourgeois feminists were in some cases used to attack the working class. In particular in the



Miners' wives demonstrating in Britain, 1984

USA the demands for equal white women's suffrage was argued for by the leading feminists on the basis that black men had no right to a vote that the white daughters of the bourgeoisie did not have. Their racism, and the support many of their leaders had given to the continuation of slavery, made them clear enemies of the working class.

23. The second major phase of feminism emerged in the late 1960s and formed the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in the USA and western Europe which continued into the 1970s. The movements emerged as a result of the dramatic change in the material condition of women which had occurred since the Second World War. The expansion of education and increasing employment opportunities for women in the long post-war boom led to a large number of women entering higher education and professional or white collar jobs. Improved contraception methods and better provision of abortion alongside this expansion of opportunities led to an increasing expectation by many of these women for equal rights. The clear discrimination against women in education and employment, plus the social isolation they found when they left work to look after young families, were a stimulus to them to fight their oppression.

The militancy of the working class, particularly in May 1968, plus the radicalisation of students and youth through the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA, the Vietnam solidarity campaigns in the USA and western Europe acted as a spur to the mobilisation of women. Women workers took up their own demands for equal pay and improved conditions, union rights contraception and abortion rights, and women in the radical movements and in the organisations of the old and new left rebelled first against the sexism of their male "comrades", and later took up their own demands for equality and liberation.

The WLM which grew in this period, unlike the first phase of feminism was, in political terms, petit bourgeois in character. It derived this character from its mass base amongst women of the intelligentsia, the upper

white collar sections of the proletariat and students.

The composition of this new women's movement was a fragmented reflection of the political traditions and contemporary strengths of the workers' movements of the different countries. Likewise, the intensity of the class struggles influenced the direction and content of their interventions. In the USA where the WLM grew first, there was a strong bourgeois element around the National Organisation of Women which was similar in composition, aims and methods to the early bourgeois feminists. In those parts of western Europe, where there were stronger organised labour movements, important sections of the WLM identified with the working class movement.

The major influences in the early WLM were the radical feminists of the USA, around groups such as the New York Red Stockings. These groups, in western Europe and the USA, were radical and militant, making a significant impact on the media and labour movement which had for so long ignored the question of women's oppression. Combined with pressure from organised women workers for equal pay, childcare etc, there is no doubt that the early WLM made an important contribution to raising the question of women's liberation to the fore. In the face of the dominant sexism in the labour movement the organisation and mobilisation of women certainly represented a limited step forward. But based as they were on a false ideology, feminism, they were unable to achieve fundamental changes in the position of women in society.

Since the ability of the bosses to grant limited reforms to women depended upon the fortunes of the economy, the end of the post-war boom and the onset of recession forced the most progressive sections of the women's liberation movement to realise that they were fighting, not simply prejudice, but the whole nature of capitalist society. Attempts to develop a theory and programme to deal with such fundamental questions led to major splits and divisions within the movement.

The feminism on the 1980s has its origins in these early splits, primarily from radical and socialist feminism, but increasingly a strand of liberal feminism has emerged.

24. Radical feminism emerged as a coherent and influential force as the WLM itself began to come up against the limits of its own programme and organisation. It is based on attempts to theoretically define women as a distinct oppressed and exploited caste or class who should organise separately in opposition to their class enemy—men. This is a consciously anti-Marxist approach which identifies working class men as enemies and bourgeois women as allies in the struggle for women's liberation. There are various theoretical strands of radical feminism, but they are united by a concept of patriarchy as the underlying system of oppression, more fundamental than class relations.

Male power is at the root of women's oppression, according to radical feminism, and it is exercised against women through the state, the family and through individual relations between men and women. The violence of men against women is the method by which men keep women subordinated and is therefore a central issue, leading to these groups concentrating on

campaigns against rape and male violence. In the 1980s this has been extended from individual male violence to a concentration on military targets. Nuclear weapons are seen as the most extreme example of male power, and radical feminists have set up peace camps and campaigns.

Radical feminism is essentially a petit bourgeois ideology which has profoundly reactionary positions on certain questions. Firstly in arguing that men are the enemy it necessarily opposes any working class unity in the face of the bosses. This has led to the exclusion of men from any WLM events, and in some groups to the exclusion of heterosexual women who were seen as collaborating with the enemy. In some groups it even led to the refusal to allow male children into their creches!

Secondly, their concentration on male power, violence and sexuality has led many radical feminists to side with right wing pressure groups in campaigns against pornography, sex shops and cinemas. They became part of a repressive lobby which encourages the state to ban films and books and harass people whose sexuality they disagree with. Needless to say lesbian and gay publications proved to be one of the main targets of the state's anti-pornography legislation in Britain and the USA.

Thirdly, certain radical feminists argue that women should be given wages for housework, since they see the family as the place where men exploit the labour of women. This is a backward slogan which does not lead to the economic independence of women through being drawn into social production, but to the reinforcement of the capitalist ideology which teaches that home is a distinct women's sphere.

25. Socialist feminism emerged as a specific current within the western women's movements during the 1970s, in response to radical feminism. It was a small tendency in the USA reflecting the weakness of the organised labour movement, but more influential in Britain, Italy, Holland and France. Many women in the WLM had been influenced by, and had participated in, the upsurge in working class women's activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was especially true in Britain. Women from left groups in particular entered the WLM, either as individuals or in organised tendencies.

They found themselves facing radical feminist opposition to any orientation to the "male dominated" labour movement, and were unable to answer the radical feminist charges that Marxism could not explain women's oppression and that existing left organisations within social democracy, Stalinism and centrism had an appalling record on the woman question. In fact it was not surprising that the left's record was so bad. The revolutionary communist position on the woman question and work amongst women had been first decisively developed in the Marxist classics of the nineteenth century and the healthy Comintern up to 1923. However, the rise of Stalinism and the domination of the working class movement by Stalinism and social democracy from the late 1920s onwards ensured that this position was buried.

After the war the groups claiming to be Trotskyist had not succeeded in reproducing the theoretical under-

standing of, and programme for, the woman question, let alone refining and developing either for the post war period. The International Committee tradition, and in Britain the Cliffite tradition, initially had a purely economic response to the problems posed for revolutionaries by the rise of the WLM. They downplayed the woman question altogether, posing women's issues in exclusively trade unionist terms.

The WLM, having been characterised as petit bourgeois (a correct class appraisal but hardly the last word on the subject—after all other petit bourgeois movements, especially national ones, were being cheered to the echo by these same groups), were simply dismissed. Socialist feminism emerged in this climate. The result was that certain sections of the centrist left, especially the USFI who sensed yet another new vanguard in the making, began to consciously adapt their politics to the socialist feminist movement.

The socialist feminists have developed a range of theoretical positions which attempt to link a Marxist understanding of history and class with what they see as a feminist understanding of women's oppression. These theories have failed for a number of reasons. Firstly, they all agree that Marx's political economy is "sex-blind" and cannot explain the economic relationship of women to production and reproduction.

The fact that Marx never explored this relationship explicitly in his writings does not mean that his categories and methods are useless on the issue. Marx's historical materialism gives us the tools, as it did to Engels, to understand women's oppression in the context of the struggle of classes, explaining the social relations within which women are oppressed in terms of their relationship to the mode of production.

Socialist feminist theories have tried to graft onto Marx other categories dealing with "modes of reproduction", which are relatively autonomous from the mode of production.

These theories, varying greatly in their sophistication and understanding of Marx, all lead towards a conclusion whereby there is something separate about the dynamic of women's oppression, a dynamic which goes beyond the fundamental class antagonisms which Marx outlined. It is this conclusion which is false. It leads socialist feminists to theoretically justify their practice, which separates off a "woman question" into a distinct sphere.

A second, and related, weakness is that most socialist feminists share with radical feminism the notion of patriarchy—structures and ideas, autonomous from the particular class society which reproduce male domination—as something different from the relations of ruling class and its state. Central to this is the idea that the family is the social unit within which women are oppressed directly by fathers, husbands or other male relatives, with the implication that they enjoy a class superiority over women.

This is fundamentally wrong. Like radical feminism this theory ends up targeting men, regardless of their class, as the enemy. We argue that the family is a social relation necessary for capitalism and it is only the capitalists who really benefit from maintaining the family. It is for this reason that we reject the idea that "patriarchy" exists as a social relation within each individual family

and is root cause of women's oppression. We do not totally reject the notion of patriarchy, however.

The family structure, with a male head dominating women and children within it, is patriarchal, and gives men prestige within the family and society. In previous class societies this family structure was based on an actual economic relation whereby male heads of families controlled the product of the labour of women and children. For the mass of serf or peasant labourers this control did not give men any great advantages, since any surplus product was appropriated by the ruling lords and landowners. But within the family it gave men power to regulate the labour of their wives and children, and with this social domination.

Many socialist feminist theories fail to understand the working class family under capitalism because they have not seen the transformation of the role of that family. Their notion of patriarchy within the family is a-historical, because they regard this as a constant structure of oppression alongside the historical development of class society and ignore the changed social function of the family and male dominance in the working class.

Thus socialist feminism does not represent a qualitative break with the errors of radical feminism, and remains tied to a utopian, and ultimately reformist, programme. Since socialist feminism shares radical feminism's notion of a separate dynamic to the question of women's oppression, the terrain upon which they concentrate their demands and struggles is also shared. They have been most active around questions related to male violence, sexuality and fertility. Within the labour movement they have been raising issues of sexism, action programmes for women in the unions and workplace, and campaigns for men to take more responsibility for housework and childcare.

Whilst all of these are issues which revolutionaries must take up, socialist feminists in fact avoid the fundamental problem facing women: capitalism. They also reject the idea that working class women must be in the vanguard of a struggle for women's liberation, preferring to retain their alliances with radical feminists and petit bourgeois or bourgeois allies in a cross-class women's movement. Socialist feminists have argued that male workers are not a natural ally of working class women. Rather they are a group who, whilst oppressing women, are a major part of the only class which has the potential to create the economic prerequisites for women's liberation, i.e. socialism. They argue, therefore, that male workers are a temporary ally in some struggles but will ultimately become a force women have to organise against.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), at the forefront of the struggle to bring feminism into the socialist movement rather than revolutionary politics into the women's movement, argued in the 1970s that women were a natural ally of the working class. By this they meant *all* women. This is an incorrect and misleading notion which deflects from the problem of clear conflicting class interests between bourgeois and proletarian women. It is working class men, not enemy bourgeois "sisters", who are the "natural" allies of working class women in the sense that they share an objective interest and can subjectively recognise this in the course of struggle.

26. Just as the bourgeois revolution and the advent of industrial capitalism propelled women in the western world into campaigning for female emancipation, so the impact of imperialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the growth of nationalist movements in these continents, propelled women in these countries into a battle against reaction, obscurantism and social oppression.

Modernisation—industrialisation and the transformation of infrastructures and of agriculture—became a central plank of the programme of various bourgeois nationalist movements and of many national bourgeoisies in the semi-colonies. The extension of education, bourgeois democratic rights and, as part of this, more rights for women, were a necessary component of the bourgeois nationalist programme for modernisation.

If the new ruling classes were to educate their own next generation they needed educated women and families based on western monogamy. It was also the case that religious and cultural traditions could hold back progress in the countryside and prevent the freeing of female labour there which the developing industries needed.

Progressive women's organisations as far apart as Egypt, Korea and South Africa grew as part of the modern nationalist movements. Some nationalist governments such as Ataturk's in Turkey and Sun Yat Sen's in China spearheaded a drive against the particularly vicious subjugation of women that had been a feature of life in the Ottoman Empire and imperial China. Early feminist movements in the colonies and semi-colonies thus found more support, relatively speaking, from sections of the nationalist bourgeoisie, than their sisters in the west found from the imperialist ruling classes.

But this support had definite limits. First, there have been times and places where nationalism has gone hand in hand with profound reaction on the woman question (Islamic Fundamentalism in Iran and other parts of the Middle East is a recent example, but nationalists in the 1920s were equally capable of turning on women's rights, as they were every gain made by the masses in the anti-imperialist struggle).

Second, for the new ruling classes of the semi-colonies, limited emancipation and the establishment of western style monogamy were enough for their purposes. A free and independent womanhood would be a threat to the established order which they now presided over and to the institution of the family. In these cases feminist movements either died out after the achievement of independence or maintained a tenuous existence until a new generation of women were able to take up the unsolved questions.





For the most part bourgeois feminism in the colonies and semi-colonies mirrored western feminism in paying little attention to the needs of the great mass of working class, urban poor or peasant women. Where they were paid attention, their independent interests would be subsumed within the general bourgeois reforming programme. The Comintern in the early 1920s, made a determined effort, through the establishment of the Communist Women's International, to bring working class and communist leadership to the progressive women's organisations of the east and to rouse working class and peasant women independently of the bourgeoisie. With the degeneration of the Comintern from the mid-1920s however, these efforts ceased and many of the gains were lost.

Nevertheless the specific interests of working class and peasant women, and their understanding that imperialist domination was placing ever greater burdens on them, led to the participation of substantial numbers of these women in anti-imperialist movements that developed during and after World War Two, including in the armed struggle, for instance in China, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. At the same time, these women challenged their traditional subordinate roles or sought to preserve and extend their independence as capital uprooted the peasant family and placed ever increasing burdens on their shoulders. The spread of socialist and Marxist ideas within such anti-imperialist movements encouraged the demands for equality and the organisation of women. But the hegemony of Stalinism and the programme of petit bourgeois nationalism has led to these movements being tied to either the new ruling bureaucracies, or the new bourgeois governments such as in Zimbabwe.

Today women's organisations of a cultural, political or welfare-providing character exist in every country of the globe. Women play a crucial role in the life and

leadership of the working class in the barrios, shanty towns and workplaces of the imperialised world. Western feminism is often viewed with suspicion. Its preoccupation with lifestyles seems light years away from the daily struggles for existence confronting the majority of the world's women. But this does not mean that feminism does not exist or is not influential. Working class and peasant women are taking up, not only the fight against poverty and exploitation, but also the battles against "machismo", dowry deaths, the seizure of land held by women and sexual brutality. Where feminism, with its theory of a separate or parallel struggle against patriarchy and its strategy of a cross class women's movement can appear to provide the answer to these problems it will continue to grow until communist leadership provides an alternative to it.

Feminism in the 1980s

27. Towards the end of the 1970s and right through the 1980s feminism moved into increasingly defensive struggles. Following the defeats of the workers' movement that occurred in western Europe and the USA they turned away from pseudo-revolutionary strategies—whether socialist or radical—towards reformist ones. Amongst the radical feminists anti-pornography campaigns became crucial and were centred on fighting lengthy and elaborate court battles. Amongst the socialist feminists there was a major turn towards the social democratic parties and even to some extent, in the USA, the openly bourgeois Democratic Party.

Women's units became part and parcel of the various social democratic local and national government apparatuses. Cadres from the WLM became well known leading activists inside the reformist parties. The radical demands for "liberation" were hushed up as women's

movement activists put their university degrees to work in "women's studies" departments, government "equality" units or feminist publishing houses. The growth of such political areas showed that the state had been forced to take up the issues of women's rights in a greater way than ever before. In all the major (and many minor) imperialist countries state agencies, education departments and most of the major bourgeois parties began to openly address the issues of improved opportunities for women.

This development is no doubt in part due to the lobbying of women from the WLM and other organisations such as trade unions, but it would be wrong to assign all the credit to the feminist movement. In fact these developments reflect the actual changing role of women in society, with increasing numbers of women working and better control over fertility allowing women to play a more central role at all levels of society, whilst continuing their family role. The expansion of state provision of health care, welfare and other facilities drew women into work and gave them greater opportunities to participate in education, politics and other social activities.

Whilst the WLM undoubtedly influenced the way in which women were drawn into state administration and political life, the tendency occurred even where there was little or no organised feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In Sweden there was a tiny WLM, although reformist women's groups had remained in existence since "first wave" feminism. Yet it is in Sweden where women have had the highest involvement in public life—28% of members of parliament in 1984, compared with 3.5% in Britain, 5.9% in France and 7.9% in Italy (1983), all of which had much larger WLMs.

The expansion of women's involvement in the state and other arenas has drawn many feminists (particularly from the socialist feminist camp) into mainstream politics, away from their consciousness-raising, alternative lifestyle building of the 1970s. This has included a significant increase in bureaucratic women's posts in the trade unions which have attracted many socialist feminists. Likewise women have been drawn into local state administration. In these latter posts the chronic limitations of the feminists and their utopian strategies are most sharply revealed: no end of women's units, equal opportunities programmes or women's studies courses have significantly altered the position of working class women. Welfare agencies such as women's refuges and rape crisis centres have provided temporary respite for some women from the extremes of brutality, but resources pumped into these areas will never solve the underlying problem.

As feminists get drawn into state administration they can, at best, help patch up the worst examples of women's oppression, but as capitalism's crises intensify even these small gains are threatened. At worst, and most commonly, feminists in government positions become advocates for bourgeois politics, albeit with a "pro-woman" facade. "Feminist" incomes policies (take from the male workers to pay the women better), "men out first" solutions to unemployment—are demonstrations of the ultimate problem with all variations of feminism; a programme which, since it fails to address the question of capitalism, fails to put forward a

strategy for working class unity in the face of the bosses' offensive, ends up being a liberal camouflage for bourgeois politics.

The current period of capitalist crises makes the tasks of building a revolutionary party capable of leading the working class, men and women, to power an urgent necessity. Winning women away from the false ideas of feminism is an essential part of the building of that party.

Working class women's movements and the revolutionary party

28. There is a tradition of organising women that does not belong to the feminist movement. Women workers have organised themselves in the course of many struggles over the last one hundred years, and the socialist movement played a central role in the most important examples of such organisation which occurred independently, and generally in opposition to, bourgeois women's movements.

Before World War One the Second International, and its unofficial leading party the SPD, organised working class women into an explicitly socialist women's movement. This was led by left wing members of the SPD including Clara Zetkin who played a central role in both the German women's movement and the International Socialist Women's organisation. Initially women were not allowed to be members of the SPD because of the repressive laws in Germany at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This led to Zetkin organising a network of women through a semi-legal parallel structure to that of the SPD.

Whilst forced separation like this made it difficult for women to play a full and active role in the main party, it did allow them to struggle for their own demands, and organise themselves in ways which made it easier for new women to be drawn into politics. Once the laws in Germany were relaxed and women allowed to be members of political parties there was no longer a reason for a women's organisation simply as a surrogate for party membership for socialist women. Yet Zetkin fought successfully to retain and expand the women's movement for by that time she and other party leaders, both men and women, had realised the importance of special forms of organisation and propaganda aimed at women.

This did not mean that Zetkin founded a socialist women's organisation politically and organisationally divorced from the party. Rather what she fought for was a special organisation led by party members to draw women out of the backwardness, passivity and low level of culture imposed on them by their age-long oppression and maintained by capitalist exploitation.

Zetkin also learned in struggle that it was not only women who were "backward". Because the women's movement and its principal leaders stood on the revolutionary left of the SPD, as the party came to be dominated by party and trade union bureaucrats in the years before the First World War, the increasingly reformist leadership sought to subordinate it to their control and at the same time to dilute its radicalism by turning it into a mass social organisation for the wives of male party

members, undermining its political character and orientation to women workers' struggles. Zetkin and the other women around the paper *Die Gleichheit* continued their revolutionary struggle against the right wing in the workers' movement and its indifference to the full emancipation of women.

This did not mean that Zetkin was in favour of separate socialist women's organisations. She always argued for women to be full members of the Socialist, and later the Communist Parties. The special oppression and exploitation to which women were subjected, the backwardness and illiteracy of many working women and the discrimination and underestimation which they experienced even in the SPD in respect of their demands, made it necessary for them to have special methods of work, pioneered by Zetkin (their own press, special meetings and special forms of organisation). On important questions, such as voting rights in Germany and Austria, the right wing of the Social Democratic leadership was prepared to sacrifice women's demands for the good of a compromise with the rulers. This expressed both the growing bureaucratic reformism and, equally, the historically determined lack of analysis of women's oppression and absence of a revolutionary women's programme. Although even Clara Zetkin was not free of these weaknesses it was she who fought against the giving up of the demand for women's voting rights.

The tradition of the German Socialist Women's movement, always in sharp opposition to the bourgeois feminists, is a valuable lesson for us. Attempts to build such movements in other countries were less successful but still important, for example the united attempts of Bolshevik and Menshevik women, such as Alexandra Kollontai, to build a movement of women workers in Russia in the period 1905-7. These attempts were encouraged by the International Women's Bureau. This, being led by left Social Democrats like Zetkin, played an important role at the outbreak of World War One in trying to rally an international opposition to the chauvinist betrayal of the leaders of the Second International.

29. After the betrayal of the working class by the Second International in 1914 the struggle for the foundation of what was to become the Communist International, began. The defence of a revolutionary position on women was no less important than the many other issues taken up by the Bolsheviks and left wing of Social Democracy. The 1917 Revolution in Russia involved large mobilisations of. The February Revolution actually began with strikes and demonstrations of working class women in Petrograd on International Women's Day.

The Bolsheviks had been doing work amongst women in this period, but it was between February and October that they really tried to build a mass movement of working class women. After, to some extent stormy, internal discussions they set up a Bolshevik women's bureau to lead this work. After the revolution this was transformed into the Zhenotdel (women's departments). The movement of women that the Bolsheviks built was communist-led, but directed its efforts towards drawing non-Party women into joint activity

with them. This included special conferences for working women, special representatives of factory and peasant women on local committees and state organisations.

This movement was not "separate" in the sense of being autonomous (it was led by Bolshevik women), although it did allow women workers to participate in conferences, adopting resolutions etc, which were sent to the Soviet government. Neither was it an attempt to lead women into a distinct area of struggle. It had two main aims which Alexandra Kollontai, Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks were clear about. It was to draw women into the Party and the tasks of building socialism through their own direct participation in work, soviets and the state.

Special forms of work, organisation and propaganda were necessary to achieve this because the women were backward, isolated in the family, and often had to unite with other women to overcome the sexist reaction of the men around them who would rather their wives and daughters had left the politics up to them.

The women's movement was also necessary to express the interests of women, to ensure that they were taken up by the Soviet leadership. Neither of these reasons led to the need for a separate organisation, since at all times it was thoroughly integrated into the Party, the unions and the Soviets. As Lenin argued, "This is not bourgeois 'feminism'; it is a practical revolutionary expediency."

The transition to NEP in 1921 which Lenin recognised as a necessary retreat for the young workers' state led to a heavy defeat for women. They were the first to lose their jobs and the socialisation of housework was postponed. On the one hand this was the result of the objective economic backwardness of Russia, on the other it was made easier by a serious gap in the programme and, above all the mass agitation, of the Bolsheviks in pursuit of women's emancipation (e.g. the underestimation of gender-specific division of labour, lack of criticism of sexual oppression).

The Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 adopted theses on "Methods and forms of work among Communist Party women". They outlined the key positions on how national sections should organise and build departments for work among women. This included all the key tactics used by the Bolsheviks and the German socialist women's movement. They urged sections to do special work among women in the unions, workplaces, communities etc. This, had it been carried out by the sections, would have led to the kind of mass communist women's movement which developed in the Soviet union. The theses offer a correct perspective for work in a period when there were mass communist parties in a position to win the vanguard of the working class, men and women, to their banner through mass work.

Trotsky kept alive, just, this revolutionary perspective on work amongst women. He noted and opposed the process of Thermidor in the family in the USSR and argued for the defence of those rights to abortion, easy divorce and soon, that were won by the revolution and betrayed by Stalin. However, the struggle of the Left Opposition, and of Trotsky, against the bureaucratic counter-revolution, which advanced even in the areas of family life, sexual morality and women's rights, did

not sufficiently integrate these issues into their overall programme. Thus even though Trotsky was one of the first to warn of the reactionary effects of the Soviet bureaucracy, the Fourth International was too weak and too isolated to be able to undertake an actual further development of the programme, though its founding document, *The Transitional Programme*, in stark contrast to the programmes of the Stalinists and social democrats, raised the slogan "open the door to the woman worker".

With the post war degeneration of the FI into centrism it was inevitable that the revolutionary position on the woman question held to by Trotsky, should be dumped along with his revolutionary programme in relation to Stalinism and social democracy. While the occasional document was penned on the woman question little or nothing of note was added to the arsenal of Marxism on this question by the FI.

A further contribution, which should not be underestimated, was made by the Sex-Pol movement under Wilhelm Reich in the early 1930s in Germany and Austria. Reich attempted to build a sexual-revolutionary movement, based primarily on women and youth, within the context of the revolutionary workers' movement, using the methods of psychoanalysis. At first it had some success but was soon discontinued by the Stalinist leadership of the KPD. Whilst Reich was right to see sexual misery/deprivation as an important area for communist mass propaganda and showed some interesting inter-connections between the social oppression of sexuality and susceptibility to reactionary ideologies, his initiative was, nonetheless, limited.

Reich overestimated the contribution of sexual repression to the development of false consciousness within the working class and underestimated the extent to which false consciousness is based on the very nature of the wage labour form. He overlooked the decisive significance of the united front as a tactic against reformism and over-emphasised sexual enlightenment. In addition he stood for a normative heterosexual genitality which characterised departures from this norm as deviant forms of orgasm and pathological forms of sexuality.

30. It is to the tradition of the German and Russian revolutionary working class women's movements and of Trotsky and the early FI's defence of the revolutionary position on the woman question that we look, and which we seek to develop. Not because we slavishly copy their positions and actions, but because they represent an invaluable experience of working class women's leadership in the struggle for the emancipation of women. It is also necessary to re-assert the Marxist positions developed in those periods, against the capitulation of social democracy and Stalinism to bourgeois positions on women.

We fight today for the building of a mass movement of working class women, based in the workplaces, the unions and the working class communities. Like the movements in Germany and Russia, such a movement would not be separated off, but rooted in the mass organisations of the working class. Its fighting strategy must not be restricted to economic issues alone, or to the sectional interests of "working women" alone. Its pro-

gramme must be one of struggle against all aspects of the oppression of women under capitalism—against all attacks on abortion and contraception rights, against the physical violence suffered by women, against all the effects of capitalism in crisis such as low wages, job insecurity, rising rents and prices, health service cuts etc. A working class women's movement would give a lead in these struggles.

Within such a movement revolutionary communists would fight for their programme and for leadership against the reformists, feminists and centrists. Revolutionaries would fight to win women to membership of the Party in order that they are fused in struggle with the overall struggles of the working class.

To those who say that a movement of working class women would divide the working class and lead to separatism and bourgeois feminism rather than revolutionary struggle, we reply: firstly, the class is already divided along sex lines by the fact of the oppression of women which leads to the privileges many male workers actively defend (by such methods as excluding women from certain craft unions), and the sexism which pervades the class. In these conditions for women to participate fully and equally in the labour movement, they will have to fight for their voices to be heard, for their participation to be taken seriously and for the class as a whole to take up the demands of women.

Secondly, a working class women's movement is necessary to reach women who are trapped in the family and outside social production and thus are prey to backward ideas and form a potential pool of support for reaction. Thirdly, whatever we may argue as revolutionary communists, working class women's movements will emerge spontaneously in the course of struggles.

In country after country, working class women find themselves thrust into political activity and leadership in the townships, democratic movements and trade unions with a tendency to form their own organisations. They have formed sections and caucuses in the unions and create equal pay and pro-abortion campaigns. They have formed women's organisations to support male workers in struggle such as in support of the miners in Bolivia and Britain, organisations which promoted class unity and solidarity. At the same time the creation of these women's support groups reflected the recognition that the women had something distinct to offer, and strengthened their own ability to participate in the struggle even when met with sexist hostility.

The building of a really revolutionary women's movement led by communist women cadre will challenge both the sexism and hostility encountered in sections of the organised labour movement and the sexism, prejudice and obstacles women workers face in the home. The party and particularly its women members will have to consciously struggle around these issues inside the working class and within its own ranks insofar as manifestations of sexism occur in the Party.

If communists do not intervene with a clear programme for building working class women's movements, then the leadership of these organisations will be left to the reformists and feminists and to domination by alien class forces.

We are here posing the question of the united front. To both workers' organisations and feminists alike we

argue that working class women are suffering oppression, facing intensified attack in periods of capitalist crises and need to fight back. They should put no faith in the existing reformist leaders in the unions, nor in the Stalinist or social democratic parties, nor in the petit bourgeois nationalist movements and parties. But we recognise that in the current period where revolutionaries are a very small section of the class, it would be sectarian and infantile to restrict our call to the building of a Party women's department or a "communist women's movement". The vast majority of working class women look to reformist leaders and parties to take up their struggles. We argue for putting demands on these leaders, for calling them to account, and for working class women's self organisation to prevent the leadership's betrayals.

But the united front is never an end in itself. It exists not only to unite for struggle but to put competing leaderships, reformist, centrist and revolutionary, to the test—i.e. it is a tactic whereby revolutionaries can win the leadership of the masses from all other leaderships. Nor can this be turned into an evolutionary process. As with other united fronts the reformists and centrists will try, and often succeed, in splitting the working class women's movements. Communists are not afraid of taking responsibility for leading an explicitly communist women's movement fighting against the reformist as well as the bourgeois women's movements. After a successful revolution it is clear that it is the task of communists to expand or build a truly mass women's movement on the basis of a communist action programme. In the event of other parties of the workers and peasants rallying to the proletarian dictatorship, a mass communist women's movement may retain its united front character.

But in any case it is necessary to build a movement led by communist women to organise special forms of agitation and work amongst women with the aim of drawing party and non-party women into the active struggle for their own emancipation. This would include organisational measures such as democratic self governing conferences and local committees, which will be complementary to, rather than counterposed to, participation in the organisations of the working class (the party, unions and soviets). We do not apologise for seeking to win and to hold the mass working class leadership for communism. Our strategic goal therefore remains throughout a mass communist women's movement. Throughout the struggle for this and in all united fronts which may be tactically necessary the communist organisation has the duty to organise its women members as a communist fraction under full party discipline.

The core of the working class and communist women's movement must lie with women organised in the workplace. This involves organising to ensure that the trade unions take up women's issues, building caucuses in the unions to allow women to discuss their special oppression and build fighting confidence, drawing more women into the unions and developing class consciousness. In organising against the bureaucracy which refuses to take women's demands seriously, it will be part of the struggle to build a rank and file opposition and alternative leadership. But a working

class women's movement will also draw in women organised on the estates, in the barrios and townships, and it will reach into the countryside to the mass of peasant women suffering grinding poverty and oppression.

Building such a movement is not an optional extra for revolutionaries, but an essential part of the struggle to unite the working class and its allies in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism. In the imperialised countries it may be necessary to apply the anti-imperialist united front with bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces for the winning of progressive measures

31. Whilst recognising that the fight for women's liberation is inseparable from the fight for socialism, we do not ignore the question of democratic rights and the struggles of feminists on these issues. We support the fight for democratic reforms which would grant women equal recognition under the law, over property, in politics etc. The experience of feminism has been that such "rights" are difficult to achieve and retain even under so-called liberal democratic regimes. As with all democratic demands only the working class in power can guarantee such rights. In supporting the struggle for equal suffrage, for example, we fight for suffrage for all, not equal propertied suffrage or equal suffrage based on race or religious group. We would call on workers to organise and take industrial action in support of such demands, linking their attainment to the question of working class power.

We seek to draw petit bourgeois feminists into united action with the working class in the fight for democratic or other demands. We do reject the creation of a popular front of bourgeois and workers' parties in the name of achieving such democratic reforms. Such cross-class alliances in effect tie the workers to a bourgeois programme and deny the working class parties independence. The WLM of the 1960s and 1970s was based on mainly petit bourgeois forces and professional and white collar workers. In its politics it espoused the desirability of an alliance with bourgeois women, but these women in general shunned the approach and continued in their own organisations. Revolutionaries need to be in constant argument with women in the working class, plus students and intellectuals, who joined and were active in the WLM. Joint activity around issues like abortion can provide the arena for winning such women away from feminism to revolutionary politics. The building of a revolutionary tendency inside any mass petit bourgeois feminist movement could be an important tactic for a revolutionary party, but in no way implies a concession to *political* autonomy or separatism, since the communist women would oppose such practices and use all opportunities to build links with organised workers, male or female. But we defend the right of a proletarian women's movement to independent organisational structures (for instance women's fractions in trade unions) and cultural forms of expression (for instance women only social events).

32. For Marxists a coherent strategy for the seizure of power by the working class—a programme—is inseparable from organised militants fighting for that prop-

gramme and applying it tactically—a party. The question of women's liberation is itself an integral part of that programme and women communists an integral part of that party—both in its leadership and rank and file cadre.

Such a party must fight sexism in its own ranks, amongst militant workers and in the working class at large. To do this it must take special measures to strengthen and support women within the party and the class. To this end the right of women to caucus and the provision of creche facilities, in order to facilitate the participation of mothers in political meetings, are vital. Communists propagate the principle that as long as housework and child rearing is not fully socialised, men are politically and morally obliged to participate accordingly.

Whilst these rights must be guaranteed, we reject absolutely the view that the democratic centralist party is inimical to the full participation of women, that women must organise, separately and exclusively, "their struggle" because they alone have subjective experience of their oppression. Whilst the latter is a vital component of working out strategy and tactics,

women's oppression and its relationship to class society was not discovered by subjective experience alone (any more than was working class exploitation). It was, is and will be analysed by scientific work for which the party as a whole is the necessary vehicle.

Women workers will be vital to the building of a revolutionary party as they will be for the building of socialism after the creation of a workers' state. Without the leadership of a revolutionary party the spontaneous struggles of women will be unable to draw together the lessons of past struggles, and mount an effective challenge to the reformist leaders of the labour movement, or the feminist leaders of the women's movement. Any victories such spontaneous struggles achieve would risk being partial and temporary, and would fail to address the fundamental issues of women's oppression and class exploitation unless, that is, they were won in the course of struggle to the revolutionary party with its programme for women's liberation and socialism.

It is to the task of building such a party, and a mass communist-led working class women's movement, that the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International commits itself.

At the graveside of Imre Nagy

A leaflet by Arbeiterstandpunkt, June 1989

Neither capitalist restoration nor bureaucratic reform For proletarian political revolution

The rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and his comrades comes thirty years too late. For over thirty years the ruling bureaucratic caste in Hungary has slandered the 1956 revolution as a "counter-revolutionary uprising". It condemned as "fascist bandits" the working class which had, for the first time in history, brought down a Stalinist regime. This caste even tried to erase the year 1956 from history.

In vain! Today, under the banner of "*Grosznost*" and democratisation, the victims of the Stalinist terror have been acquitted. Yet this is public acceptance of the fact that up to now Hungary has been governed by criminals and hangmen. Certain consequences flow from this recognition. One cannot rehabilitate the murdered without judging the murderer. More! One cannot simultaneously rehabilitate Imre Nagy and forget the thousands who fell during and after the revolution or the tens of thousands who were imprisoned, tortured and exiled.

It is impossible to stay silent about how the present party regime, which presents itself as liberal and enlightened, was established. It emerged under the protective fire of the Soviet army of occupation, after the bloody and merciless suppression of the Hungarian workers. Only a short while ago, the executioners of 1956—Kadar, Farkas and the rest of them—sat at the apex of power. Even today many still occupy their positions in the party and society. It is finally time to kick them out. It is high time, if all the democratisation and openness is to be more than empty talk, that all those guilty of the repression and terror of the last decades should be brought to stand before a public and independent workers' tribunal.

Liberalisation, democratisation, or a return to capitalism?

The bureaucratically planned economies, marked for years by crisis and stagnation, have now reached the limits of their possible development. Hungary only offers the most drastic and visible example of this. Today, even its former champions admit to the utopian and reactionary character of trying to build "socialism in one country".

The same applies to the idea of "peacefully co-existing" with capitalism at the same time as catching up and outstripping it. Bureaucratic rule has not achieved communism (as Khrushchev once promised in the USSR

by the end of the century). Rather it has become an obstacle to any further development of the productive forces.

Shortages, mismanagement, corruption and a rapidly growing dependence on credits from the imperialist countries have become permanent characteristics of these regimes. Bureaucratic despotism was always a brake on production. But now, in this acute crisis, its fundamentally reactionary character becomes clearly visible.

If in the past the bureaucracy parasitically undermined the post-capitalist economic system then now it is setting about the direct and open destruction of socialised property in the means of production. Having got into a dead-end the bureaucracy can see only one way out—backwards to capitalist exploitation and subordination to imperialism.

The perspective of economic reform, from Gorbachev via Deng Xiaoping to Grosz, offers no way out of the crisis of "real socialism". It is rather another way into the abyss, a path that leads to the abandonment of every socialistic gain. In the past the Stalinist bureaucracy played the role of political tyrant and economic commander. Now it offers itself as "de-Staliniser", as the advocate of "market socialism", and as an agent for international capital.

From within the ranks of the ruling caste, a new bourgeoisie is crystallising out. It promotes every capitalist tendency inside the country and begs openly for external capital investment. It is becoming an agent of capitalist restoration. Fifty years ago Leon Trotsky—the Russian revolutionary hunted down and murdered by Stalin—predicted this path of bureaucratic degeneration. Today we are witnessing the confirmation of his warnings.

His error lay only in estimating the tempo of the process. For decades the pressure and hostility of imperialism prevented such a deal with a section of the bureaucracy. As a result the disintegrative tendencies of the caste were suppressed and delayed. After the widespread destruction of the Second World War the Stalinist bureaucracies showed a limited ability for developing industrial production on the basis of post-capitalist property relations. This gave the rulers of the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Democracies of eastern Europe a certain breathing space.

These times, however, are now definitely over. The "enlightened", "undogmatic" reform wing of the bureaucracy now seeks its salvation in the reintroduction of capitalism and its reconstitution as a new, bourgeois, ruling class. Obviously the completion of this process cannot take place without splits and huge conflicts within the bureaucracy itself. The self-liquidation of the

bureaucracy into a new bourgeoisie will require a violent social counter-revolution but the tendencies towards this are now all too clearly visible.

This is the driving force behind the present democratisation policy. What Cold War and NATO, atomic blackmail and imperialist armaments could not achieve, the bureaucrats are delivering up to imperialism; namely, the complete and final abandonment of every socialistic element of society, the handing over of the state to international capitalism.

After decades of Stalinist despotism which completely silenced the workers' political voice, representative parliamentary democracy appears to many workers as a welcome alternative to the one party state with its totally regulated public life. It is equally understandable that the experiment of "market socialism" should now be followed with hopes and illusions. After all the present experience is one of permanent shortages in the shops and an economy which operates without regard to the needs of the people.

But we must not deceive ourselves for a moment. The much admired prosperity of the industrial nations of the "free west" is based on their imperialist character. It flows from the simple fact that the whole of the rest of the world is subjected to limitless plundering by the western European, Japanese and North American bourgeoisies. Equally, it is based on the exploitation of the workers of the imperialist countries themselves, which is not made any the less by their relatively higher wages. Let us not fool ourselves: in the dependent semi-colonies of the supposedly so superior capitalist world, millions starve annually.

The majority of the population in the semi-colonies lives below the breadline. In the imperialist countries millions live in poverty and without the hope of jobs. In other words it would be out of the frying pan and into the fire to swap "really existing socialism" for capitalism. A capitalist Hungary would in no way turn into a prosperous economic miracle. Rather it would be condemned from the beginning to play the role of a semi-colony of the European Community. It would suffer the degradation of being a reservoir of cheap labour power and a source of cheap agricultural produce.

And parliamentary democracy? Parliamentary democracy with all its attractive civil rights, its freedoms and its institutions is a farce. It is an instrument of bourgeois rule. Its human rights are only fully valid for the property owning classes. As soon as the rule of capital in the "free west" is seriously threatened or the normal running of society is endangered then very quickly nothing is left of the magnificent facade other than the essence of bourgeois rule—dictatorship and fascism.

Hungary's own history shows striking evidence of this. The bourgeois parties always governed in the manner of Horthy and yet they finally delivered the country up to German fascism. Today, everybody—the party itself, the Social Democrats, the bourgeois parties and the imperialist west—is praising the proposed free parliamentary elections. It is raised up as the great alternative to the fossilised and manipulated "representative" organs of the People's Democratic regime.

Unlimited party pluralism and parliamentarism are accepted as the magic formulae to overcome the current

crisis. Let us not be deceived. That kind of a parliament would either be a "democratic" facade for the continued rule of the bureaucracy and a powerless talking shop for professional politicians of every sort; or it will become, especially in a period of acute crisis, an organising centre for bourgeois counter-revolution and capitalist restoration! We are not in favour of an abstract democracy. There can be no freedom for fascist and racist forces, no freedom for parties openly supporting a restoration of capitalism in Hungary. There should be no political rights extended to the ex-monarchist and clerical rabble around the Habsburg's "Pan European Movement"!

We call on the Hungarian working class, should there be free workplace and district meetings, to democratically elect delegates. They should stand their own list drawn from all those who clearly defend collective ownership of the means of production and the democratic rights of the workers and peasants. They should argue in parliament for the alternative power of democratic workers' and peasants' councils in opposition to the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie.

Is there a way out of the crisis? Yes! Workers' power, council democracy and socialism!

Hungary today faces the deepest crisis for decades. A crisis which is rapidly worsening and threatening to become acute. Every attempt by the ruling bureaucracy to alleviate this by concessions to capitalism have only worsened the situation. The parasites in the party, the trade unions and the public administration indulge themselves in their villas on Budapest's Rose Hill or at Balaton. In the last twenty years they have been joined by the black marketeers, the swindlers and the neo-capitalists.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands in Hungary live in absolute poverty. The workers earn such a miserable wage that they have to take on extra jobs after work. The average wage is 5,000 Forints per month although, according to government figures, a working class family needs between 7,000 and 8,000 Forints for essentials. In addition, agriculture stagnates.

The foreign debt to the capitalist west stands at 900 million Forints, and the inflation rate is 20%. At the same time, the government is offering greater opportunities for capitalism in the economy. The bureaucracy invites in the multinationals and the banks for unlimited investment in the country!

In order to win over the people to their unscrupulous sell out of the workers' state, and to please their business partners abroad, they are putting on this whole pantomime of democratisation and free parliamentary elections. This is a betrayal of the interests of the Hungarian working class.

In opposition to bourgeois democracy and bureaucratic reform we must set out the alternative: workers' power and council democracy. The Hungarian working class, uniquely in the whole of Europe, twice briefly held state power in its hands. In both 1919 and 1956 this power was snatched from them by external military intervention coming to the help of domestic reaction.

In 1919 it was the bourgeois White Guardist Horthy

who triumphed, in 1956, the Moscow loyal bureaucracy of Kadar. Both times the council power of the workers was drowned in blood. It is this experience of defeat and merciless repression which largely explains the passivity and the retreat into unpolitical private life of most Hungarians. Kadar's "goulash communism" was built on this passivity and de-politicisation of the workers. Now the "enlightened" reformer Grosz wants to exploit this to fool the workers with shopping trips to Austria and open borders to the west.

A revolutionary workers' party is necessary

Out of Hungary's history we draw different lessons from the born-again reform democrats. First of all it is possible for the workers, the great mass of the population, to seize and exercise power themselves. It is only the working class itself, not a bureaucracy ruling in its name but against its interests, which is able to make socialism a reality.

Secondly, a socialist planned economy cannot be built in a single country (even one as big as the Soviet Union) and certainly not within a straight-jacket of bureaucratic rule. Such rule has merely brought a disastrous caricature of capitalism and sabotage of all the socialist elements of the planned economy. It can only be built in an international framework through workers' management over the production and distribution of social wealth.

Thirdly, neither the bureaucratic one-party system nor bourgeois representative democracy can be the form of political rule in a socialist society. We need the power of freely and democratically elected workers' and peasants' councils which are accountable to their base and instantly recallable. Bureaucratic despotism and censorship cannot represent workers' power. As a person needs air to breathe, so the dictatorship of the proletariat needs its own democracy if it is to prevent the rise of a new bureaucratic caste and usurpation of state power.

- Full freedom of organisation for all parties and tendencies which recognise workers' council power. Faction and tendency rights in all parties.
- Autonomous trade unions; freedom of speech and publication.
- Open and elected workers' courts. guaranteed individual rights.

Fourthly, the system of bureaucratic rule cannot be reformed away step by step. Let us remember that the revolution of 1956, and the unfortunate Nagy, together with tens of thousands of others, were victims of precisely this illusion. The ruling caste must be driven from power by force, by the armed insurrection of the working class.

However, to really carry this out, we need what was missing in 1956: a revolutionary workers' party armed with a socialist programme of political revolution which will stand for and defend unconditionally the interests of the working class.

In this century, we have seen huge mobilisations of the masses, many spontaneous rebellions and insurrections of the oppressed. Yet despite unparalleled heroism on no occasion were they able to hold on to power where

they had no revolutionary party of their own. Whenever the insurrectionary workers have been led by, and put their trust in, bourgeois (as in Iran 1979) or reformist-bureaucratic forces (exactly as in Hungary in 1956), this has led rapidly to the collapse and betrayal of the revolution.

If we are not now to risk future defeat, we need a political organisation which can co-ordinate and lead the struggles, which can be the centre of resistance and the vanguard of the mobilisations. We need a party which can develop the theoretical and practical means so that the working class becomes conscious of its interests. No form of organisation other than the Leninist type of democratic-centralist party can do this. Neither a mass trade union like Solidarnosc, nor a loose club of individual revolutionaries like the anarchists and certainly not a bureaucratic reform party of the Social Democratic or liberal-Stalinist type.

The building of a revolutionary workers' party is the most decisive and important task of today. We must begin it straight away or it will be too late. The first step is to work out the historic tasks of the working class, beginning with a correct understanding of the present situation in Hungary and internationally. The programme must be developed itself in the day to day struggle. It must embody the independence of the proletariat and map out the road to the seizure of power.

These steps can only be taken when there exists the appropriate organisational form for it; namely, a fighting propaganda group composed of the best and most determined, who can develop their politics, put them into practice and fight for them by constant intervention in all the struggles as they break out.

The MRCI has set itself the task of achieving this on a global scale. We call on all those interested comrades, all those who want to realise the aims of the insurrectionary workers of 1919 and 1956, to get into contact and discussion with us. This is a call to all those who are serious about workers' power and socialism—to which everybody here claims allegiance but which all the bureaucrats have in their own ways betrayed.

The Hungarian working class does not need parliamentary democracy or a neutral Hungary. Even less do they need a free market economy to defend its immediate interests. On the contrary, it must fight.

For a political revolutionary programme

The central elements of this must include the following demands:

For the maintenance of living standards!

- For a sliding scale of wages to maintain living standards against rising inflation.
- Establishment of a minimum wage, enough to live on without the need for second and third jobs.
- Sharing the available work amongst the whole workforce as a measure against unemployment, which will rise with "marketisation".
- Organisation of a public works programme especially in housing. This will counter unemployment and alleviate the housing crisis. For the building and organisation of more and better restaurants, laun-

dries and nurseries to allow women to participate fully in social life.

- For the defence of statified means of production—but the introduction of real control by the workers.

For workers' democracy!

- For free trade unions, the right to strike and better working conditions; against privileges, corruption and the rule of the technocracy and bureaucracy.
- For independent proletarian women's and youth movements to fight against all discrimination built into the system.
- For a simple, clear and direct democracy of workers' councils from the factory up to the leadership of the whole state. All delegates to be directly answerable and instantly recallable. No room for bureaucrats in these councils! All power to workers' councils!
- These workers' councils, from the base to the top, should discuss and decide upon the essentials of a national economic plan to be developed in conjunction with experts they trust.
- A functioning workers' democracy does not need market mechanisms. Rather it must steadfastly set about overcoming what remains of them.
- The demand for bourgeois parliaments is not a proletarian one. Ultimately they can only be the home of the bourgeois counter-revolution, never the organs of workers' democracy.
- If there are so-called free, democratic parliamentary elections then these should be held under the control of workers' councils or the workers' organisations.

Authorisation only to those parties which stand by the gains of post-capitalist production relations.

For defence of the workers' states!

- For the rejection of the Warsaw Pact and the creation of a new treaty. For the defence of the workers' states together with respect for their national rights.
- For the publication and re-negotiation of all inter-state treaties on the basis of complete equality.
- For workers' militias, not a bureaucratic repressive apparatus, to defend the workers' states against imperialist attack.

For socialist internationalism!

- For the cancellation of all debts to the imperialist banks; end all payments, if possible through concerted action by all workers' states and semi-colonies.
- For the internationalisation of the proletarian revolution as the best means of defending the workers' states and as the precondition for the building of socialism.

For political revolution!

- For the achievement of these goals a political revolution is necessary in Hungary, and that demands the leadership of a revolutionary party.
- This party must be built on the principles of Lenin and Trotsky, completely independently of all wings of the ruling Stalinist parties. It must have a democratic-centralist structure and be armed with an international revolutionary programme.

16 June 1989

"Left" republicanism in Ireland

by James Kennedy

Republicanism in Ireland is almost 200 years old. Taking its inspiration from the American Revolution (1776-82) and, more especially, the French Revolution (1789-94) republicanism emerged in Ireland as the doctrine of a developing northern protestant bourgeoisie in its fight against English rule.

The defeat of the 1798 rebellion and the subsequent abolition of the Dublin parliament signalled the end of an Irish republicanism associated with a revolutionary bourgeois class in Ireland. From the mid-nineteenth century on the national struggle passed into the leadership of the petit bourgeoisie based on an overwhelmingly catholic social base.

The twists and turns of the national struggle in Ireland have consistently thrown up various currents within the republican movement. Over the course of the last century one of these can best be defined as "left" republicanism or "socialist republicanism". This trend, beginning with James Connolly, consciously seeks to connect the struggles for national liberation and for socialism.

The reformism — and, exceptionally, the centrism — of these currents graphically reveals the inability of the republican tradition to meet the needs of the workers. In every case, alliances with the ruling class at the expense of the workers have finally won out over the struggle for revolutionary socialism.

Over the last twenty years four major "left" republican currents have emerged. Two of these have been left-centrist in origin: the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), which split from the Official Sinn Féin in 1974, and the League of Communist Republicans (LCR), a group based in the Maze Prison which broke from Sinn Féin in 1986. The two largest "left" tendencies have been openly reformist: the Stalinised pro-Moscow Official Sinn Féin — now the de-republicanised Workers Party — and the tendency around Gerry Adams which took over the leadership of the Provisional Sinn Féin in the early 1980s.

Whatever the obvious political differences between these groups, they have all been heavily influenced by Stalinism and have laid claim to the political mantle of Connolly, the chief propagandist for Marxism in Ireland.

Through the prism of left republicanism Connolly is seen as the creator of a distinct "Irish" socialism — socialist republicanism — defined by Connolly's linking of the national question to the social question. This is a major question for any Irish organisation which seeks to put forward a revolutionary answer to the

oppression and exploitation of the Irish masses. Connolly's answer, though extremely influential, was deeply flawed.¹

Connolly's Marxism

When Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) in Ireland in 1896, its programme differed in only one respect from that of the British Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Unlike the SDF and other Second International parties, the ISRP made no reference to the struggle for national independence in its "minimal" section. Instead it was included along with the final goal of socialism in the "maximum" section. The goals of socialism and national independence were thus interconnected.

Connolly's general argument was that the Irish national question was the expression of an inner movement within Irish society to recover the (fictitious) "common property relations" of pre-conquest Ireland, a movement in which only the plebeian classes had an interest. Since the goal of the Irish bourgeoisie was the defence of private property, it had no interest in the struggle for its own nation state. Connolly's theory, therefore, severed the historic link Marx had made between, the nation, the bourgeoisie and capitalism, and reformed it in terms of the working class and socialism.

Connolly went even further and argued that the development of Irish capitalism was an impossibility because of the already saturated nature of world markets. The development of Ireland's economy after independence could thus only take place on a socialist basis. Nationalism in Ireland could only lead to socialism and only the working class could embody the national principle successfully. "The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland. The cause of Ireland is the cause of labour" were the propaganda slogans Connolly drew from his analysis.

This schema had profound consequences for his politics and programme. To begin with it opened the door to bourgeois and petit bourgeois Irish nationalism. Connolly consistently denied the *progressive* character of bourgeois national movements in the nineteenth century in Ireland, whilst at the same time obscuring the *bourgeois* character of the programme of the revolutionary nationalists. In practical terms, his fatalistic optimism about the necessarily socialist outcome of the fight for national independence led him to concede

1. For a full analysis of Connolly's legacy see the series of articles in *Class Struggle* (nos 13-20) published by the IWG

leadership of the national struggle to petit bourgeois forces.

As a strategy and series of slogans Connolly's programme served to liquidate the political independence of the working class into revolutionary nationalism. His legacy is a source of theoretical and ideological confusion for latterday socialist republicans. His life's work gives licence for making vital concessions to bourgeois or petit bourgeois nationalist programmes.

But if Connolly was guilty of a naïve fatalism with regard to the socialist outcome of the national struggle he cannot be accused of espousing the rigid stageist approach of modern left republicans. We have Stalinism to thank for that.

It was Stalin, not Connolly, who argued that in the semi-colonies it was essential for the working class to forego its specific class, anti-capitalist, goals until the national, "patriotic" semi-colonial bourgeoisie had led a successful struggle for independence. The prevailing notion among "left" republicans that national independence is an essential pre-condition before the struggle for socialism can begin is a product of the degeneration of the Communist International after 1923.

The combination of the centrist legacy of Connolly and the deadening influence of Stalinist stageism has obstructed the evolution of centrist forces within left republicanism towards revolutionary communism. All of the left republicans who have tried to break with reformism have been trapped by the contradictions of these two ideologies, from the Republican Congress in the 1930s, through the IRSP in the 1970s to the LCR today.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party

The IRSP was founded in 1974 as the result of a break-away from the Official Sinn Féin. Under the pressure of events in the North after 1969, the increasingly Stalinist republicans had been forced to participate, arms in hand, in the defence of the nationalist communities against the armed forces of the Northern state and of British imperialism.

In 1970 the republicans split into the Provisional and Official IRA. By the summer of 1972 the Officials had called a ceasefire. Several opposition tendencies sprung up within them after this point. The most vocal and coherent oppositionists were those comrades who, to some degree, considered themselves Trotskyists. As members of the Young Socialist group in Derry they had, in the late 1960s, come under the influence of Eammon McCann, member of the Derry Labour Party and by 1969 a member of the International Socialists group (today the British SWP).

Having joined the Officials in 1971, this group put forward a resolution at the 1973 annual conference calling for the abandonment of stageism and reformism, for increased action in the national struggle and for greater internal democracy. All the opposition groups made the mistake of believing that the Officials could be won to alternative positions. They failed to forge a tendency armed with a genuinely revolutionary theory and programme that could have been the basis

for winning the best militants in an internal struggle that would have led to a split.

In 1974 the Stalinist leadership moved to bureaucratically expel Seamus Costello, a leading figure later to be murdered by the Officials in 1977. The left, rallying to his defence, were effectively expelled from the organisation. An agreement was reached with Costello — a man who in fact had never broken from stageism — to found a new party, the IRSP.

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, who joined the IRSP in December 1974 expressed the hopes of many for the new party when she said:

"The Provos are concentrating on getting rid of the British in a military campaign without any policy on the class war. And the Officials have no policy on the national question."²

The new party had about 400-500 members, with about a quarter of the membership in Derry. The weight of these left-centrist elements was felt at the first IRSP conference in 1975 in the shape of a series of radical resolutions. They argued for a struggle rooted in the working class against imperialism and capitalism; for the building of mass action in the streets and united fronts and struggle against repression North and South, for the right to abortion on demand, and for the building of an international to establish socialism world wide.

The vast majority the left resolutions were adopted, very often against Costello's opposition. But resolutions, no matter how revolutionary, were to count for little in the events that overtook the IRSP. These events revealed, tragically, that the left lacked any real method which would have enabled them fight for their programme and ideas against Costello and his supporters.

The most important mistake the left made was to agree to the establishment of a separate military wing (the Irish National Liberation Army) outside the control of the party and its programme. This showed that, despite their avowed Marxism, they had not yet fully broken from the elitist physical force tradition of republicanism. Faced with a wave of murderous attacks on IRSP members by the Officials, the left had no answers.

The key task was to combine the physical defence of the organisation with the political task of exposing the Officials to the anti-unionist and southern working masses. It was paramount to mobilise support — resolutions, meetings, marches etc — for the right of the IRSP to exist and defend itself, and for an end to the Official's bloody attacks.

The left failed the task. Their "Marxism", fine for writing resolutions, was not a method of analysis, a tool of intervention, or an orientation of struggle. Despite the very real possibilities that had existed in 1974 for the creation of a revolutionary Marxist organisation with real roots in sections of the anti-unionist working class, the IRSP was doomed. Faced with Costello's reformism and the Officials' guns, the centrist left was paralysed. The only solution they could offer was resignation *en masse*.

Now in full control of the organisation, Costello's only attachment to "the strategic working class struggle against capitalism and imperialism" was rhetorical. The IRSP rapidly combined the fatal ambiguities of Connolly's legacy with a classic stageism as they argued that the anti-imperialist struggle should take place within

2. Quoted in K Kelly, *The Longest War* (London 1980 p230)

the framework of a "Broad Front" which involved:

"The convening of an all-Ireland constitutional conference representative of all shades of political opinion in Ireland for the purpose of discussing a democratic and secular constitution which will become effective immediately following a total British withdrawal."³

It is difficult to imagine a clearer statement about the strategic goal of a 32 county bourgeois state.

The IRSP had become barely distinguishable from the Provisionals. This increased the temptation among the military factions to prove themselves equal or superior to the IRA as a means of drawing support. Though somewhat revived during the H-Block struggle of the early 1980s, in which the IRSP uncritically backed the cross-class H-Block committee and fiercely opposed a fight to build a real anti-imperialist united front based on workers, socialists and republicans, the IRSP/INLA finally imploded in a murderous feud in 1984.

In 1987 the IRSP reappeared, claiming to be a genuine Marxist-Leninist organisation. They have recently begun a serious attempt to theoretically address their political tradition, notably on the question of the Broad Front. The outcome of this discussion remains to be seen.

If the IRSP are to break with the ambiguous legacy of socialist republicanism and their past avowal of stageism, then they need to recognise that a serious attempt to bring the working class into the leadership of the national struggle requires openly fighting at all times for the action programme of the working class against capitalist rule. This means organising working class action including strike action and mass workers' struggles in all struggles against exploitation and oppression. Such a perspective would fighten off not only the Irish bourgeoisie but also the Sinn Féin leadership.

The Adams tendency in the Provisionals

As Gerry Adams has acknowledged in his book, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, by the late 1970s the Provisional IRA was facing defeat. Their belief that they could win a military war with British imperialism had been shattered, and it was increasingly clear that a war-weary population in the North could see little point in the continuation of the Provos armed struggle.

It was in this context that the "left tendency" around Adams emerged in Belfast. They decided it was necessary to build and extend an active social base within the minority community. The H-Block struggle and the hunger strikes, with the enormous radicalisation of young people flooding into Sinn Féin, created the opportunity for the Adams wing to challenge for the leadership of Sinn Féin.

These young people were little concerned with the sterile orthodoxies of the republican tradition, more eager to see the movement become a force for radical social change. Thus "feminism" and "Marxism" were gradually accepted as no longer "alien" to republican politics. In 1983 the strategy of the armalite and the ballot box was born, as Sinn Féin received 35% of the nationalist vote in the North. The Provisionals' policy clearly revealed their revolutionary nationalism—fighting for the armed overthrow of the sectarian state.

But they also revealed their petit bourgeois nature in their commitment to maintaining a co-operative vision of Irish capitalism.

The nature of the Provisionals' programme was further emphasised by the use they made of their political capital. The activists won to Sinn Féin in the H-Block struggle increasingly became "servicers", hard-working social reformers in their local communities. The "socialism" of Sinn Féin was limited to a radical municipal reformism. This is not to disparage the need to actively take up the grievances of the oppressed catholic communities, over housing and harassment for example, but the whole exercise was unconnected to any political (as opposed to guerrillaist) programme of overthrowing the statelet that enforced this oppression.

Emboldened by their success, Adams and the left, firmly in the leadership of Sinn Féin, more clearly sought to identify the Provisionals with the radical "socialist republicanism" of Connolly. But while drawing expediently and rhetorically upon the legacy of Connolly and other Irish socialists, Adams had no intention of breaking from the petit bourgeois and elitist programme of the physical force tradition.

In their attempts to theorise the relationship between socialism and nationalism, the Provisionals have completely distorted the true nature — the class basis — of republicanism itself. Without a shred of evidence, Adams has argued that "Irish republicanism is not a term which defines a system of society in a way that socialism does". He thus suppresses the fact that republicanism as a political phenomenon stands for the creation of a bourgeois state, founded on the defence of private property relations.

Sinn Féin carried this distortion further when they recently celebrated the establishment of the first Dail — the revolutionary assembly created in 1919. In doing so, they hailed the democratic programme of the Dail as a "document clearly based on socialist principles".⁴ In fact the democratic programme, drawn up at a time when the petit bourgeois nationalists of Sinn Féin were waging a life and death struggle with British imperialism, drawing upon the support of the masses in town and country, was not a programme at all but merely a rhetorical statement of social aspirations. As such it was a bland statement of social pieties, typical of the standard legal formulae of many capitalist states. It made no mention of labour, of capital, of classes or of socialism. Some "socialism"!

Addressing the relation of the national question to socialism Adams has argued:

"The true socialist will be an active supporter of the republican character of the national independence movement . . . will realise that unless this character is maintained and unless the most radical social forces are in the leadership of the independence struggle then inevitably it must fail or compromise. This classical view of the matter contrasts with the ultra-left view which counterposes republicanism and socialism and which breaks up the unity of the national independence movement by putting forward 'socialist' demands that have no possibility of being achieved until real independence is won."⁵

But this is not the view of Lenin or Marx or Trotsky. It is an amalgam of two traditions: those of Connolly and

3. Quoted in *The Starry Plough*, December 1987
4. APRN, 25 January 1989
5. G Adams, *Politics of Irish Freedom* p135

Stalin, the former inadequate, the latter wholly treacherous. The Stalinist tradition of popular fronts and strategic alliances between the workers and "patriotic capitalists" insists on the key role of the bourgeoisie, and on trimming the programme of the workers in order to maintain the alliance. In contrast to Connolly this Stalinist tradition is one of conscious class collaboration and stageism.

Sinn Féin's claim to the socialist republicanism of Connolly sits uncomfortably with its record. From the H-Block campaign to the current anti-extradition campaign the provisionals have consistently sought an alliance with the bourgeois constitutional nationalists of the SDLP and Fianna Fail. The recent appeal for the building of a mass anti-imperialist movement is all of a piece with a "labour must wait" approach.

Sinn Féin's socialism dissolves away to reveal its wholly nationalist perspectives which is to fight only for those demands around which the broadest movement "can be built with an appeal to all major sections of Irish society".

This opportunistic outlook will guarantee neither independence nor socialism in Ireland. Only a working class consciously self-organised on an independent class programme can effectively struggle against imperialism and capitalism in Ireland. Only a workers' state can be the basis for genuine self-determination. No amount of opportunist electioneering, community politics or guerrilla action, or combinations of all three, can be a substitute for the building of a conscious organised party leadership with a programme which leads the immediate struggles of the working class to the goal of social, political armed revolution against both Irish states.

The League of Communist Republicans

"For far too long the cause of labour and the cause of Ireland have looked upon each other with suspicion. With one notable exception . . . both have failed."

Thus began the first issue of *Congress 86* published by the LCR prisoners (and their supporters outside). While they were influenced by the decision of Sinn Féin to drop the principle of abstentionism in 1986, the prisoners believed that this was just one more signal of Sinn Féin's abandonment of the goal of socialism.

Avowedly Marxist, the LCR stands for the building of a revolutionary communist vanguard party to achieve national independence and socialism. This alone marks the LCR as being a qualitatively different political formation from the Provisionals. Nevertheless, in their break from the reformism of Sinn Féin, the LCR have yet to fully settle accounts with their political past. The confused legacy of Connolly weighs heavily upon them, as is shown by their aim of reconciling nationalism and socialism. The "one notable exception" to the record of failure on this score mentioned in the above quote is, of course, Connolly's collaboration with the petit bourgeois nationalist Clarke, which culminated in the Easter rising of 1916.

Rather than draw the lesson that Connolly's "socialism" was destined to collapse at the decisive moment faced with the programme of petit bourgeois revolu-



tionary nationalism, the LCR began its project by seeking to clarify the common objectives that bind "nationalism" and "socialism". Although the evolution of the LCR is far from complete, by the third issue of *Congress '86* they had shown that they were engaged in a serious evaluation of Lenin's theory and practice which was taking them back to Lenin's original strategy, cutting through decades of Stalinist distortion. They argued, for example:

"There should be no ambivalence on what form the unified republic will take. It has to be for a workers' and small farmers' state. To imprint the message clearly on Irish political life the slogan has to be 'A republic: under the revolutionary democratic control of the workers and small farmers'. It is only around this banner . . . that we can hope to gather the broadest possible support for a revolutionary struggle: workers, the poor, small farmers and the deprived will all see in it a means to improve their lot. Republicans of the Fenian tradition should find no difficulty supporting the demand and any genuine socialist could only welcome it."⁶

The LCR are here arguing for a particular version of the slogan "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", first used by Lenin in the pre-1917 Bolshevik programme, and later deformed by Stalin as the basis for strategic alliances with the national bourgeoisie of the imperialised world, and which led to such fatal consequences for the working class as in China in 1927.

It seems from the quotation above that the LCR wishes to put distance between them and the policy of conscious class collaboration and counter-revolution that the Stalinised Comintern insisted upon after 1935. Thus the LCR aim to avoid the "mechanistic" stages theory:

"The stages theory has, for years, come in for severe criticism. This is due mainly to the fact that it has been mechanistically and pedantically interpreted by reformists to suit their own behaviour . . . Nevertheless when properly applied, the stages theory remains a perfectly valid Marxist concept."⁷

Trotskyists, while defending the theory of permanent revolution have of course never denied that the process of political struggle, social revolutions involve definite phases of development to which concrete tactics have to be applied. If this is all the LCR means by "properly applied stageism" then there may be room for agreement.

For example, it is obvious that the South African revolution *began* in 1986 as a struggle for democratic demands in which the working class had to exert its leadership. This would involve putting revolutionary democratic demands to the fore of agitation. But in no way does this mean that a revolutionary party postpones the vigorous pursuit of specifically proletarian political and economic goals.

The stageist programme of the South African Communist Party on the other hand consciously obstructs the working class in the formulation of and struggle for specifically anti-capitalist working class objective. This is because Stalinism — like its fellow-travellers such as the "Trotskyists" of the American SWP — insists that these demands are impermissible at this "stage".

Where does the LCR stand? In a typically centrist fashion, their more general statements are compatible with either interpretation:

"It is clear that we need a democratic Ireland — a democracy where the views of the majority are represented in administrative power... the structures which will bring a proper democracy into existence will first have to be put in place by the working class and their allies like small farmers. Our class must be organised into a force capable of fighting for, and creating, these structures."⁸

But what of the relationship of this to the struggle for socialism? This is what they have to say:

"For those who see this [i.e. revolutionary democratic republic] stopping short of the socialist demand the answer is blunt. There is no surrender on socialism. We are simply recognising the transitional period necessary between the overthrow of bourgeois political power and the socialisation of all private property."⁹

In an attempt to return to Lenin of pre-April 1917 the LCR comrades have found themselves embracing Stalin's mid-1920s right-centrist position, which cost the Chinese masses dear in 1927. At that time the centrist Stalin still wished for the victory of the Chinese workers — unlike his counter-revolutionary line on Spain in 1936.

In 1927 his centrism consisted of the fact that he insisted that the working class should ally itself with the bourgeoisie in the pursuit of a democratic republic as a stage on the road to socialism. But — predictably — the national bourgeoisie was treacherous and turned on the working class with bloody consequences. Thanks to Stalin's insistence that the workers concentrate on achieving this alliance, and thus subordinating their class goals, the vanguard of the Chinese working class had been politically disarmed.

As Trotsky made clear at the time, the Chinese bourgeoisie had no strategic interest in fighting for a bour-

geois democratic republic, any more than today's Irish bourgeoisie have in fighting for an end to partition! Trotsky's programme of permanent revolution, as expressed by the 1917 Revolution and subsequently codified at an international level in the wake of the Chinese Revolution, insisted that the full revolutionary democratic republic could only be realised in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the small farmers or poor peasants.

The dangers of a right centrist interpretation of the revolutionary democratic republic and how to achieve it are already there to be seen. In a recent issue of their journal, they have dealt with the issue of privatisation. The LCR's programme revolves round the idea that the class struggle has to be fought within the limit of a preparatory democratic phase, defined by the goal of a "peoples' republic". This means that they refuse to advance demands which express the independent class interests of the working class against the capitalist state.

They thus suggest that faced with the anarchy of the market, state nationalisation is the only solution. They deliberately ignore the fact that capitalist nationalisations have always led to the subordination of workers' interests to those of the capitalists. By a programme of compensation to the former owners, by the anti-working class system of management and organisation, nationalisations by the "collective capitalist" — the state — help the ruling class, not the proletariat.

The only way to confront reformist illusions in bourgeois nationalisation is to fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers' control. This also means a fight by the workers to smash the sacred seals of business secrecy and to open the bosses' books to workers' inspection. By giving no place for these demands in their article we presume that, for the LCR, these are socialist demands which are not on the agenda until some later stage or phase of class mobilisation.

With no clear and distinct independent working class positions of its own the LCR is doomed to merge its banner and programme with those that have a clearer left-reformist position. At the moment the most likely candidate seems to be the Stalinist CPI with whom the LCR already shares the view that the Soviet bloc represent healthy socialist states.

The corrosive consequences of Stalinism and of republicanism — in all its variants — are clearly shown by the events of the last two decades in Ireland. The LCR, the latest product of the historic failure of physical force republicanism in Ireland, is at a turning point. Its unstable centrism — like that of the IRSP — shows that without a political, programmatic break from the centrist and reformist traditions of the Irish left and of republicanism, it is not possible to create an organisation capable of leading the masses to victory.

Neither Stalinist reformism nor the armed nationalists of the Provisionals have anything to offer militant socialists or those trying to reforge Marxism in Ireland. If the LCR are to survive, if their most precious experience of the struggle is not to be lost to the workers' movement, they must be won to Trotskyism.

8. Congress '86, No6, 1989, p15
9. Congress '86, No6 (emphasis in original)

Trotskyism versus economism on Ireland

by Aileen O'Doherty

Preface

The February 1989 issue of *Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle*, published by the International Communist Union (ICU), the international grouping run by the French organisation *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO), carried an article on the armed struggle in Northern Ireland. We print here a reply from our Irish section, the Irish Workers Group.

It was first published in a pamphlet in French, at the LO Fête outside Paris in May of this year where the IWG held an open forum on the question. LO rejected the MRCI's request for a debate on the issue and instead organised a rival meeting at the same time as that of the

IWG. LO further reneged on its promise to send representatives to the IWG forum. We have submitted this article to *Lutte de Classe*, which claims to be "a place where all those who really want to create truly communist and revolutionary organisations can exchange, debate and discuss their viewpoints".

In the original pamphlet, we reproduced the ICU *Lutte de Classe* article. For reasons of space, we are not able to do so here. We have therefore slightly edited the article, including quotes from LO which will enable the reader to follow the argument better.

Reply to *Lutte Ouvrière* on the national question in Ireland

The article on the struggle in Northern Ireland in *Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle* (February 1989) analysed the problem in an economistic way which arrived at wrong political conclusions. Nowhere did it characterise the conflict as a national struggle against an imperialist power — a fact of central importance to proletarian internationalists.

The article did not characterise the Irish republican movement (Sinn Féin/IRA) as a revolutionary nationalist force. Rather, it concentrated on the peripheral aspect of the republicans' method which consists of their concern for "getting some sort of recognition — from their enemy, from other governments, from public opinion — regardless of the consequences for the very people they claim to be fighting for".¹

Further, it failed to state what should be the attitude of revolutionaries internationally to the republicans or to the struggle which they lead. Consequently, the sharp criticism of the republicans, while correct in several aspects, allows the reader to conclude that LO and its co-thinkers refuse to take the side of this movement in its struggle against the British army in Ireland.

National oppression and the national struggle:

First of all, the article lacked any historical perspective. As a result the origins of the present phase of the struggle were incorrectly portrayed and at least one serious error of fact was introduced to support a danger-

ously wrong conclusion about the loyalist (protestant) working class and its place in the revolutionary struggle.

The conflict between the Northern State and its catholic nationalist minority exploded in 1968 around demands for reforms in the electoral system and the allocation of housing. All the major immediate grievances, however, had their roots in the systematic discrimination against the nationalist population on the basis of their Irish nationalist identity.

Between 1921 and 1925 the border between the two states was fixed by Britain with the deliberate aim of giving the loyalist protestant population the maximum possible territory in which they could maintain a permanent majority over the nationalist minority interspersed among them in the north east.

It was as nationalists that the catholic minority suffered systematic discrimination, and it was in terms of the re-unification of Ireland that they saw the only solution to this special oppression. The nationalist movement which established its own bourgeois rule in the semi-colonial South in the 1920s and 1930s, however, left no doubt about its bitter hostility to every force which might struggle to achieve the historic goal of national unity, even though such national unity was the first official aim of the southern state itself!

Radical nationalist forces have existed continuously since 1922 as an armed conspiratorial guerrilla organisation. They have repeatedly engaged in armed campaigns to end Britain's continued occupation and parti-

1. *Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle*, February 1989 p48

tion of Ireland. It was only in the conditions of the popular revolt of 1968-72, however, that they were able to place themselves at the head of the popular masses who were struggling to complete the unfinished business of the historic Irish national struggle.

The nationalist mass mobilisations of 1968-69 for democratic reforms (equal voting, fair allocation of houses) took on a revolutionary character only because the Northern Ireland state was, and remains, inherently built upon the national oppression of the catholic minority within its borders.

It was the loyalist regime, in refusing the reforms, who first characterised the struggle for "civil rights" as a nationalist struggle to unite Ireland. It was only when peaceful demonstrations resulted in pogroms by organised loyalist mobs and murderous attacks by the state forces that the mass movement was re-awakened to the revolutionary nationalist dynamic of their struggle.

The failure of the Irish "Trotskyist" left in 1968-69 to anticipate and recognise the character of the developing struggle as a national struggle was central to their failure to offer an alternative leadership. Their gross underestimation of the objective basis for a resurgent nationalist movement tactically disarmed them. The left organisations were thus crippled despite the significant role that some of their small forces had played in the civil rights movement or behind the barricades.

During a year of mass action when the question of leadership in the nationalist population remained unresolved, the mass of catholics looked instinctively to their traditional defenders, the guerrilla army of the republican movement, despite its virtual absence from the struggle until mid-1970! It is this important fact that underlay the ability of the IRA to hegemonise the popular revolt, in the absence of an alternative revolutionary communist leadership. The left forces had failed to relate, with principled united front tactics, to popular illusions in nationalist solutions.

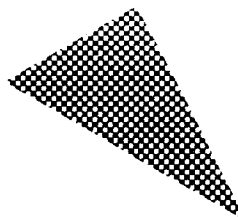
An economistic analysis

LO's analysis tends to reduce the unfinished Irish question to simple economic considerations. They limit the grievances of the catholics to the problems of workers' access to jobs and housing. This ignores the central role played by the questions of political equality, including equal rights to vote, and of the exclusion of the catholic petit bourgeoisie from political life within the Six County state. The struggle is thus presented as a working class struggle in the north east in the context of working class militancy throughout Ireland.

Tragically, no such link was developed between the struggles of the nationally-divided working class, north and south. Tragically, the perspectives and leadership of the mobilised catholic minority in the north, even at their most radical, remained petit bourgeois and never developed a class-conscious expression. The Northern catholic middle-class split the movement not along class lines but between petit bourgeois revolutionary nationalism and bourgeois constitutional nationalism.

True, as LO's article says, "the North of Ireland has long ceased to be a major economic asset for the British bourgeoisie".² Its population, however, has formed a

La lutte nationale en Irlande: notre réponse à Lutte Ouvrière



Irish Workers Group
(Section Irlandaise du Mouvement pour une Internationale Communiste Révolutionnaire)

permanent reserve army of labour in the UK economy.

Its few large industries operate at lower wage rates to the benefit of British capitalism. It comprises a large land mass with an extensive agricultural industry far out of proportion to the weight of its population within the UK economy (2.5%) of which it forms but one "subsidised" region. To describe it as a "parasite living off the £8 billion net subsidies paid every year by the British state"³ is entirely one-sided.

But imperialist powers are not governed only or mainly by economic considerations in their colonial policies! As a region Northern Ireland has consistently served the most reactionary aspects of British imperialist policy for over a century, and even now the struggle itself is valued by important sections of the imperialist bourgeoisie as a training ground for the army and a factory for the methods of police state repression.

Northern Ireland will retain a strategic importance within NATO as long as Southern Ireland remains "neutral". It is not the case therefore, as LO suggests, that economic considerations make the British ruling class want to withdraw but that they hesitate for "electoral reasons";⁴ the conservatism of the British petit bourgeoisie, the influence of Irish protestantism in certain mainland British communities etc. The British ruling class is far from persuaded that its strategic interests would be served by extracting itself from Ireland.

It is even more misleading to claim that the protestant petit bourgeoisie in the North merely require a guarantee of their economic future to wean them away from their loyalist attachment to British rule.

It is absurd to say as LO's article does — "What is involved for [Paisley] and for the social layers he represents is not principle, it is money!"⁵ This crude eco-

2. *Ibid.*, p38

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p40

conomic reductionism misunderstands the whole nature of the Unionist movement and of the loyalist state which it constructed as a veto on Irish national self-determination.

The material basis of loyalist reaction

Historically, the extreme regional unevenness of economic development in Ireland, in the century after the crushing of the revolutionary Irish bourgeoisie in 1798, gave rise to a powerful and reactionary Unionist bloc of classes. The component elements of this bloc — aristocratic landlords, industrialists, petit bourgeoisie and industrial workers, were united by their common protestantism, and committed to defend the Union with Britain. The bloc was deeply rooted materially in the extreme dependence of its economic development upon the British economy. Its economic basis was threatened by the nationalist movement which totally hegemonised the southern catholic masses.

Acting in concert with the most decisive imperialist sections of the British bourgeoisie, this reactionary Unionist alliance in the north east of Ireland vetoed the complete unity and independence for which the revolutionary wing of the nationalists struggled from 1916-22.

From a strictly economic point of view Britain had no more interest in holding Northern Ireland than it has now, as its capital would have remained absolutely unchallenged throughout a united and formally independent Ireland.

The Unionist bourgeoisie were given their own semi-autonomous state, and they constructed it upon the basis of systematic privileges at every level for loyalist protestants at the expense of the imprisoned nationalist minority within its boundaries. Systematic inequality and discrimination; systematic repression; systematic denial of basic democratic rights — such was the lot of the catholic nationalists living under the permanent state of emergency since the state was founded. Repeated pogroms, internment without trial — these were the realities suffered by catholics in recurrent episodes throughout the history of the state.

The leaders of the state machine publicly declared it "disloyal" to employ a catholic. They openly boasted of their commitment to "a protestant state for a protestant people". Right up till 1969 the official civilian militias, the "B Specials" were exclusively protestant plebeian forces which alone had the right to bear arms in defence of the state. Defence of their state meant brutal action against defenceless catholic nationalist communities. Yes — all this within a region of the United Kingdom itself. These are the realities which exploded in 1968-70. These are the realities which sustain nationalism as a real force in Northern Ireland. And it is this and not simply a "whole range of experiences" in three short years of mass struggle which made them able to stand firm against two decades of repression and to keep the fight going, despite everything, up to the present day.

The protestant petit bourgeoisie of Northern Ireland have a deeply rooted commitment to, yes, the "principles" of their own sectarian state. That commitment goes well beyond any direct economic calculation. The material privileges which sustain their reactionary

movement may be meagre in absolute terms, but they are real in relative terms. They extend even into the system of regional planning which gave the new town of Craigavon and the New University of Ulster to their communities in the late 1960s rather than to the catholic areas which were economically more profitable locations! Loyalists defend the Northern Ireland state as their own state, as the guarantor of their relative privileges and the basis for their quasi-racist sense of superiority over Irish nationalists.

Many reforms have been conceded in response to the struggle, notably on voting rights, but there have been few reforms of material importance apart from a more equal distribution of houses. In a longer perspective the rapid economic decline of industry in the region will undermine the will of the plebeian loyalists and the ability of the bourgeois unionists to resist the combined pressures of the British, of the European Community and of the USA.

These pressures, however, are aimed only at re-shaping the Northern State, not at destroying it. Their goal is to force the loyalist state to accommodate the constitutional catholic nationalists within the political structures of the Northern State — to share power with the catholic bourgeoisie, and thus to marginalise the armed struggle in the catholic communities. The objective is not a British withdrawal but the propping up of bourgeois order in Ireland.

The working class of the Six Counties

LO's picture of the working class in the Six Counties is the most threadbare and distorted part of its whole analysis. To say there is little difference "between the working class ghettos in Dublin, the catholic Andersonstown and the protestant Shankill Road in Belfast, the Toxteth area of Liverpool and the Broadwater Farm estate in London"⁶ is to ignore all the most important political realities that make the class struggle so utterly different in Northern Ireland.

The working class in the North is divided and subordinated to petit bourgeois nationalism on the one hand, to reactionary loyalism on the other. The catholic working class ghettos suffer not only exploitation but a marked degree of special oppression in their material life as nationalists.

As for the protestant working class, the LO article is entirely mistaken when it derides the idea of "the privileges of the protestant workers" as "a sinister joke, particularly for the 20% of them on the dole".⁷ Such simple economism would make fine rhetoric in the fight to unite protestant and catholic workers in joint economic struggles. But it makes for a very false analysis of the nature of the conflict which actually stands in the way of such united class struggle.

To start with, the figures are wrong. The average unemployment across the two communities is 20%. But the rate of unemployment for catholic workers is 2.5 times as high as for protestant! The consequences of such inequality is not lessened by the general lowering of working class conditions in the declining economy of Ulster.

The "privileges" of the protestant worker can be

6. *Ibid.*, p57
7. *Ibid.*, pp54-55

stated more positively. In the largest employer — Short Brothers, manufacturers of aeroplanes and guided missiles—90% of the 7,000 workforce is protestant! This is despite 17 years of direct rule from the London parliament which finances Shorts! Having explicitly dismissed the relevance of the protestant workers' privileges, the writer of LO's article is nevertheless forced to refer to "the relatively privileged and mostly protestant section of the working class"⁸

Such "privileges", however, must be understood as marginal in absolute terms. The average conditions of the protestant working class are no better than for the British working class in general. The fact that they do not equate with the unequal privileges of the middle class over the working class does not, however, make their marginal privileges unimportant!

The unskilled and unemployed among the protestant workers suffer low standards of living similar to their catholic neighbours, but individual protestant workers have a greater chance of moving out of the lower strata than their catholic neighbours by being a part of the network of favoritism and patronage in the protestant community.

What is ultimately decisive in shaping the outlook of even the lowest strata is that they are dominated in their workplaces, trade unions, communities and Orange Lodges by the those who do enjoy real relative privileges in comparison to their catholic neighbours. The collective ideology of protestant loyalism involves even the most exploited protestant workers in an identification with the sectarian state.

The marginal privileges of the skilled protestant worker, and his dominance over the mass of protestant workers, have played a powerful historical role in the nineteenth century in creating the reactionary Unionist class alliance. They later played a crucial role in consolidating the loyalist Northern State. The powers of the state itself have been deliberately used to entrench the privileged position of protestants at every social level.

Of course, much has changed with the rapid decline of the Ulster economy. Increasingly the confidence of the protestant working class, as well as its bourgeois masters, in "their own" fortress-state is being undermined. But these developments have hardly begun to erode the reactionary consciousness of the protestant working class in general on questions of democratic rights in Ireland.

Important united economic struggles of protestant and catholic workers emerged spontaneously in 1907, 1919 and in the 1930s but it was their antagonisms on the national question that was always the decisive instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie in breaking their resistance.

It would be idealist and utopian to pretend that the sectarian divisions were based merely in a false consciousness, were merely a lying conspiracy of the bourgeoisie to trap and divide the workers. A century of sectarian conflict has proven otherwise. The reactionary outlook of the protestant working class has a material basis historically which continues to exist.

To challenge it effectively means to take forward the revolutionary democratic struggle against the Northern State as one vital part of the revolutionary proletarian programme. It means never hiding from the protestant

workers our opposition to British imperialism and its loyalist allies even while we struggle to involve them in united class action against the capitalist offensive.

The national struggle of the catholic working class, at the same time, contains a powerful progressive element despite the illusory nature of nationalist solutions. This is especially true in Ireland where a united bourgeois state is all but impossible and would in any case solve none of the material problems of the oppressed and exploited.

This is far removed from the perspectives which LO draws from its analysis. As in the Irish perspectives of the economistic Militant Tendency, LO emphasises workers' unity of protestant and catholic as the concrete means to open up the road of class struggle, "by closing the ranks of both protestant and catholic working classes against the bosses"⁹

For both Militant and Lutte Ouvrière, such a policy involves downplaying or denying that there exists a national struggle with a progressive dynamic against imperialism. For both organisations a simplistic economism serves to downplay or deny the depth and the material basis of the divisions between oppressed nationalist workers and loyalist workers whose political outlook is deeply reactionary.

LO's article conjures up a fantastic schema. It suggests that a British withdrawal would create the conditions for a "working class armed uprising" because of its economic impact upon the Northern Ireland economy:

"The real and main problem for the British state is in fact the working class, both protestant and catholic. The drastic increase of unemployment and the sharp reduction in the standard of living of the working class which would come out of a settlement may spark off a violent reaction among workers . . . This danger is a very real one for the British state. There are plenty of weapons around in working class districts in Northern Ireland, and no shortage of people who have used them one day or another and would be prepared to use them again. The last thing the British state wants to risk is a working class armed uprising so close to its own land!"¹⁰

It is simply stupid to suggest that the arms used today in defence of reaction by sections of the loyalist working class might tomorrow be turned against the bourgeoisie, in a united offensive with catholic workers, because of a rapid economic decline in the wake of a British withdrawal.

Such a schema simply wishes away the complex problems of revolutionary perspectives for the nationally divided Irish working class.

There is no evidence whatever that such a withdrawal is contemplated by Britain. Its economic offensive in Northern Ireland is certainly no sharper than in the "mainland". If London and the other imperialists agreed with Dublin and sections of the Northern bourgeoisie to re-unite Ireland from above, it could only be done on the basis of economic guarantees to both sections of the Irish bourgeoisie, possibly within the framework of a European Community plan.

What LO does not suggest is that such a withdrawal from the North might be forced upon the British by a mass revolutionary movement in Ireland, increasingly led by class-conscious proletarian forces but accelerated in particular by popular resistance to imperialist repres-

8. *Ibid.*, p39

9. *Ibid.*, p57

10. *Ibid.*, pp40-41



Army thugs in action

sion and super-exploitation. That would pose a profound threat to bourgeois order as a whole in Ireland.

Of course, a revolutionary process developing along such lines would have to win significant sections of protestant workers or at least shatter the loyalist class alliance and neutralise proletarian loyalism as a force. LO gives no consideration to this, the key problem of revolutionary strategy and tactics in Ireland. Solving these programmatic problems is a fundamental task of the construction of the Irish section of a revolutionary communist international. The existence of such a section, and its leadership of the struggle, will be indispensable for the final victory of the Irish masses.

Criticising the republicans

LO's article is devoted principally to an attack on the Irish republican movement. Such criticism is, we believe, a duty for Trotskyists. The Irish Workers Group has never held back from that duty, including within the republicans' own meetings and campaigns. We make our criticisms, however, from the standpoint of complete solidarity with the struggle to force Britain out of Ireland, and alongside the unequivocal and public defence of the IRA against the imperialists.

It is for revolutionary communists fighting within Ireland, however, to impose conditions on their support for the IRA, as part of the fight to replace them with a revolutionary communist leadership.

Our fraternal organisations in other countries, especially Workers' Power in Britain, must subordinate their criticisms of the IRA to the primary duty of winning the unconditional support of British workers for the IRA against their own state. What is the framework in which LO criticises the IRA? It appears to make no clear internationalist declaration of support for the struggle against imperialism in Ireland.

As for the content of LO's criticisms of the republicans, many of them are correct. As they rightly point out: "What does Sinn Féin have to offer the Irish workers, North and South? A united and independent Ireland. United with the reactionary catholic church which is still tightly in control of the Republic's state? Independent but with even less resources than it has now, therefore with lower standards of living? Independent with the perspective of having to slave away in order to compensate for the lack of an industrial basis? What sort of socialism can be built on such a basis — except a caricature of socialism based on more exploitation and more poverty for the working class?"¹¹

The "socialist" rhetoric of the republicans is a sham. Their methods render their own mass of supporters utterly passive. They cynically cultivate bourgeois parliamentary respectability in order to negotiate for a reorganised bourgeois Ireland. They do not give a lead to any section of the working class in resisting economic attacks. By the same token they turn their backs on the class needs of the protestant workers also.

But we do not agree with LO that the republicans embody "absolute and total contempt for the protestant population including for its most deprived layers".¹² That is the language of pro-imperialist propaganda in Ireland and internationally, echoed by "Trotskyist" tendencies such as Militant, the Spartacists . . . and LO! It is quite a different thing to say that they do nothing "to bridge the gap between protestant and catholic workers".¹³

It is true that some of the IRA's military actions result in the inexcusable killings of civilians and a deeper antagonism between the nationalist and loyalist communities. Increasingly their own political leaders openly criticise such actions.

It would be completely wrong, however, to suggest that their guerrilla campaign is characterised in essence by a hostility to the protestant population as such, even

11. *Ibid.*, p56
12. *Ibid.*, p54
13. *Ibid.*, p55

if some particular actions by some guerrillas are almost certainly conceived with a deliberate sectarian hatred for protestants. It must be remembered that very large numbers of protestants (and almost no catholics) actively participate in the huge police force of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in the police reserves and in the local battalions of the British army — the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The catholic community has daily experience of brutal repression at the hands of these forces, as well as of the British army. In the eyes of the most combative sections of the catholics, this experience makes such forces legitimate targets, even when they are not "on duty". It would be utterly wrong to suggest any similarity between the actions or outlook of the republicans and the actions and outlook of the loyalist murder gangs who randomly kill catholics in order to terrorise and intimidate their communities.

The problem is not Sinn Féin's "total contempt for the protestant population". It is rather its petit bourgeois class outlook which completely subordinates any consideration of the common needs of all sections of the working class. It is a petit bourgeois party and leadership, despite the fact that its biggest mass support is among the most exploited working class sections of the catholic population in the North. Small farmers in the North also form an influential part of its base, but they are not an important social force.

As a political current, Sinn Féin exists on an all-Ireland basis and draws support from a widely scattered, although thin, layer of the petit bourgeoisie throughout the country as a whole. It has no significant support among the southern masses and no organic relationship to the working class as such.

Ghettoised in the North, without support in the South, and with a programme that can only isolate it from the concerns of southern workers, the republicans are incapable of developing the national struggle to the point of forcing a British withdrawal. They have little possibility, therefore, of ever becoming the direct agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie in re-constructing bourgeois rule in a united Ireland, as suggested by LO in its article when they argue that:

"As long as Sinn Féin's influence remains what it is today, it is obvious that no settlement can be pushed through without its involvement."¹⁴

The pre-condition for developing the revolutionary-democratic struggle against repression, British imperialism and Partition, is the involvement of significant working-class forces from the South. That cannot be done except with a revolutionary communist action programme and party which combines tactics towards the national struggle with action goals which lead to the strategy of workers' power throughout the island — a strategy of permanent revolution.

As a revolutionary-nationalist formation the republicans stand at the head of an open mass revolt against British rule in Northern Ireland and against that sectarian statelet itself. Communists are obliged, therefore, to fight for united front tactics with them and the forces they lead.

The Irish Workers Group carries out this policy by fighting for unity in action between "workers, socialists and republicans" around concrete issues of repression,

for the prisoners' demands, for troops out etc. We have consistently fought alongside republican activists on this basis while always openly arguing our independent revolutionary communist programme.

There is no other principled way to relate to the "radical militant Northern catholic areas" which LO correctly sees as an important location for proletarian revolutionaries to build support. Having rooted a communist party in such sections, however, does not mean, as LO believes, that there is any direct route from there to the task of "closing the ranks of both protestant and catholic working classes against the bosses . . . and against the most unacceptable and blatant aspects of the British occupation".¹⁵

Why only oppose "aspects" of the British occupation? Does this mean that LO does not recognise the legitimacy of the demand of the Irish national struggle to drive out the British army entirely? Their central emphasis on unity of protestant and catholic workers in economic struggles leads LO, as for the Militant and the Spartacists, to put forward utopian perspectives. Open and unconditional support — the duty of communists towards national struggles against imperialism — runs a poor second place.

The national struggle is of central importance for communists in Ireland as a whole. It has been a source of instability to bourgeois rule throughout the island in every decade since partition. Many important features of the Irish social and political formation, especially the political backwardness of the Irish working class as a whole, are directly rooted in the division of the nation and the class by British-imperialist partition and in the economic subordination of southern Ireland to the imperialist powers.

Irish economic and social development as a whole is distorted and retarded by its profound dependence on imperialist capitalism — British, US and other European. This may yet be of enormous importance in speeding up the tendency towards economic and political crisis and mass unrest in the period ahead. The only possible — but extremely unlikely — alternative is that the increased economic integration of the European Community succeeds in propping up the Irish economy. Thus there is not only an open struggle against imperialism in the North but also a latent dynamic of popular revolt against the depredations of capitalist imperialism in the South — albeit that conditions for the latter depend at present upon international economic developments.

It is this combination of features in Irish society, North and South, that makes it possible to put forward a perspective of permanent revolution for the class struggle in Ireland. The programme of revolutionary communists must not only advance a transitional action programme for the independent needs of the proletariat. It must simultaneously fight for working class leadership in all popular revolts which arise out of the two distinct features of Ireland's subordination to imperialism.

Our first duty is to apply that method now, in Ireland and internationally. We stand clearly with the struggle of the oppressed nationalist minority in Northern Ireland and we defend the republican fighters who, whatever their methods, are the current leadership of the

14. *Ibid.*, p42
15. *Ibid.*, p57

struggle against British imperialism.

In the imperialist heartlands communists must fight for British troops out of Ireland now and self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!

By way of conclusion

Faithful to its economistic method and its vulgar materialism, LO turns its back on the sole strategy capable of transforming the national struggle in Ireland into a struggle for workers' power: the strategy of permanent revolution. Nowhere does LO put forward an action programme capable of simultaneously resolving the social question and the national question in Ireland. Despite its claims to be Trotskyist, LO ignores the role of imperialism in Ireland and fails in the elementary duty of every communist to openly support all those who struggle against British imperialism and its more than 10,000 troops, its police and its gangs of loyalist paramilitary killers.

This internationalist duty, especially important for militants in an imperialist country such as France, is absolutely indispensable if one wishes to criticise the republicans from a class point of view. Failure to use this approach leads you to line up with the imperialist bourgeoisie which is always ready to attack the "terrorism" of the oppressed.

None of this should surprise regular readers of *Lutte de Classe*. In a series of other articles on anti-imperialist struggles, Lutte Ouvrière and the ICU have shown their total incomprehension when faced with the democratic and anti-imperialist demands of the oppressed masses. In the case of Israel, the ICU propose limply that it is necessary to "foster an awareness, based on the Palestinians' struggle; that there are general interests involved, that the Palestinian's fight could become the fight of all workers".¹⁶

Whilst this is an admirable sentiment, as usual LO and the ICU give no indication of how it is to be achieved. We are left with the pious hope that revolu-

tionaries should "prove to the Jewish working class and to the Jewish population as a whole that it is in their interest to break with the Zionist policy of Israel".¹⁷

As in Northern Ireland, LO/ICU prefer to "forget" the role of imperialism and its ability to divide the working class, hoping that merely concentrating on economic questions will lead to the working class spontaneously developing a revolutionary awareness of capitalist, imperialist and national oppression!

In this economistic dream-world, the realities of national oppression can be dismissed with a wave of a hand, and revolutionaries can get on with the real business of the economic class struggle, which seems to be all that counts for this organisation.

It is this position which in France has led Lutte Ouvrière to:

- ignore the question of building real solidarity with the Kanak people struggling against French imperialism
- gaily identify the nationalism of the oppressed with the nationalism of the oppressor ("racism, nationalism, they're the same thing, they're both stupid" said LO's election stickers in 1986 . . .)
- minimise the importance of the rising tide of racism and the growth of the fascist Front National, and to refuse to create a worker's campaign against racism and fascism.

And with this record LO dares to give lessons to the oppressed peoples on how to conduct an anti-imperialist struggle!

No doubt LO and the ICU feel that their position protects them from the influence of petit bourgeois nationalism. In fact, it cuts them off from the oppressed sectors of the proletariat, and brings their politics dangerously close to that of the chauvinist reformists.

In Ireland, as in the Middle East, Kanaky and France, the oppressed masses have no need of LO's rationalist and abstract principles. They need a revolutionary programme which will lead them to victory. That is the goal of the Irish Workers Group and the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International.

16. *Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle*, No8 p6
17. Ibid

The MAS, the Izquierda Unida and the Argentine elections

by Juan Arienti

In the recent Argentine parliamentary elections, Luis Zamora, a leading member of the *Movimiento Al Socialismo* (MAS — "Movement Towards Socialism"), was elected a deputy. One other MAS member was elected a local deputy for the Buenos Aires region. The press of the International Workers League (LIT), founded by the late Nahuel Moreno is loud in its praise for the "success" of its Argentinian section: the "first Trotskyist MP" its members have boasted.

But was this really a great triumph for Trotskyism in Argentina? Sadly not. In fact it represents yet another sorry step in the history of Morenoite centrism. The MAS fought the election as part of an electoral bloc — the *Izquierda Unida* (IU — "United Left") — with the Argentinian Communist Party. This bloc received half a million votes in the national deputies list.

Despite the pretensions of the MAS and the LIT, the programme of the IU is neither that of a principled united front for action, nor a revolutionary answer to the crisis facing the Argentine masses. It is yet another opportunist bloc in which political clarity is sacrificed for short term electoral gain. The MAS may have one MP, but they have no programmatic base for using that MP as a revolutionary tribune in the class battles which are to come.

Argentina is currently in the thralls of one of its most severe economic crises in recent history. The Radical government of outgoing President Raul Alfonsín had failed in all its attempts to revive the economy. Burdened by enormous debts to the imperialist banks, with inflation running at 80% and more per month, with growing shortages and power cuts throughout the country, the Radicals went to the country promising only more austerity as a way out of the crisis.

The victory of the other major bourgeois party, the Peronists, came about due to the overwhelming support that its leader, Carlos Menem, received from the Peronist-led trade unions and the working class in general. Apart from occasional bouts of "anti-imperialist" rhetoric against the banks and the British over the Malvinas, Menem remained studiously vague about what his economic policies would be.

A further element to the political crisis in Argentina has been a series of revolts by sections of the army designed to halt all investigations into the "dirty war" conducted under the military dictatorship during which 30,000 "disappeared". By the revolts and threats of coups, the army has managed to block virtually all attempts to bring the army officers responsible for the murders and tortures to the courts, courtesy of course of

concessions agreed by Alfonsín and Menem.

It was in these circumstances that the United Left was launched in October 1988 on the initiative of the MAS. This was not the first time that the MAS had made a bloc with the CP. At the end of 1985 the two parties formed a "Peoples Front" (FREPU). This grouping fell apart in 1987 when the CP joined with other "democratic parties" in supporting Alfonsín's "Act for Democratic Compromise" which involved fundamental concessions to the military. The MAS refused to sign and in the following period overtook the CP in terms of its growth and support, especially in Buenos Aires.

By 1988 the MAS was courting the CP again. Moreno's justification for seeking such electoral blocs with the Stalinists was that they were part of a strategy aimed at "hugging the CP to death". With the CP's electoral support in decline, the Morenoites combined their opportunism with a ludicrous triumphalism predicting to the "death" of the CP as an important force in Argentina. The MAS was soon to learn that the CP could "hug" as hard as the "Trotskyists"!

The founding of the Izquierda Unida

The IU was finally launched in October 88 by the MAS and the CP's front the FRAL, which contained the Humanist Party and a few other small petit bourgeois groupings. They appealed to others to join including the Intransigent Party, a split to the left from the Radicals. Both the CP and the MAS had been attempting to draw this party into an alliance since the FREPU was launched but had consistently failed. So right from the outset, the IU was not seen as being a bloc of workers' parties, but was aimed at including "left" elements of the bourgeoisie.

The programme of the IU therefore had to be tailored twice over: first so as not to scare off the CP, then so as to attract any potential bourgeois allies.

In order to decide on who should be the candidates in both the presidential and parliamentary elections, the IU held a series of US-style "primaries". It was at this point that the MAS got a rude awakening as to the real strength of the CP and its allies. The candidate supported by the CP's front, the FRAL, was Nestor Vicente.

This ex-Christian Democrat, ex-Peronist, ex-Radical and openly proclaimed Catholic (the ideal candidate for such a bloc!), won the primaries, leaving the MAS with the second prize of running for the vice-presidency.

The LIT like to present the IU as having "a working

class, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist programme".¹ They argue that:

"Argentina's United Left is a workers front. In that sense it is qualitatively different from coalitions like the Broad Uruguayan Front, the Peruvian United Left and other fronts that the Communist parties impose in Latin America with class conciliationist programs harmonious with the world political pact with imperialism urged by Gorbachev".²

One look at the programme of the IU shows what a false picture this is. In fact the programme is perfectly in harmony with the reformist politics of Stalinism and the right-centrist MAS happily accommodates to it. Despite being couched in radical phrases, the IU's programme for combatting the capitalist crisis shows clearly how the MAS guts the *Transitional Programme* of its revolutionary content.

For example, to deal with soaring inflation the IU calls for price control on the leading companies . . . "where they agree"! And if they don't? The workers will lose out. Where is the key demand for the protection of workers' living standards — the sliding scale of wages? Where are the demands to mobilise the masses in price watch committees, to mobilise the trade unions for action to win this demand? The centrists of the MAS obviously have no use for such demands which would offend their Stalinist allies and certainly scare off any radical bourgeois elements. The programme has been diplomatically trimmed to meet the needs of the MAS, not those of the masses.

Similarly absent is the consistent call for the expropriation of the capitalists. While the IU are willing to countenance this for factories that go bankrupt and close down, the demand mysteriously disappears when it comes to dealing with the banks and major industries, precisely at the point where it is most vital.

The fine sounding first point of the IU programme illustrates the whole problem with the method of the MAS. "For the non-payment of the fraudulent external debt" it says. Fair enough. But this sits uneasily with the rest of the programme. As the MAS would surely readily agree, if Argentina were to cancel the debt and break with the IMF and the World Bank it would undoubtedly have to face a massive imperialist blockade. Yet the programme does not even attempt to address this problem.

And with reason. The only possible solution would involve the demand for a workers' government which immediately proceeded to expropriate the capitalists, their banks and industry, to arm the workers in defence of these actions and against imperialism, and to take active steps to spread the revolution beyond the confines of one country in Latin America. The fact that none of these questions are even raised shows that this demand is just for "negotiation", a threat to get a better deal from the imperialists. The Argentine workers should not be persuaded by the IU's promises: without the necessary revolutionary strategy, any IU government (in itself an unlikely prospect) would quickly find itself up against the limits of its own rhetoric.

All this is no accident: it reflects the whole approach of the programme towards government and state power. And here the document is reformist through and through.

The programme puts forward the purely parliamentary road to socialism so beloved by the Stalinists. It calls for a "constituent assembly, with full freedoms and sovereignty", a purely bourgeois demand (and a bizarre one in the case of Argentina with its developed parliamentary democracy). Throughout this "anti-capitalist" document there is no mention of workers' councils (soviets) as essential organs of working class struggle and as the form of the future state. In the absence of this, the call for "a government of those who have never governed . . . the workers and the popular masses" is nothing but a smokescreen.

What about Lenin and Trotsky's insistence that the bourgeois state has to be smashed and that it cannot be transformed? All this is absent from the "anti-capitalist" programme of the IU.

A reformist line on the state

On the crucial question of the repressive state forces the programme is at its most cravenly reformist. With typical sleight of hand, point 23 proudly declares for a "dismantling of the repressive apparatus". This turns out not to be a demand for the dissolution of the bourgeois army and its replacement by a workers' militia, for the arming of the people, but a call for the "trial and punishment for those guilty of the disappearances" i.e. a purge of the "bad elements" in the army! This is hardly radically different from Alfonsín's promises on coming to power!

Point 18 makes clear the IU's commitment to defend the Argentine bourgeois state, when it declares "For substantial military reforms to compulsory military service that guarantee respect and dignity to the soldier and for military instruction according to the needs of national defence"! Where is the "anti-capitalism" here?

In case anyone thought this was a position imposed on the MAS by the CP, the MAS paper *Solidaridad Socialista* expands on the MAS' reformist conception of "democratising" the army. In an article entitled "Our proposals for the armed forces" the paper sets out its position on changes necessary in the armed forces thus, "the changes should be in the direction of their democratisation, so that they cease to be institutions of the exploiters, for the repression of the workers".³

Allende and the Communist Party of Chile in the Popular Unity peddled exactly the same illusions with regard to the armed forces and that led the Chilean workers to bloody defeat. The "Trotskyists" of the MAS want to repeat the lesson in Argentina!

As good pseudo-Trotskyists, the LIT claim that they are in favour of a programme of permanent revolution for the imperialised world:

"The underdeveloped countries can only achieve genuine democracy and national liberation through the taking of state power by the *working class*, supported by the peasantry, in a *socialist* revolution."⁴

All this is just so much fine talk. We find the real content of the LIT's opportunist "Trotskyism" in the programme of the MAS and the IU.

In the section dealing with "anti-imperialism" the IU programme clearly shows the marks of the CP's perspective of a democratic stage:

1. *International Courier* (English edition) No38, January 1989, p37

2. *Ibid*, p37-38

3. Article reproduced in *La Aurora*, 2.2.89.

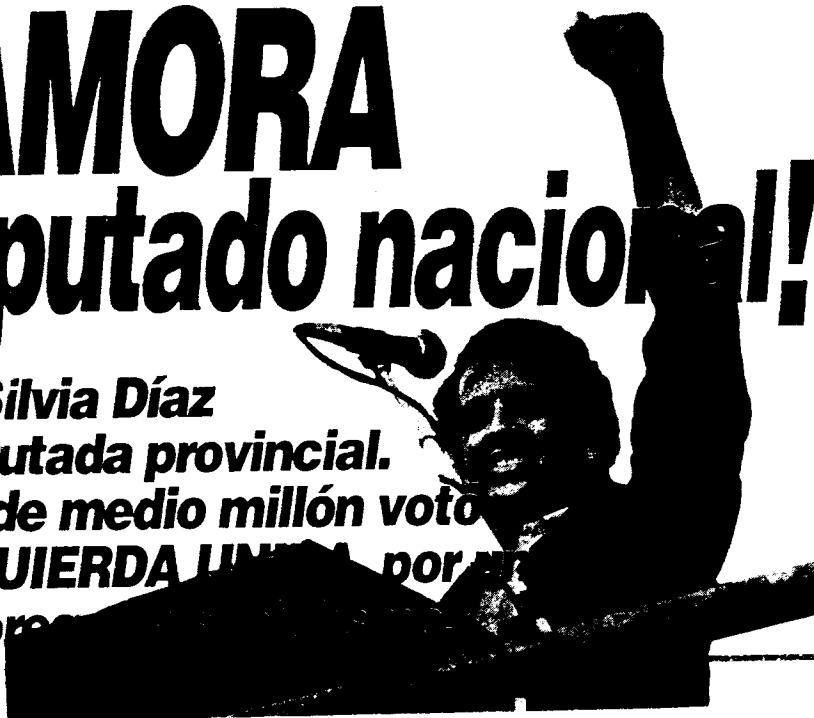
4. *International Courier*, op cit, p2

¡LUIS ZAMORA diputado nacional!

**SOLIDARIDAD
SOCIALISTA**

**Silvia Díaz
diputada provincial.
Más de medio millón voto
por IZQUIERDA UNIDA por el
gobierno de trabajadores**

Tribuna Independiente del pensamiento socialista



"For a second Latin American Independence beginning with a break with all the economic, political, diplomatic and military pacts which hold back our people and for a break with US imperialism."

This evasive formula could clearly mean an "independent" capitalist Argentina. It makes no mention of socialism (the whole programme itself is careful to avoid this dangerous word, preferring vague talk of "social liberation"). Yet how else can Argentina or any other country in Latin America suffering imperialist exploitation break the economic and political stranglehold of imperialism? Given the IU's silence on this fundamental point it seems that the Argentine CP has "hugged" the Trotskyism out of the MAS!

Throughout the whole programme the most notable absence is the question of mobilising the workers in struggle against austerity and the state. This is of the utmost significance because a revolutionary communist election campaign should stress the necessity of direct working class action to achieve even its most basic objectives and the impossibility of using parliament to defeat the bourgeoisie and overthrow their system.

The IU election programme thus reveals itself as an opportunist propaganda bloc where the content of the propaganda is tailored to suit what the reformist CP will accept. There is no way of using the IU's 29 points as the basis for a working class fightback against austerity, or for charting the way to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

The only call for mass mobilisation of the workers is in opposition to the threat of a coup d'état. The MAS might claim that this is a "code" for the insurrection. The truth is that the IU's programme is totally in line with a reformist method which seeks to mobilise the workers electorally, in order to institute a "left government" which will legislate for socialism.

The general strike, arming the workers, forming workers militias, soviets, conducting revolutionary work in the army with the aim of breaking it up as a repressive force, all these crucial elements of a real "anti-

capitalist" "anti-imperialist" programme of action are absent. It is little wonder then that when the IU's presidential candidate was interviewed by the newspaper *Clarín* and asked about the question of a government of the workers, he immediately replied:

"On the subject you ask about, the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is not a subject talked about these days, neither in the IU nor the FRAL."⁵

And one can add "neither in the MAS" when it comes to presenting a programme before the workers!

Legalist reflexes

The increasingly rightward drift of the MAS was demonstrated in the election period not just by its reformist bloc with the CP but by its reaction to the Tablada Massacre, where members of the ERP (Revolutionary Peoples Army), a guerrilla tendency long thought defunct in Argentina, launched an attack on the La Tablada barracks, believing it would cause a leftist rising. After their surrender and capture many were murdered by the army in cold blood. Even the bourgeois press was shocked at this blatant resurgence of the "Dirty War".

What would have been a revolutionary response to such an incident? First and foremost it would have been to defend the ERP, however misguided their actions, against the repression of the bourgeois state. But what most concerned the MAS was to demonstrate their commitment to bourgeois legality and to distance themselves from "putschism" and declare that "terrorism was not Marxism".⁶

This piece of scabbing on the victims of state repression was taken further when the "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" (an organisation of the mothers of those who disappeared under the dictatorship) called for a demonstration on the anniversary of the 1976 military coup. One of the slogans of the demonstration was the denunciation of the La Tablada massacre. This was enough for Zamora to declare his opposition and for the MAS to

5. *Clarín*, 19.2.89

6. Cited in *Prensa Obrera* No 260, p1

organise a boycott!

The recent elections in Argentina have entirely confirmed the hopeless centrism of the MAS and the LIT. Morenoism has demonstrated again its deeply opportunist practice and electoral cretinism in its heartland of Argentina. Its "left" face of 1979 when it broke with the United Secretariat of the Fourth International over the USFI's opportunism in relation to the Sandinista regime, is long gone.

Its opportunist manoeuvres with the Argentinian CP have already cost it 200 militants who split to form the

Workers Party for Socialism (PTS). But if these comrades are to learn the lessons of the split they will need to look beyond the most recent turn of the MAS.

They will have to examine the origins of Argentine Trotskyism's collapse into centrism. These origins lie in the collapse of the whole Fourth International into centrism by 1951. Only by learning those lessons and developing an irreconcilable struggle against Stalinism, Peronism and centrism within the Argentinian working class, will it be possible to build a real revolutionary workers' party, worthy of the name of Trotskyism.

The programme of the Izquierda Unida

1. Non-payment of the fraudulent external debt: be it in the form of capital, interest payments or so-called "capitalisation". Break off the deals with the IMF and the World Bank.

2. For an immediate increase in pay, allowances and pensions. Restoration of the basic living wage so that it covers all family needs.

3. For an end to inflation: for the restoration of price control for the leading companies—including the large commercial monopolies—where they agree, and with the participation of the trade union and mass organisations of the people.

4. For an end to price rises and over-pricing. Prices in the public sector services to be accessible to the poorest sections of the population. For the freezing of these prices to the levels existing prior to the "Primavera" plan.

5. For the right to work: for full employment on the basis of a plan of prioritised public works, and of the revitalising of the productive sector and regional economies. For guaranteed state unemployment benefits equal to the basic living wage, so that the unemployed can survive the present situation. For nationalisation, without compensation, of all factories that close down. This to be under the control of the workers in the plant (having beforehand studied its economic feasibility), in order to guarantee the right to work.

6. For an immediate embargo on the wealth of all those capitalists who have taken \$30 billion out of the country, and of those companies which have transferred their external debt to the state. If, in sixty days, they do not repatriate and re-integrate these funds the embargo will be put into action and their capital will be seized.

7. Full support for the struggles of the workers and the people against the current economic plan. For an alternative economic plan that benefits the masses and

which is elaborated by the organisations of the people and the workers' movement, the basis of which is proposed by the IU in this document.

8. For the nationalisation of the banks, the exchange system, foreign commerce, insurance companies and all the monopolies.

9. Against privatisation: for the cancellation of all the contracts that involve handing over state industries to the multinationals (petroleum, telephones, airlines etc). For a state monopoly of public services; and of the exploration, exploitation and commercialisation of all natural resources and their derivatives. For the defence of the state industries, for the removal of civil servants linked to the interests of transnational monopolies in order to prevent fraudulent bids and particularly to secure efficiency on the basis of workers' and users' control.

10. For an agrarian reform that expropriates the large land holdings, the large bourgeois land owners, and gives the workers, peasants and small farmers access to the individual or collective exploitation of the land. For the restructuring of the small land holdings to make them profitable. Support for agrarian co-operative projects.

11. For cheap credit from the state bank for small producers and merchants.

12. For a political taxation system based on the principle of "the more you have the more you pay". For the elimination of taxes which affect the spending power of the masses. For the prevention of tax evasion by the rich and for the imposition of strong and progressive taxes on the large estates and capital holdings.

13. For an end to the commercialisation of health and essential services and a securing of health for all through the establishment of free and integral health care, with the use of preventative medicine integrated

into a plan of national centralisation, based on public hospitals. This will mean the nationalisation all the laboratories and health centres.

14. For state taught education: egalitarian, unrestricted, free and secular, at all levels and in the service of national and social liberation. Increase in the budget for education. Decent salaries for all teaching staff. For an end to state subsidies for private education. For independent scientific and technological development to prevent a "brain drain".

15. For a law controlling the universities, elaborated with the participation of students, staff, non-staff workers and graduates, which guarantees real autonomy as well as free and open access.

16. For a plan of decent housing for the people with the provision of long term state credit at low interest. For an emergency housing law that suspends the evictions of families. For a just and fair rents law that ensures that rents do not rise over 15% of the family income. For an integrated rent system which does not operate against the interest of the small proprietors. For a fixed expiry date for the renting of houses which remain uninhabited. For a definitive lowering of prices of occupied plots and housing and for the imposition of a stronger progressive tax for those that keep prices high.

17. For the rights of women workers: equal pay for equal work and access to all professional levels. For creche facilities in working class districts and places of work. For a special complementary family wage for single mothers. For the encouragement of the participation of women in positions of leadership in the unions proportional to the number of women workers in each sector.

18. A guarantee for full rights for youth, especially in education and in work. For the same work and the same pay as adults. For the right to vote from the age of 16. For substantial reforms in compulsory military service that guarantee respect and dignity to the soldier and for a military instruction according to the needs of national defence.

19. For full enforcement and extension of the democratic freedoms consecrated in the national constitution. For full maintenance of the following freedoms: to meet, of association, press, to life, to work, to form unions, to defence in a trial, to the privacy of the home and correspondence, etc. For the repeal of all restrictive legislation regarding the right to strike, to trade union organisation and politics. For voting rights for all foreigners that have been in the country for five years or more.

20. For an end to all privileges for civil servants (executive, legislative, judicial sectors and of the armed and security forces). They should earn the same as state employees, on the same wage scales, without privilege, early retirement and easy jobs.

21. For a constituent assembly with full freedoms and sovereignty.

22. Against all attempts at a coup d'état. For the mobilisation of the workers and people in order to prevent it.

23. For the dismantling of the repressive apparatus; for the investigation and exposure of its activities. Trial and punishment for those guilty of the disappearances, abductions, tortures, military uprisings and any other form of state terrorism. Abolition of military immunity. Clarification of the whereabouts of the disappeared. For the abolition of the "Full Stop" (otherwise known as the statute of limitations) and "Due Obedience" laws, and all those laws aimed at absolving the killings. Against all forms of amnesty. Against the "National Security Instruction" and the "Law of Defense". For the return of the abducted children to their families. Freedom for all political prisoners.

24. For a new, anti-bureaucratic, combative leadership for the workers' movement, committed to national and social liberation. Against the trade union bureaucracy which betrays struggles and which imposes the politics of the social contract and consensus in the interests of the bosses. For trade union democracy. For the workers' right to decide in their trade union organisations without interference from the bosses or the state.

25. For the recovery of our sovereignty in the Malvinas and the islands of the South Atlantic. For the expropriation of British assets in Argentina. For the dismantling of the NATO nuclear base in the Malvinas. Against the process of "de-Malvinification" which intends to revive and strengthen imperialist relations. Break the military pacts such as TIAR which tie Argentina to imperialism.

26. Against the USA's policy of armament and imperialist aggression throughout the world.

27. For Latin American integration with all countries which break with imperialism. For an independent foreign policy and active solidarity with all peoples fighting for liberation. For effective support for the struggles of the neighbouring peoples of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile and Paraguay. For unconditional defence of Cuba against imperialist aggression.

28. For a second Latin American independence, beginning with a break with all the economic, political, diplomatic and military pacts which hold back our people. For a break with US imperialism.

29. This programme can only be put into practice on the basis of a government of those who have never before governed in our country: the rank and file, the workers and the popular masses whose interests lie with the achievement of national and social liberation.

Reviews

For political revolution in the USSR

by Balzas Nagy (Michel Varga), a Workers Press pamphlet, £2

Michel Varga is a Hungarian "Trotskyist" who has been in exile in the west since the late 1950s. Over the last thirty years he has organised a series of interventions into Eastern Europe. Whatever his faults — and they are many — his attempts to grapple with the problems of applying the programme of political revolution on the ground deserve the attention of revolutionaries.

Varga has recently dissolved his tiny "Group of Opposition and Continuity of the Fourth International" (GOCQI) into the "Preparatory Committee for an International Conference of Trotskyists", initiated by the British WRP (*Workers Press*). This committee has recently been joined by the PTS, an Argentinian group led by Leon Perez which has split from the Morenoite LIT. Hanging around the edges of the committee, neither in nor out, are "observers" such as the Italian GOR and the RKL (formerly IKL) of Austria.

Varga's work in Eastern Europe, notably in Hungary (where he has recently been interviewed by the CP's youth paper), is one of the factors which currently unites this disparate group of centrists. Awe-struck and bound by a tacit non-aggression pact, none of them have subjected Varga's work and analysis to even the slightest critique.

This is unfortunate, for Varga's method shows all the methodological flaws which have dogged the degenerate centrist fragments of the Fourth International over the last forty years. Whatever he may claim, Varga continues to repeat the errors which have marked his interventions over the last quarter-century. Whilst he maintains this method, he will be building on sand.

The pamphlet consists of a report given to a January 1989 meeting of his GOCQI. Much of it is taken up with polemical attacks on the Spanish-based Ramos grouping, now known as the International League, from which Varga was expelled at the beginning of 1985. Most of this material is of little interest because Varga, breaking all the rules of polemic, refuses to give any quotes to back up his claims.

Varga's basic — and correct — criticism of Ramos is that the latter sees Gorbachev as seeking to set about the restoration of capitalism within the workers state. Varga points out that this leads such "Trotskyists" to effectively side with the Ligachev wing of the bureaucracy as somehow more positive. The problem is that Varga's analysis is equally flawed and equally opportunist only from the other side.

The positions outlined in the pamphlet represent a clear adaptation to the "reform" wing of the Soviet

bureaucracy. While this might appear ironic for a leader of an organisation that has in its Ten Point principles the characterisation of Stalinism as "counter-revolutionary through and through", one should remember that this undialectical view has never prevented the International Committee tradition from adapting to Stalinism in the past, for example to Maoism during the "Cultural Revolution" in China.

Varga argues that the policies of glasnost and perestroika are not primarily the result of the pressure of imperialism but the bureaucracy's response to the pressure of the workers and that these policies reflect, in however a distorted form, the demands of the workers themselves. In Varga's own words:

"It would be wrong to think . . . that the programme of Imre Nagy in 1956, or of Gomulka in 1956, or Dubcek in 1968, or Gorbachev today, were or are inspired entirely by the bourgeoisie. In reality they are crude versions of the wide demands of the masses, filtered and modified, censored and changed, often recast, always emasculated, by the bureaucracy, or more exactly by its 'reforming' faction."¹

Behind this lurks a centrist fatalism faced with the "historic process" which is at least as opportunist as that of Mandel and the "Pabloites" Varga claims to be so different from. He argues that "it is in the USSR itself that the process of political revolution has started and clears a path through many obstacles".² In an even grosser distortion he goes so far as to suggest that "the bureaucracy is forced to adopt slogans stolen from the *Transitional Programme* of the Fourth International"³

Like Ramos, Varga's analysis is one-sided and therefore wrong. The growing stagnation of the economy, itself the result of the inability of bureaucratic command planning to develop modern industry, has led to a recognition by sections of the bureaucracy that they are falling further and further behind the imperialist economies. Of course, the imperialists are more than willing to offer their "support" and advice to any wing of the bureaucracy that they think will offer diplomatic concessions abroad and encourage market forces and foreign capitalist investment at home. The fact that Gorbachev offers these opportunities does not however make him a "capitalist restorationist" in the immediate sense. There are others in the CPSU who want to go further and more quickly down this road.

This stagnation of the economy also threatens internal unrest and in this sense Varga is partly right. Poland, for example, showed the dangers for a bureaucratic

1. *For Political Revolution* p2

2. *Ibid.*, p4

3. *Ibid* p20



Varga

caste that not only failed to improve living standards for the workers but actually enforced cuts in living and working conditions. The Soviet Union is increasingly in this position and the bureaucracy is scared of a potential Soviet "Solidarnosc". But to say this is not to suggest, as Varga does, that somehow *glasnost* and *perestroika* represent the "filtered" demands of the masses.

These are part of a bureaucratic response to the crisis and as such they have a definite bureaucratic content. *Perestroika* represents the ruling caste's attempts to increase labour productivity through the use of the discipline of the market, of competition and even of unemployment. A key task of Soviet workers will be to fight against the pernicious effects of *perestroika* which will inevitably involve a vicious attack against working-class conditions and living standards.

Glasnost represents a similar set of bureaucratic reforms aiming at undercutting some of the slothfulness of the lower and middle layers of this caste. A by-product of this policy is that it provides the Kremlin with a "left" cover which can be used to persuade the Soviet workers that they should not fight against the economic and social attacks that will be made in the name of *perestroika*.

The two policies go hand in hand, and whatever the enormous opportunities that are provided by the bureaucracy's current impasse, a key task of revolutionaries is to expose the lies and deceit of all wings of the bureaucracy, even the most radical sounding.

Varga's response is classic centrist stuff. He argues that what we need is "workers' *glasnost*", or even worse, "workers' *perestroika*"! This is a concession to the Gorbachevites and adapts to those intellectuals, workers and party members who have illusions in these slogans. Furthermore, there is not an iota of difference between this line and that of USFI leader Catharine Samary, who has argued for a "deep *glasnost*".

Varga shows how little he understands the dynamics of post-capitalist society when he argues that *perestroika* is essentially part of the revolutionary programme. He



**Workers Press
Special Supplement**

**FOR THE POLITICAL
REVOLUTION
IN THE U.S.S.R!**

**IN DEFENCE OF
THE TRANSITIONAL
PROGRAMME!**

by Balázs Nagy

glowingly quotes Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev's right-wing economist, who claimed that "the intention of *perestroika* is to proceed from administrative methods to a principally economic management".⁴ Our "Trotskyist" continues: "we cannot categorically deny the necessity of such a process and propose something else in its place. The 'revision of the planned economy' demanded by our programme will also begin with this process!"⁵

Varga is either blind or wilful, or both. As if the programme of political revolution could have anything in common with Aganbegyan's programme of increased unemployment and soaring prices. Aganbegyan wants to dismantle the centralised planned property mechanisms. Varga seems to be cheering him on! The revolutionary programme of political revolution will involve the thorough-going overhaul of the bureaucrat's planning apparatus, its transformation into a means of planning for need, not bureaucratic oppression.

This is not the first time that Varga has committed such an error. Whilst leading the intervention of the so-called "Fourth International" during the political revolutionary events in Poland 1980-81, Varga sanctioned a call for a government of all the opposition forces which included the openly restorationist KPN! In a subsequent polemical exchange with our British section, Workers Power, Varga admitted that he was wrong. He does not appear to have learned the lesson.

Does our opposition to the "reform" wing of the bureaucracy and their slogans mean that we are "sectarians" who ignore the impact of *glasnost* on whole layers of workers and intellectuals? Of course not. Every positive aspect of these policies, such as the rehabilitation of old Bolsheviks and the uncovering of Stalinist falsifications of history, we welcome.

We use these issues to demand a real settling of accounts with Stalinism not only for the freedoms necessary to uncover its crimes but the bringing of the bureaucratic criminals before workers courts. We wel-

4. *Ibid.*, p19

5. *Ibid.*

come the electoral reforms in as far as it allows workers to kick out the most unpopular bureaucrats but we do it in such a way as to point out the limitations of these reforms and the continued ban on the right to organise workers' parties against the CPSU. We point to the fraud of *glasnost*, and demand real elections, real freedom for the workers to organise and form their own parties, and for real soviets. Varga sees things differently:

"According to the sectarians, a correct policy must oppose to these slogans [*glasnost* and *perestroika*] the demand for soviet democracy, socialist planning, in a word, the political revolution."⁶

If this be "sectarianism", we plead guilty comrade Varga!

It is not surprising therefore, given this position of seeing *glasnost* and *perestroika* as a distorted reflection of workers' demands, that Varga sees the focus for developing the political revolution not in the independent workers struggles but in the inter-bureaucratic faction fights in the CPSU. He declares:

"The tactics of the preparation of the political revolution coincide, to a great extent, with the use of the internal contradictions of the bureaucracy in order to hasten its dislocation and promote the mobilisation of the masses. Those who renounce these tactics, I do not hesitate to say are not revolutionaries. Such use is none other than support — temporary, limited, circumstantial, is it necessary to say? — of one wing of the bureaucracy against the other, when it fights on the basis of the conquests of October for this or that workers' demand."⁷

Here Varga reveals his opportunism in relation to the "left" bureaucrats. Crucially missing from his qualifications as to the nature of his "united front", temporary, limited etc, is the word *criticism*. And this is no oversight.

He aptly quotes the example of the WRP in Britain supporting Scargill in relation to the right wing of the

TUC but forgets to mention that they did it uncritically and opportunistically. Varga does the same in relation to Yeltsin. For Varga, Yeltsin represents the demands of the workers for an end to privileges, for redistribution in favour of the workers etc, within the bureaucracy. And while Varga gives us long quotations from Yeltsin to show the latter's "radicalism", there is little criticism.

There is no doubting Yeltsin's support amongst the Moscow workers. His verbal attacks on bureaucratic privilege strike an undoubted chord amongst them. But Yeltsin has a record as a Stalinist bureaucrat, even if now he wants to use "left" phraseology to develop an independent base within the party. In this sense he is as dangerous as a Tony Benn, both the mobiliser and disarmer of the left in the Labour Party in Britain.

Can we "support" Yeltsin or a "left wing" of the bureaucracy? Only in the sense that we support concrete actions and demands they make which are in the interests of the masses. And we do it critically right from the beginning, pointing out the limitations of their demands, their vacillations, their unwillingness to actually mobilise the working class in its own independent organisations to fight caste privilege.

While Varga can declare that "even Yeltsin" will be an enemy of "the Fourth International", his tactics belie this general statement. As all centrism shows, general declarations that reformists and Stalinists are "class enemies" can happily go along with the most opportunist and uncritical tailing of them in practice. This is the stock in trade of the IC tradition, of the likes of Healy and Lambert. Varga repeats this rotten tradition and brings it up to date for the Preparatory Committee's intervention into crisis of Stalinism. The workers and peasants of Eastern Europe, hungry for answers, will find no strategy for the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Varga's unprincipled politics.

by John McKee

6. *Ibid* p18

7. *Ibid* p43

Le Sentier Lumineux du Pérou

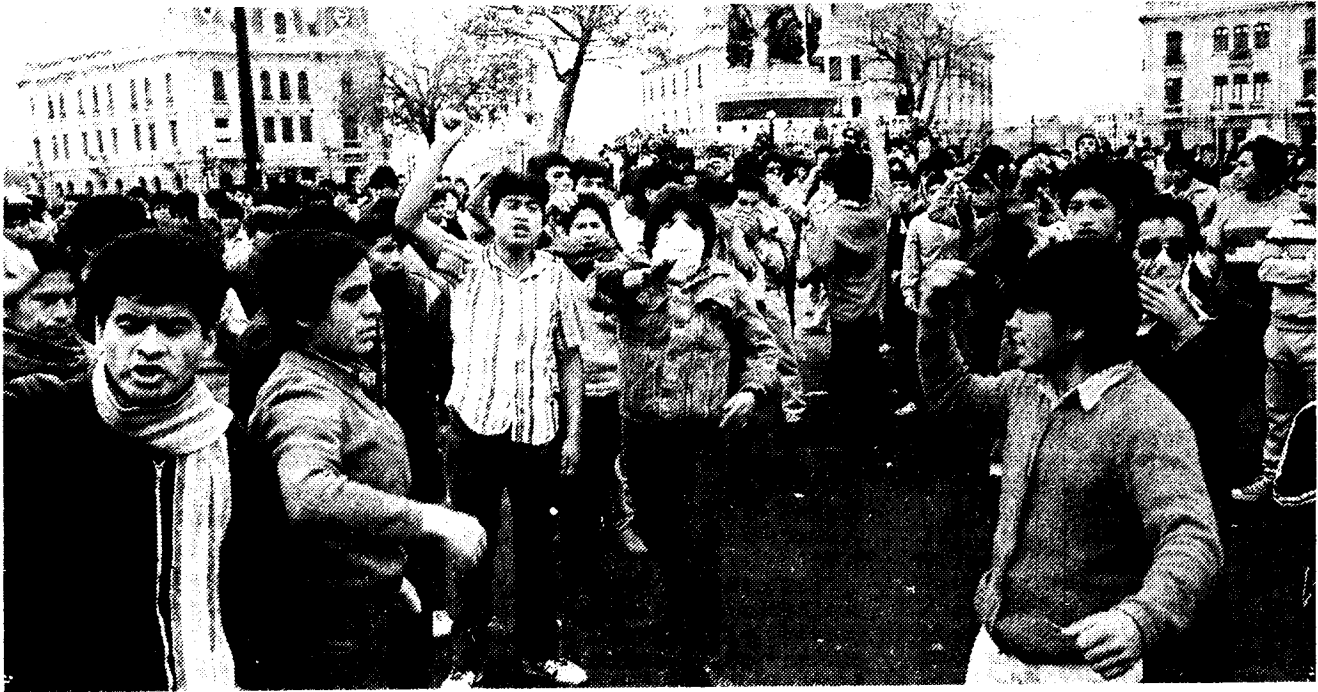
by Alain Hertoghe and Alain Labrousse, La Découverte, 95FF

In April 1980, Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path"), an obscure Peruvian Maoist group based largely in the small provincial town of Ayacucho, declared war on the state. This would have been laughable if the consequences had not been so tragic both for the organisation, and for thousands of peasants in whose name Sendero claims to act. This new French book, based on extensive research and frequent visits to Peru, traces the history of Sendero and the reactions of both the state and other left groups. As such it provides a fascinating picture of a particularly degenerate variant of Stalinism in action.

Since their first "armed actions" — burning ballot boxes in villages — Sendero have spread their war throughout Peru. They have succeeded in tying down

an important part of the state's forces in a bloody war marked by vicious repression, and they control important areas of the Andean and Amazonian regions of the country. More recently, in an unholy alliance with the Colombian cocaine drug barons, they have organised the peasants' production of coca leaf, thereby extracting a "revolutionary tax" from the dope dealers which runs into tens of millions of US dollars each year. Despite still being a relatively small organisation — all estimates put their numbers at around 5,000 — Sendero have had an effect which far outweighs their size.

The founding nucleus of Sendero Luminoso was a group of lecturers at the provincial university of Ayacucho. Led by Abimael Guzman — nowadays



Sendero Luminoso supporters demonstrate in Lima

known as "Comrade President Gonzalo" — Sendero split from another Maoist group, the *Bandera Roja* ("Red Flag"), in 1971. Apeing Mao's tactics in the 1930s and 1940s of a Stalinist led peasant movement committed to the forming of a Chinese popular front Sendero seek to use a peasant base in order to set up a "new democracy" which leaves a place open for the bourgeoisie.

The reality of their commitment to "socialism" can be seen in the fact that in the Sendero-occupied areas both legal capitalism — notably the banks — and the illegal drug-runners are given free rein. Further, most of Sendero's physical attacks on non-army figures are against members of the left, not against bourgeois politicians!

For the first twelve years of its existence, Sendero concentrated most of its activity in Ayacucho province, one of the poorest regions in Peru. Annual income in the rural areas is £20 per year (the national figure is £120). Life expectancy is a mere forty years and 80% of the population is illiterate. Largely composed of Indians who are culturally and economically cut off from the main stream of Peruvian life, Ayacucho has a long history of rebellion, both against the Inca invaders in the fifteenth century and then against the Spaniards.

In an area where government repression and neglect is rife and where anti-Indian racism of government officialdom is endemic, an armed force offering protection and a bright new future to the peasants had a ready following. Their propaganda was adapted to the most backward peasant traditions, infusing it with local myths and legends, even though these are often in contradiction with Sendero's avowed aim of "socialism". They have frequently fuelled and participated in disputes between peasant communities in order to gain support. On a programmatic level, however, Sendero seem to have ignored the very real oppression of the poor peasants. They do not denounce anti-Indian racism, nor demand schooling in Quechua — the main language in Ayacucho. In the 1970s they denounced land seizures as being "reformist", claiming that only

the seizure of power would suffice, but at the same time they attacked the Belasco government's major land reform as being "fascist"!

How then have Sendero been able to develop and extend their influence outside their Ayacucho heartland if their programme only meets the needs of the peasantry in the most minimal of fashions? As Hertoghe and Labrousse explain in detail, in the coca growing areas, where agriculture is increasingly devoted to supplying the international drugs market, Sendero's armed groups have defended the peasants against army attacks, and have negotiated better prices with the drugs barons. The "commission", they claim, has been extremely important in maintaining their illegal organisation. At the same time, with a bitter Maoist petit bourgeois morality they have "cleaned up" the towns and villages devoted to coca production and smuggling, closing down the brothels and bars and shooting prostitutes and homosexuals. Ruthlessness has become their byword.

Right from the outset Sendero had a leaning towards bloody rhetoric. As a leaflet distributed on the Ayacucho university campus put it in 1973: "We will bury those who oppose us ten meters deep!" And the "opponents" they were referring to were other left groups — not the bourgeoisie!

The launching of the guerrilla war in 1980 was accompanied by similar stuff:

"Sendero will strip away the reactionary flesh; it will tear it into shreds and these shreds will be buried in an urn. What remains will be burnt and the cinders scattered to the four winds."

The rhetoric quickly turned to action. Having spent the first year or two disarming soldiers and carrying out other low key actions, Sendero showed their mettle in 1982 when they attacked the Ayacucho prison and freed 297 prisoners. At the same time their "work" in the countryside began to take on a different tone.

Development agency workers, experimental farms and laboratories began to become prime targets. Voicing the most backward hatred of the peasantry for all prod-

ucts of the town and of modernity, Sendero dressed up their reactionary ideology with Maoist talk of "encircling the towns from the countryside".

Those who had left Sendero in opposition to the turn to armed struggle, or who criticised this line from within, were ruthlessly exterminated as "traitors and renegades". The peasants suffered the most from the stepping up of the violence. In April 1983 Sendero massacred 84 people in the village of Lucanamara in order to show quite how brutal and determined they could be if the peasants refused to give them shelter and food. This coincided with the decision to extend their base of operations from Ayacucho to the whole of Peru.

The state responded with typical military subtlety. Following the strategy of the Argentinian "dirty war" — and advised by US and Israeli counter-insurgency "experts" — the Peruvian army launched a bloody wave of repression which still continues today. Under General Clemente Noel the order of the day was "60 x 3", that is, the army was prepared to kill 60 peasants to get three Senderistas. A few examples will suffice to give an impression of the scale and the ruthlessness of the army: in April 1983 army helicopters used incendiary bombs against a school killing 16 children; in August 1985, 69 peasants were killed in the village of Accomara; in May 1988, 29 were massacred in Cayora, with witnesses being systematically hunted down and "disappeared" by army death squads. The height of the state's war against Sendero came with the massacre of 250 Senderistas during the crushing of a prison revolt in Lima on 19 June 1986.

The viciousness with which the army represses the peasants only plays into the hands of Sendero. Despite the fact that the guerrillas regularly withdraw from the villages at the first sign of army intervention, leaving the peasants to the tender mercies of the anti-terrorist units, the army is responsible for both the physical and economic oppression of the peasantry. In any conflict between Sendero and the army, the peasants — especially the youth, from whom Sendero gains most of its recruits — generally side with the former. As the mayor of Ayacucho puts it in an interview contained in the book: "The repression has led to more support for Sendero than all its Maoist speeches!"

This is not always the case, however. Some villages have organised self-defence squads in the teeth of opposition from both the army and Sendero, neither of whom are pleased to see any form of independent organisation amongst the peasantry. In other villages, notably where other left organisations have a base, Sendero have found it extremely difficult to gain a toehold. They have their greatest successes amongst the unorganised, largely illiterate and deeply oppressed communities of the Andes.

A turn to the working class?

Despite what "Comrade President Gonzalo" might like to think, the similarities between China in the 1940s and Peru in the 1980s are relatively slight. In China 90% of the population lived in the countryside. In Peru today the figure is only 35%. Like many Latin American countries there is a massive move away from the countryside

towards the towns, which involves the creation of enormous shanty towns. Using both statistics and a series of graphic descriptions, Hertoghe and Labrousse accurately convey the squalor and oppression of these "wretched of the earth".

They explain how between 1979 and 1985, at a time when the urban population increased by two million people, the state built a mere 50,000 houses! The result is that 47% of the inhabitants of Lima are illegal squatters, mainly in the sprawling shanty towns which surround the capital. For those lucky enough to have permanent shelter conditions are appalling. Only 28% of town dwellers have running water. As in South Africa, Brazil or Mexico, most of the working class live in dreadful conditions.

The fact that Sendero's campaign in Ayacucho has failed to actively mobilise the peasantry — indeed, with its bureaucratic and elitist methods, it could not have had any other effect — has led to dissensions within Sendero's ranks. In 1983 and again in 1987, proposals were raised to discontinue the armed struggle. On both occasions, Guzman's response has been to up the stakes and increase the action.

In 1987 he proposed an important change of line, which was eventually carried at Sendero's 1988 "Congress". There was to be a turn to the towns and to the working class. Land occupations by the peasants were also sanctioned.

Prior to this period, Sendero's activity in the towns had been relatively limited. Their first action in the capital, in 1980, consisted of hanging dead dogs from Lima lamp posts in an expression of disapproval of Deng Xiaoping's policies in China! Attempts to gain a hearing amongst the engineering workers of Cesco de Pasco from 1979 onwards had met with such little success that Sendero had urged their worker supporters to go into the countryside.

The 1988 turn was based on the idea that "the masses of the shanty-towns are like iron belts which will close round the enemy" as Guzman put it in a 47 page interview with Sendero's daily paper in July 1988. There can be no doubt that there is the very real need to organise these masses, especially the youth. Over eleven million Peruvians (50% of the population) are less than 19 years old. 59% of 15-24 year-olds are unemployed. Faced with spiraling inflation and a growing economic crisis, there is an enormous potential for revolutionary activity.

But as every page of Hertoghe and Labrousse's book makes clear, Sendero are completely unable to provide any sort of answer to the needs of the masses. Their elitist and petit bourgeois political programme concentrates entirely on the prospect of armed action by a select few. An example of Sendero's "work in the labour movement" is given by their action around a strike in the Tejido e Hilado textile plant in April 1988. The boss refused to grant a wage rise, so Sendero set an ambush and filled him full of bullets! Whilst this might encourage the odd small capitalists to grant a wage increase, little was done thereby to raise the consciousness or the organisation of the working class.

This is hardly surprising, as Sendero are not particularly interested in doing anything of the sort. Their perspective is clearly that of a military coup which will

take place before the presidential elections of 1990. As Guzman put it, they are prepared for "a genocide of national proportions". However, they will do nothing to mobilise the masses for self-defence. Indeed, where peasants have taken such action, they have been ruthlessly repressed by Sendero's armed columns.

Sendero Luminoso — a new Khmer Rouge?

The final section of the book deals with the possibility of a Sendero victory in Peru. The appalling social and economic crisis which grips Peru certainly provides the basis for the growth of a whole series of radical organisations. But it is difficult to see how Sendero's particularly nihilistic and brutal version of "socialism" could ever really penetrate the urban masses. The support for Sendero that exists within the most oppressed sections of Peruvian society is the result of the inability of the majority of the Peruvian left to fight for a programme which meets the needs of the mass of workers and poor peasants. It is this political vacuum which is Sendero's strongest ally.

Hertoghe and Labrousse explicitly draw parallels between the prospects for Sendero Luminoso and the victory of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The comparison is tempting: both groups share a provincial petit bourgeois hatred of the cities; both have shown themselves capable of a horrific violence against the masses in the name of their bureaucratic creed. Sendero, however, have explicitly criticised the Khmer Rouge for their programme. Where then is the link? The only explanation that the authors can offer is that both share a "disconcerting mixture of dogmatism and mysticism".

The truth is somewhat different: what Sendero and the Khmer Rouge share is their Stalinism. As events in the USSR and in every degenerate workers' state have shown, the reactionary theory of socialism in one country leads to the most brutal and destructive policies. Pol Pot took the theory to its crazed "logical" conclusion and tried to construct an entirely autarchic state. Sendero, in their pandering to peasant backwardness, and in their own provincial petit bourgeois narrowness, have taken several important steps down the same path.

However, there is one important difference between the situation in Cambodia at the beginning of the 1970s and that in Peru today. The Khmer Rouge were backed by a massive Vietnamese army, which did much of the work in destroying the Lon Nol regime. Sendero has no such direct ally in its campaign against the Peruvian

state. This alone makes any talk of Sendero taking power in the near future extremely unlikely.

The Peruvian left should be clear: Sendero, with its hankering after an alliance with progressive Peruvian capitalists and regular habit of killing members of the labour movement, is a treacherous ally in the struggle against imperialism. As it has already shown on many occasions, it will turn its weapons against the workers and peasants the moment they show any sign of stepping outside of Sendero's bureaucratically imposed limits. This does not mean for a moment however, that we endorse those leaders of the United Left — Barantes and the CP — who refuse to defend Sendero's political prisoners and who endorse the army repression against them.

The best way of ensuring that Sendero's influence does not grow, and indeed declines, is to mobilise the masses to defend themselves both against the state and its death squads and against Sendero. This must go hand in hand with real answers to the growing economic and political crisis which threatens to paralyse Peruvian society. Sendero will undoubtedly be stepping up its actions in the run up to the 1990 Presidential elections. Finding a principled response to their activity is an important question for Peruvian workers and peasants.

Not surprisingly, it is at this point that Hertoghe and Labrousse's book is at its weakest. The authors are, respectively, a journalist and a researcher, not revolutionary communists! They complain that:

"The only way of stopping Sendero Luminoso's advance would be the restoration of the authority of the state and the mobilisation of the popular organisations against them. But the idea of a government of national unity does not find much support."

Good! The last thing the Peruvian masses need is to be tied to the bourgeoisie in a supposed united struggle against "terrorism". The very existence of Sendero shows the weakness of the Peruvian left. Rather than uniting with the Peruvian bourgeoisie, the masses need to be organising themselves to take power!

Despite the inherent limits of its analysis both of Peruvian society and of the nature of Sendero, this book provides extremely useful information for understanding the situation in Peru today, and the origins and nature of Sendero. It should be translated into English without delay.

by Jacqueline Aubin

Previous issues of
**TROTSKYIST
INTERNATIONAL**

Issue No 1 (Summer 1988)

- MRCI Theses on Gorbachev (July 1987)
- MRCI Resolution on Afghanistan (April 1988)
- MRCI Resolution on Austria and the EC (April 1988)
- Arbeiterstandpunkt leaflet on the Waldheim affair
- A balance sheet of the "Open Conference" project
- The French LCR and Pierre Juquin
- Archive: The Pulacayo Theses (1946)
- A history of Morenoism, part one

Issue No 2 (Winter 1989)

- MRCI Theses on Zionism, Israel, Arab Nationalism and Palestine (September 1988)
- MRCI Theses on Nuclear Power (September 1988)
- Poder Obrero leaflets on Peru
- Archive: The French Miners' Strike of 1948
- The USFI 1963-1988, part one

Price: £1.50 per issue (incl p&p)

Subscription rates (three issues):

Britain: £5 (individuals), £10 (institution)
Overseas: £7 (individuals), £15 (institution)
Airmail rates on application

Send cheques, payable to

Trotskyist International, to:
MRCI, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX,
England.

All journals available from our British address at £2.00 (inc P&P except * which is £2.50 (incl p&p). Papers are 50p per copy (inc p&p). For details of subscriptions, write to the addresses below.

Arbeiter Standpunkt
Journal of the Gruppe
Arbeiterstandpunkt
Postfach 265
1140 Wien
Austria

Arbeitermacht
Postlagerkarte 039964 B
2800 Bremen 1
Germany

Class Struggle
Monthly paper of the Irish Workers
Group
c/o 12 Langrishe Place
Dublin 1
Ireland

Poder Obrero
Journal of Poder Obrero
c/o the Workers Power Group,
Britain

Pouvoir Ouvrier
Journal of Pouvoir Ouvrier
Stenberg H
EP 166
75564 Paris
France

Workers Power
Montly paper of the Workers
Power group
Also *Permanent Revolution** its
theoretical journal
BCM 7750
London
England WC1N 3XX

