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Ireland – no peace without unity

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Fight for a united Ireland

Following a historic betrayal by the republican leadership, in seperate referendums north and south of the border the Irish people have voted to accept the Good Friday peace agreement. **Charli Langford** and **Philip Marchant** examine the implications and suggest a way forward for republicans and socialists

In the referendums held on May 22, voters in both the north and south of Ireland gave their support to the imperialist 'peace process'. In the six counties of the north, 71 per cent of those who voted were in favour of the Good Friday agreement, under which 'Northern Ireland' will remain part of the United Kingdom although with its own power-sharing assembly and closer links with the south. In the 26 counties of the Irish Republic, 94 per cent of the votes were in favour of amending the constitution to remove its territorial claim over the north.

The referendums cannot be seen in any way as a measure of self-determination. The questions asked did not allow for any expression of Irish unity, and there was massive distortion of the result by the huge media and governmental campaign for a 'Yes' vote and an implicit threat of continued war for a 'No'.

The result was widely anticipated. Given the long-term failure of the IRA's guerrilla strategy, war-weary northern nationalists have put their faith, if reluctantly, in the British and Irish governments and the 'democratic process'. An estimated over 95 per cent of the nationalist vote in the north was for the agreement. However, the unionists were deeply divided with many seeing the agreement as offering too many concessions to the nationalists and threatening their own privileges. According to exit polls, 55 per cent of unionists were in favour of the agreement and 45 per cent against.

In the south, the turn-out for the referendum was much lower – 55 per cent, as against 81 per cent in the north – but the overwhelming vote for dropping the claim to sovereignty over the whole island of Ireland will serve to reinforce partition. One of the factors producing this result seems to be the relative success of the Irish economy within the framework of the European Union, which has diminished the importance of regaining the lost territory in the north. Support for the IRA is at an all-time low and it would appear that most southerners are reluctant to inherit the problem of the northern unionists.

The Good Friday agreement

For Irish nationalists the signing of the agreement on April 10 by the Sinn Féin leaders was a historic betrayal. It marked acceptance by Sinn Féin of the six-county sectarian statelet. Despite unionist claims the agreement contains no meaningful concessions to nationalists at all, and its implementation has the potential to be a generational setback. In dropping even the formal claim to the six counties from the southern constitution it goes further than the 1921 betrayal by Michael Collins when he agreed to partition and the setting up of the northern state.

So what is the result, after 30 years of struggle? Elections for a 108-member Northern Ireland Assembly, based on proportional representation, will take place on June 25. The assembly will assume full powers in January 1999, ending direct rule from Westminster. In other words, the northern parliament with a unionist majority – the 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people' – will be reinstated. Its voting procedures are designed to prevent nationalists holding a balance of power in the event of a unionist split. Policing will remain in the hands of the sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary – the armed wing of official unionism. And although the war is over, the prisoners of war will remain in jail for two more years.

As a balance to these concessions to unionism, the Irish language will be officially recognised in the north (due to happen under European Union law anyway) and there will be cross-border committees to debate issues such as tourism, fishing, animal health, water and waste management, and co-ordination of EU grants. But because the committees will 'permit a southern influence in our affairs' – claim the unionists – in addition to being totally subservient to the assembly each committee will have a built-in unionist right of veto as well.

Selling the deal to republicans

Sinn Féin and the IRA will have the role of policing the republican movement and suppressing any further military activity. It is possible that one of the reasons for there being no immediate requirement in the agreement for the surrender of weapons is so that the IRA can use them against dissenters. The condition for the release of IRA prisoners and for Sinn Féin representatives being allowed to sit in the assembly will be a continued commitment to 'democratic' methods.

Having signed the agreement on April 10, Sinn Féin leaders had to convince their own members to support the deal and vote 'yes' in the referendum. At the Ard Fheis, the party congress, in mid-April the case for acceptance was put at length by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, and by international delegates from the ANC, Zimbabwe and East Timor. However, the vote was postponed to a special session on May 10 to give the leadership time to win over the sceptics. Their task was made easier by the decision of the British government to give a 48-hour parole to four IRA prisoners jailed in 1975, who made a special appearance at the conference to promote the agreement. Prior to the Ard Fheis a number of known oppositionists, chiefly supporters of the 32-County Sovereignty Committee, had been expelled or excluded, but the major factor in the acceptance of the deal was the failure of the opposition to produce any alternative strategy.

Sinn Féin argues that the unionists' acceptance of the cross-border bodies is the first sign that their opposition to a united Ireland is weakening, and that the brief of these bodies can be extended and the unionist veto overcome. This is clutching at straws. With the defeat of the military strategy Sinn Féin had no way forward. It was compelled to accept the peace process and make the best of whatever paltry gains came its way. There is already north-south co-operation on the issues to be handled by the cross-border bodies, which will be jettisoned if they become any kind of threat. But for the Sinn Féin leaders to convince their supporters to accept the deal, these bodies have to

be presented as the embryonic institutions of a united Ireland.

Equal rights in a sectarian state?

Adams and McGuinness have made much of the 'equality agenda' promised as part of the settlement – the reform of the RUC, the banning of Orange marches by the Parades Commission, and the release of political prisoners. The first is clearly not going to happen in any meaningful sense. Tony Blair has allayed the fears of some unionists that the RUC is to be disbanded by expressing his admiration of its role in the past and his confidence in it performing the same role in the future. Similarly, there is no reason to assume that Orange marches will be seriously curtailed by the Parades Commission – this body exists to prevent ***counter-marches*** on the grounds that insufficient notice has been given, and, incidentally, could also be used to prevent industrial action in the six counties. The Commission has already put back its report until September – well after the Orange marching season – and loyalist refusal to accept its rulings will probably render it irrelevant. So the equality agenda reduces to having republican prisoners freed from jail, and not even immediately. This is a pathetic exchange for accepting partition, and misses the point that it is impossible for nationalists to achieve equality with unionists within an Orange state.

But the equality agenda has another side. It tends to reinforce the view that the conflict in the north is essentially one between Catholics and Protestants, between sections of the community with different cultures and traditions, rather than the result of colonialism. By accepting at face value the British government's claim that the future status of the north of Ireland is entirely a matter for its people and dropping the demand for the withdrawal of British troops, the Sinn Féin leadership shows that it has come round to this view. This is a dynamic that rejects the egalitarian unity irrespective of religion that has been a part of republicanism, and substitutes a narrow nationalism subservient to the church and the most reactionary forces in the south. It links into that part of the agreement, so dear to the unionists, that Ireland cannot be united except by the consent of the northern majority. Some Sinn Féin members have realised that, at present rates of growth, the Catholic voting population of the north will outnumber the Protestant by around the year 2025, and see this as the means through which Irish unity can be achieved.

Of course, this will not happen; the unionists will take various oppressive measures to ensure the steady disenfranchisement and continuing emigration of Catholics – as they have done throughout the history of the six counties – or will insist that a majority of the ***unionist*** population must be in favour of unification. But even if Catholics could bring about a united Ireland through purely demographic factors, the strategy would not be supportable. Without a struggle for working class unity, it would merely place the sectarian boot on the other foot.

Down with the reactionary Good Friday agreement!
No to the decommissioning of weapons!
Build mass action to defend nationalist communities against loyalist attacks!
Disband the RUC!
Immediate release of all republican prisoners!
British troops out of Ireland now!
Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!

And here lies the basic contradiction of the 'peace process' – the acceptance by Sinn Féin and the IRA of the 'parliamentary road' to a united Ireland will not diminish sectarianism; it will further institutionalise it. The current agreement carries in its belly the next and bloodier cycle of troubles.

British imperialism and Ireland

What is the motivation for Britain promoting a settlement which has provoked fury in some quarters of unionism and deep unease in the rest? With the IRA's military campaign at an impasse the republican leaders were willing to negotiate. The Tory administration under John Major realised that by offering Sinn Féin a role in governing the north of Ireland, those committed to armed struggle could be marginalised and more easily liquidated – a strategy that has been enthusiastically continued by New Labour.

If successful, the agreement will end the war, permit the proper operation of capitalism in the six counties and the 'normalisation' of business relations between north and south, and make the whole of Ireland more amenable to penetration by British capital. It will also cut the costs of damage and disruption to the economy and maintaining the British army, and provide the Blair government with a diplomatic triumph.

The British ruling class sees no need for fundamental change and has no desire to relinquish its first colony, but it recognises the need to 'modernise' its relationship with the south in the context of European integration. As part of a new alignment of 'centre' forces, the Blair government is obliged to take at least formal steps against the worst aspects of Orange domination and bigotry in the statelet, which are something of an embarrassment. The potential economic advantages of ending the war in the north are worth the risk of alienating a section of unionism, a view which is shared by the majority of the Ulster Unionist Party – the party of the Protestant capitalist class.

The way forward

Some socialists support the agreement – those who fail to understand the link between the national and socialist struggles in Ireland, those who have already made their capitulation to unionism, and those who are uncritical supporters of Sinn Féin. We take a different position.

Recognising that the maintenance of the border weds the loyalist working class to the national interests of the British bourgeoisie rather than the international interests of the working class, we see the resolution of the national question in Ireland as intimately connected to any progress towards socialism. We therefore support self-determination for the Irish people ***as a whole***. Far from being a stepping-stone to a united Ireland, the Good Friday agreement legitimises British sovereignty over the six counties. For this reason, we called for a 'no' vote in the referendums.

The referendum results are a setback, but socialists must continue the fight for a united Ireland, positioning themselves for the disenchantment among the nationalist population that will inevitably occur in the face of unionist intransigence and the continued capitulation of the Sinn Féin leaders.

While there is still some support for continuation of the military tactic among a small minority of republicans, the majority accept that it has failed. Since the national question has not been resolved in Ireland, there is a tendency for all opposition to manifest itself as some form of republicanism. In this situation, we support the call for a republican congress of all those who oppose the sell-out agreement. Socialists should be trying to work with all republican oppositionists, intervening in discussions around the problems and consequences of the agreement and promoting working class mass action as the method of struggle. **WA**

150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*

The *Communist Manifesto*

The *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels is 150 years old this year. To mark the anniversary **Jonathan Joseph** argues for a dusting off of the tome.

While the audience for the *Communist Manifesto* may have dwindled, its message is as relevant as ever. Given the state of left politics today, and the sterile dogmatism that grips large swathes of the existing left groups, a re-reading is a rewarding experience. But we should not fasten on every word that is written or every line that is argued. For the point of the *Manifesto* is that it is not a bible but a living, organic document that sets out in exemplary fashion the method of Marxism.

By this we mean that the *Manifesto* offers itself as a guide to political action, but on the basis of a serious outline of the historical conditions which give rise to the potential of the proletariat to change society. Necessarily simplified though it is, the *Manifesto* is arguably the best example of the materialist method and the politics flowing from it. On balance, it is probably correct to see the *Manifesto* as the founding document of communism.

Background

Of course 'communism' existed before the *Manifesto* was written and was argued for by a number of different people of various persuasions. Indeed, the *Communist Manifesto* was written as an intervention into the already existing Communist League, set up in 1847 with the aim of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and initially based on the utopian socialist ideas of German émigrés like Wilhelm Weitling. Marx and Engels made it their task to commit the League to scientific socialism, and after a secret meeting held in the Red Lion pub in Great Windmill Street, London, they were called on to draft the *Manifesto*.

Marx had sought to settle his score with Hegelian philosophy in the 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, while the German Ideology, written with Engels in 1845-6, further develops historical materialism in opposition to Feuerbach's humanist 'inversion' of Hegel. However, it is the *Manifesto* which truly applies theory to practice and takes up the sentiment expressed in Marx's famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'.

Marx and Engels had good reason to believe that the world was about to be changed. Strong workers' movements had arisen like Chartism in Britain and the revolutionary socialism of Auguste Blanqui in France. Meanwhile, although the German working class was much weaker, Marx and Engels were anticipating a bourgeois revolution, more radical than those of Britain and France, which would sweep aside the old order as a prelude to the proletarian revolution.

Above all, Marx and Engels predicted a revolutionary wave of struggle as a result of the first great economic crisis which occurred in Britain in 1847. Unfortunately it was only the first crisis and not the last. The revolutions of 1848 turned out to be bourgeois revolutions and the political and economic system was able to stabilise itself until the next wave of struggle culminating in the Paris Commune of 1871.

Historical materialism

The *Communist Manifesto* represents a general formulation of the socialist revolution informed by the analysis of historical materialism. Its first section entitled 'Bourgeois and Proletarians' introduces us to two groups, the 'owners of the means of social production' and the 'modern wage labourers who . . . are reduced to selling their labour power'.[1]

These groups are therefore defined in relation to real historical developments. It is noted that in the earlier epochs of history we find a complicated arrangement of society into various orders. The modern bourgeois society, sprouting from the ruins of the feudal, has not done away with class antagonisms but has created new classes, new conditions of oppression and new forms of struggle. However, the *Manifesto* argues that the distinctive feature of capitalism is that it has simplified class relations. 'Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.'[2]

The bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, resulting from a series of revolutions in the modes of production and exchange. With each step, a corresponding political advance of that class occurs. Marx and Engels are at pains to stress that historically the bourgeoisie has played a revolutionary role, putting an end to 'feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations'[3] and bringing together the means of production and collectivising the population. From this flows political centralisation and the modernisation of the state. This helps to explain Marx and Engels' attitude to the German revolution where, they argue, the working class should critically engage with the bourgeois struggle.

Unlike feudalism and other past modes of production, capitalism is a dynamic system. The bourgeoisie cannot afford to stand still. It must constantly revolutionise the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and the whole relations of society. It also requires constantly expanding markets. In just 100 years, the *Manifesto* argues, capitalism has created more massive productive forces than all preceding generations put together.

However, flowing from this are the negative conditions of the proletariat's existence. The constant revolutionising of production forces the proletariat into conditions of ever greater exploitation, whilst the constant drive to expand turns more and more people into proletarians. Thus the lower strata of the middle class sinks slowly into the working class as they are forced to sell their labour power to survive.

But, while the mechanisation and division of labour results in human misery and alienation, these same processes also create the conditions for their overthrow. The collectivisation and urbanisation of the working class gives it its potential power and makes it aware of its common experience and interests. Whilst the other classes have an interest in preserving the old order, 'the proletarian movement is

the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority'[4] and ultimately the grave-digger of capitalism.

The transitional method and historical conditions

The *Manifesto* is a very general document which puts forward socialist agitation and propaganda rather than the sort of analysis later provided by Capital. It represents a practical engagement with the workers' movement and with the historical conditions of the time.

The *Manifesto* attacks the utopians and other 'quack' socialists for their fantasies and schematic arguments. Instead, Marx and Engels attempt to root their programme in the actually existing historical conditions and advance a programme flowing from this. The main argument is centred on the abolition of private property which, 'in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage-labour'.[5] The question of private property is then used to deal with issues such as social distribution, the role of the family and the subordination of women and children, religion, and the role of the nation.

The second section of the *Manifesto* ends with a set of demands appropriate to the existing conditions. They include the abolition of private property, the taxation of the rich, the abolition of inheritance, the centralisation of credit, the means of communication and transport, the extension of nationalised industry, the provision of free education, and an end to child labour.[6]

These demands are general ones applicable to the most advanced countries, and are particularly targeted at Germany. The anticipation of revolutions across Europe, especially in Germany, led Marx and Engels to formulate a conception of 'permanent revolution'. The theory developed by Parvus and Trotsky to describe the revolutionary process under conditions of combined and uneven development is already in embryonic form in Marx and Engels' understanding of the revolutions of 1848. As they were to argue two years later:

> 'While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent . . .'[7]

In order to relate to the concrete political tasks of the time, the *Communist Manifesto* outlines a transitional method whereby:

> 'The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class, and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.
>
> 'Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.'[8]

So, even in the early works of Marx and Engels we find the basis of ideas like permanent revolution and the transitional method which were to resurface during the struggles of the next 150 years.

Criticisms

Because the *Manifesto* is a living, organic document which seeks to combine socialist ideas with active involvement inevitably means that it is not perfect. Like anything else, it is a product of its time and whilst it is able to give a better explanation of the conditions of its production than other texts, it is still limited by them.

For one thing, the *Manifesto* is Eurocentric, basing itself on the 'advanced nations'. As Engels' preface states, their organisational aim was to weld into one body 'the whole militant proletariat of Europe and America'.[9] The neglect of the rest of the world is understandable in that capitalism was still young and Marx and Engels believed that only the further development and spread of capitalism would allow strong working class movements to develop.

However, the *Manifesto*'s division of the world into 'civilised' and 'barbarian' nations is, to put it kindly, antiquated.[10] Such prejudices were to make sporadic appearances in Marx and Engels' writings, for example, their support for processes of colonisation as a means of lifting countries out of the feudal age, and their discussion of 'non-historic peoples'.

But the *Manifesto* is clearly international in outlook. It argues that the Communists' aim is to abolish countries and nationalities, for the workers themselves have no country. 'United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.'[11] This makes a mockery of Stalin's distortion of Marx and his theory of socialism in one country.

As we would expect, Marx and Engels are also weak on questions of gender and sexuality, although their arguments are still more advanced than others. The section of the *Manifesto* dealing with the family does make some useful points, but it is also seriously mistaken in anticipating the family's demise. The error here is one of economism. Marx and Engels effectively reduce the family to its role within capitalist society and to its bourgeois form. Later work within Marxism on forms of special oppression and the role of patriarchy attempt to correct this imbalance.

There are other simplifications in the *Manifesto* which contain potential dangers. One presumption is that the development of capitalism will lead to the homogenisation of the working class. This underestimates the divisions within classes.

Whilst it is true that the development of capitalism leads to the growth of the working class and to a polarisation between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, it also leads to the stratification of these classes. Distinctions within the working class on the basis of economic, political and ideological factors mean that it does not have a uniform character. These distinctions were to be picked up on by Lenin in his understanding of such categories as the labour aristocracy and the proletarian vanguard. Lenin was also to pick up on the role of imperialism in creating further divisions between workers. This is in sharp contrast to the *Manifesto*'s statement that 'national differences, and antagonisms between peoples, are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto'.[12]

Another problem rests with the celebrated claim that: 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.'[13] This quote has spawned an 'instrumentalist' form of Marxism which simplifies the role of the state to a mere tool of the ruling class, or a 'body of armed men'. This fails to sufficiently deal with divisions and fractions within the ruling class, and simplifies the relation between the ruling class, the state, the economy and other social structures and human practices.

However, perhaps the biggest problem with the *Manifesto* was that the predicted economic crisis and consequent revolutions did not turn out as planned.

Economic crisis and 'fetters'

The *Manifesto* also contains a discussion about the 'fettering' of the productive forces. This predates the most important passage in Marx on this question which appears in the famous 1859 Preface to the less well known *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In this

Marx writes:

> 'At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.'[14]

It has to be said that such a statement is potentially misleading. As a general description of capitalism, the idea that the relations of production 'fetter' the productive forces is unhelpful. We know that if society was organised in a socialist way, the productive forces could be developed far better. But we also know that the capitalist system is a dynamic system which requires the constant revolutionising of production. This is precisely the distinction which makes capitalism unique from previous modes of production.

The idea that the relations fetter the forces gives the false impression that there is some kind of autonomous logic to the development of the productive forces that can be separated from social relations. The reality is that productive forces are nothing outside of their socially organised form. Capitalism is different from feudalism not because it has different productive forces, but because it has different social relations which have developed those productive forces.

In fact, the passage on fettering in the *Manifesto* is more specific than later discussions. The 'fettering' creates crises which the bourgeoisie get over 'on the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented'.[15]

In other words, the idea that at some given point social relations turn into fetters should give way to Marx's general outline of capitalist crisis. Marx and Engels themselves revised their analysis of 1848 where they mistook the conditions of economic crisis as an indication of the impending collapse of the system. In fact, the industrialisation of Europe was only just about to begin.

Later, Trotsky was to base his *Transitional Programme* on the premise that the working class stood on the eve of a revolutionary period. The fact that the 'enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces' allowed capitalism to enter a post-war boom did not, however, prevent some of the Trotskyist 'quacks' from reiterating that the productive forces were continuing to stagnate and that the historical crisis of mankind (sic) is therefore reducible to the question of the crisis of revolutionary leadership.[16]

Organisation

The task of organising the working class is perhaps the most underdeveloped aspect of Marx and Engels' work and this is reflected in the *Manifesto*. In their day the workers' movement was still emerging and had yet to take the form we see today.

However, the section 'Proletarians and Communists' does make clear a number of principles which still hold good and which point in the direction of the developments made by Lenin to our understanding of party organisation. 'The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.'[17]

This is followed by the statement that the 'immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat'.[18] Today, this sounds ridiculous, but it helps explain the famous statement a few lines earlier which is often used to argue against Leninist theories of organisation: 'The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole'.[19]

The truth is that at the time the *Manifesto* was written there were very few workers' parties, while the ideologies of reformism and Stalinism had yet to be born. The attitude expressed by Marx and Engels is in relation to workers' *movements* such as the Chartists. The point is that communists should not set themselves up against such movements, but seek to participate in them and try to influence them. Related to today's conditions it means that revolutionaries do not set themselves up against the broad structures of the labour movement, but seek to participate in them and gain influence. This is a world away from saying that we should give uncritical support to social democratic parties.

What the *Manifesto*'s arguments do emphasise is the danger of sectarianism. Given today's plethora of sects each advancing their own interests, the idea that revolutionaries have 'no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole', whilst lacking formulation, is mightily refreshing.

In the Preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote:

> 'However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever. Here and there some detail might be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today.'[20]

Our revolutionary task is to put the principles of the *Manifesto* into practice, using transitional demands which flow from an understanding of today's conditions. **WA**

1.K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, Penguin, 1973, p.67.
2.Ibid., p.68.
3.Ibid., p.70.
4.Ibid., p.78.
5.Ibid., p.81.
6.Ibid., pp.86-7.
7.Ibid., p.323. Also, the workers 'themselves must contribute most to their final victory, by informing themselves of their own class interests, by taking up their independent political position as soon as possible, by not allowing themselves to be misled by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeoisie into doubting for one minute the necessity of an independently organised party of the proletariat. Their battle-cry must be: The Permanent Revolution'. Ibid., p.330.
8.Ibid., p.86.
9.Ibid., p.63.
10.Ibid., p.71.
11.Ibid., p.85.
12.Ibid., p.85.
13.Ibid., p.69.
14.K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1968, p.182.
15.K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, p.73.
16.L. Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder, 1973, pp.111-112. See also R. Price, 'The Transitional Programme in Perspective' in *Workers Action*, No.2, April 1998.
17.K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, pp.79-80.
18.Ibid., p.80.
19.Ibid., p.79.
20.Ibid., p.66.

Islington special - Labour Party prepares to attack workers

From dented shield to crushed Twiglets

by David Lewis

Labour's loss of overall control of Islington Council in the local elections on May 7 is a testament to the rottenness of the policies of Islington's ruling Labour group, varieties Old and New.

In the New Labour stronghold of Islington South, Labour lost all wards bar one. According to the Islington South CLP, 'unfortunately a low turnout amongst Labour supporters, happy with the government, led to a number of losses'. Nothing to do with fact that the South party campaigned on a New Labour platform and the voters might just have had enough of the antics of Blair's supporters on Islington Council. The only reason that the Liberal Democrats did not take the whole borough was the bedrock of support for Labour in Islington North, where Labour regained one seat lost in an earlier by-election. This, again, would have nothing to do with the fact that the North party is resolutely ***not*** New Labour.

The reason for a low turnout and the near-loss of Islington Council by Labour had nothing to do with misfortune and everything to do with right-wing policies and monumental managerial incompetence. The entry onto the council a few years ago of ultra-Blairite Stephen Twigg and his acolytes, known locally as Twiglets, from the National Union of Students, following their ultimately unsuccessful infiltration of Islington North CLP, accelerated the steady rightward move by Islington's Labour council which had been taking place since the end of the struggle against rate-capping in the 1980s.

In 1995, while they were in Islington North CLP, members of Twigg's faction were largely responsible for the campaign which led to left-wing Islington councillor Liz Davies being de-selected as the parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East. They were eventually forced in court to retract their lies and pay damages, which were donated to the election fund for Islington North's MP, Jeremy Corbyn. Twigg himself went on to win Enfield Southgate from right-wing Tory Michael Portillo in last year's general election, a result which owed more to Portillo's unpopularity than anything else, and is being groomed for a high-level New Labour post.

Having been steered towards 'sensible' policies by its former leader, Margaret Hodge, who has also moved up the career ladder and become a Labour MP, Islington Council proceeded to shed the last vestiges of its 'loony left' reputation (a reputation, it has to be said, with very little grounding in reality). Last year's decision to privatise the cleansing service was the latest in a long series of attacks on the council workforce and the working class of Islington. Even that has not actually been carried out yet. These people cannot even implement their own lousy policies! Many of the cuts that they have put into effect have been carried out on the basis of reports by management consultants hired at extortionate cost to put an objective gloss on the execution of policy by the chief officers of the council, who themselves are paid outrageously high salaries for attacking the wages and conditions of their staff and cutting back services to Islington voters.

Appropriately enough for a council which is totally out of touch with the working class, Islington now has the distinction of having a yuppy mayor. According to the *Highbury & Islington Express* of May 25, 'Glamorous, 29-year-old Oxbridge graduate' Meg Hillier 'likes meeting people' and intends to be a 'People's Mayor' under the slogan of 'New Labour, New Communities'. In an indication of what can be expected, she says ominously 'I am proud to have been associated with Stephen [Twigg]. He was a very good ward councillor, a consummate politician. He understood how the game worked but had a real feel for the bigger picture. We worked like a seamless team'. And she now has the casting vote on the council!

However, she did not need to use it in one of the first major decisions taken by the council after the elections, when Labour abstained in a Liberal Democrat motion proposing a referendum on reducing the council tax. This ties in very much with the moves towards a joint administration with the Liberal Democrats made by the council leader, Derek Sawyer, who once posed as a left-winger. The Liberal Democrats, understandably, are having none of it, preferring to keep the pressure up until the Labour group falls apart. To guard against this contingency, the new council whips, who also used to pose as lefts, are instituting a strict discipline. This is certainly going to be needed if they are to hold the group together while they attempt to push through cuts of up to £30 million.

Alternative policies must be developed and adopted as a matter of urgency. These must include

- a campaign which demands from central government urgent financial assistance to roll back the damage done by years of Tory-instigated cuts;
- slashing the pay and numbers of the most senior officers of the council;
- sacking all management consultants;
- establishing a co-operative relationship with the unions: no cut-backs, all vacant posts to be filled, implementation of national and local pay and conditions agreements, reduction of working hours;
- no privatisations, no reduction in local services.

The Labour group must be prepared to take a stand against the government and risk losing office, rather than implement more cuts. This is the only basis on which it will be able to turn to the Islington working class for support. If it fails to do this, the council will be lost to the Liberal Democrats for years to come. **WA**

Islington special - Defend sacked Housing Needs workers

Fight for reinstatement!

by Charli Langford

In July 1997, the London Borough of Islington employed Capita, a consultancy firm, to analyse the council's operations and suggest cost savings. Among its recommendations, Capita advised that the 60 Housing Needs officer posts, covering general housing matters, could be replaced by 30 Housing Advice workers for specialist areas – homeless people, transfers, etc. There were already a number of posts vacant and after voluntary redundancies Islington found itself with 35 Housing Needs and estate management staff for the 30 posts. In February 1998, the council announced that the Housing Advice posts were different jobs from those of Housing Needs officers (even though the job descriptions were 90 per cent identical) and that the Housing Needs officers would have to apply for the Housing Advice jobs they were already doing.

A system of tests followed by interview was set up, but the workers boycotted the tests on the first two occasions they were required to sit them. However, when Islington advertised the posts externally the workers backed down and sat the tests and interviews in the early part of May. Meanwhile, the Unison union branch organised a ballot for industrial action on the demands that the Needs officers be slotted into the Advice worker posts and that there be no reduction in posts from the original 60. In the ballot result – declared on May 15 – there was 80 per cent support for strike action.

But late in the afternoon of May 15 – a Friday – letters were given to 11 of the Housing Needs officers to say that they had been unsuccessful in applying for their jobs. All 11 were women from black or ethnic minority backgrounds. One worker was called out of an interview with a homeless family to receive her letter.

Rather than giving the legally-required seven days' notice, 19 of the 21 unionised Housing Needs officers went on immediate unofficial strike on the following Monday. The union branch leadership encouraged the strikers to continue on strike into Tuesday and Wednesday. Six returned to work on Tuesday, but others stayed out.

On Wednesday May 20, everyone who had been on strike after Monday was summarily sacked by the council on grounds of breach of contract of employment. In this, the council reneged on an agreement it had made with the Unison regional official, that it would allow time for him to talk with the strikers and then come back to the employer with a return-to-work agreement. The strikers had agreed to return to work on Thursday morning.

On the Thursday morning, the workers who had boycotted the tests received a letter warning them that if they took any further industrial action they would be in breach of contract and subject to dismissal. This was after 12 of their number had been sacked the previous day.

This dispute is of immense political importance. Islington Council is split evenly between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and remains Labour-controlled by the casting vote of the mayor. The chief officers of the council are under very little political control due to the hung council; the Labour group is on the Blairite wing of the party and shares with the Liberals and the officers the policy of massively cutting council spending. This is the first time that a council has sacked staff for taking strike action. While sackings for 'breach of contract' have always been possible, the council felt it was in an even stronger position because the seven days' notice of strike action required under the anti-union laws had not been given.

The union branch secretary, Rob Murthwaite, is himself a Housing Needs officer and an SWP member, as are at least four of the sacked workers. Rob has not been sacked for the technical reason that he was on facility time, although the more likely reasons are that he is registered blind and is an elected branch officer. However, the council may have provoked isolated action by this group of workers specifically to remove a potentially strong group of activists.

The Unison branch is now organising a ballot for industrial action to reinstate the 12. In the context of threatened redundancies, meaningful reinstatement must include, as a minimum, redeployment for Needs officers who fail to get Advice worker jobs. The original basis for the strike – no cuts in posts and the transfer of Needs officers to Advice worker posts – can be put as a demand but is now virtually unwinnable because of tactical errors in the conduct of the dispute. If the council can be forced to rescind the sackings, the workforce is likely to cut its losses and accept this as the best deal on offer. Activists must fight for their unions and political organisations to support the sacked Housing Needs officers in their struggle for reinstatement. **WA**

Special Education Needs workers at Rosemary School (again, Islington Unison members) went on strike on June 4 against the decision of their employer not to pay the special allowance for their type of work. This allowance is paid to workers in other special schools, including some in Islington, and the Rosemary School workers have been campaigning for it for over four years.

However, on June 8, Islington Council obtained an injunction against the strike, on the grounds that the regional Unison official had failed to give the council a copy of the ballot paper. The workers now have to repeat the process of balloting and notice-giving from the beginning. Such are the effects of the implementation of the anti-union laws. The Rosemary School workers are confident of getting unanimous support for a strike in the new ballot.

Requests for speakers on either of these disputes should be made to: Islington Unison, c/o Northway House, 257-258 Upper Street, London N1 2UD. Tel: 0171-477 2489.

A mayor for London

Enthusiasm for a London mayor and assembly was put to the test in the referendum on May 7 – the same day as the local government elections – and found seriously wanting. With the turnout at less than a third of the electorate, the 72 per cent of those voting who supported the proposal for a directly elected mayor and a 25-member Greater London Authority represent less than a quarter of all Londoners. If this were a ballot for trade union recognition, it would fail dramatically under both turnout and overall 'yes' vote under New Labour's 'Fairness at work' proposals. So much for principle and consistency.

By linking the issues together, New Labour is attempting to legitimise an obviously undemocratic, unaccountable mayor using the fig leaf of a marginally more democratic assembly. Support for an assembly is largely derived from the memory of the GLC under Ken Livingstone, the abolition of which in 1986 was highly unpopular. But the new assembly is not intended to recreate the GLC, which for all its opportunism struck a powerful chord of opposition to Tory central government, especially through its support for subsidised public transport.

In contrast, the proposed assembly – its official title of 'authority' is more fitting – will be subordinate to the mayor and will have no policy-making powers. Its electoral constituencies are huge and unrelated to any existing political entities, thereby eliminating any mechanism of accountability. There will be 14 new voting areas, each one covering two or three complete London boroughs and returning just one member to the authority. The other 11 members of the authority will be chosen from party lists and their 'constituency' will be the whole of Greater London – the 32 boroughs plus the City. In the election for the authority, Londoners will have one vote for a named candidate and one vote for a political party.

But the post of mayor is even more undemocratic. Instead of representing parties, the candidates will be elected through a US-style beauty contest. The mayor's remit – 'to speak up for London' – begs the question as to why Labour with a huge majority at Westminster cannot resolve the capital's huge transport, infrastructure and housing problems. At the same time, the mayor will lack any power to resolve the problems. As a result, the likelihood is that the mayor will use the office to dissipate the anger of working class Londoners by claiming be doing the job for them, while in practice s/he will be reduced to lobbying business for crumbs of investment. This is the logic of depoliticising the mayor's role – something which can only assist a showbiz candidacy from the likes of Richard Branson. The implications of New Labour's promotion of mayors in other cities and boroughs can already be seen in Hammersmith and Fulham, where councillors have become paid officials of the borough. It doesn't take much imagination to see the corrosive effects this will have on any lingering sense of class allegiance among Labour councillors.

This having been said, there is a big potential problem for Blair in the shape of the Livingstone bogey. All opinion polls show that former GLC leader and Brent East MP is streets ahead of New Labour's preferred candidate, Glenda Jackson. While we have absolutely no illusions about Livingstone's record, it is clear that his candidacy would rally almost all working class opposition to Blair in the capital. Workers would largely be voting for Livingstone's past – a past which Blair is desperate to expunge from the record because it is identified indelibly with London's opposition to Thatcherism through extra-parliamentary action. A vote for Livingstone would be seen as giving a bloody nose to Blair.

Despite the inherently undemocratic nature of the election, for these reasons if Livingstone stood as a candidate for mayor we would advocate a vote for him. Workers will have illusions in Livingstone, and despite the absence of a serious budget, will expect a return to GLC-style transport policies such as 'Fares Fair'. These illusions need to be tested out in struggle. **WA**

Denmark

Defeat of the general strike

by Gustav Mowitz

The situation facing workers all over the world today is certainly not a comfortable one – cuts, the lowering of wages, union-busting and generally reactionary politics. In addition, many workers have lost the confidence to fight for their own political interests – for socialism, that is.

So when workers in one country launch a big struggle, they become the centre of attention for all thinking workers around the world. Danish workers succeeded in becoming the centre of attention in late April and early May, when they took co-ordinated strike action across a range of industries after negotiations between the trade unions and the private-sector employers over a pay rise and extra holiday entitlements broke down.

Over half a million mainly blue-collar workers in the private sector – more than ten per cent of the country's population – downed tools on April 27 and effectively paralysed the country. The strike had huge support among rank-and-file workers and was by no means a bureaucratic manoeuvre, yet it ended in disaster with the Social Democrat government passing legislation to ban the strike and impose a settlement. How could it end that way? In order to understand how such a powerful movement of the working class could be demobilised so easily, it is necessary to look at the recent history of Denmark and the role of the LO, the trade union confederation.

Although a small country, Denmark has probably the most militant working class in Scandinavia. The main target of its militancy has been the European Union, which has, correctly, been seen as a project of the bosses which should be opposed. Widespread working class resistance to the EU has meant that signing up to the various treaties has been more difficult for Denmark than for other countries and the government has been forced to hold four referendums in the last 12 years in order to take the integration process forward. Another main area of conflict has been the fight against privatisation, mainly by the bus drivers.

One of the reasons for the high level of militancy within the class in the early 1990s was hostility towards the neo-liberal policies of the conservative government.

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Spain

Where now for the United Left?

by Jim Padmore

Despite the performance of the Partido Socialista Obrero España during the 'transition to democracy' in the late 1970s, many people had high hopes of the first PSOE government elected in 1982.

As it turned out, the PSOE under Felipe González introduced more austerity measures, 'forgot' its promises on abortion rights and succeeded in taking Spain into NATO and the EEC. It also repressed nationalists in Euskadi (the Basque country), including using the GAL – the state-sponsored death squads which targeted members of ETA and its political wing, Herri Batasuna, both in Spain and France.

In this context, in 1986, Izquierda Unida (United Left) was formed with the stated aim of providing an anti-capitalist political alternative. Though the dominant force in IU was, and still is, the Communist Party, it also includes most of the far left, in some areas the Greens, and otherwise unaffiliated individuals. The internal regime is fairly open without any restrictions on the activities of affiliated groups, although recently it has sometimes been unclear whether majority decisions are in fact binding on anyone.

Growing in electoral strength, IU spoke of 'overtaking' the PSOE. During the run-up to the March 1996 elections, it described the PSOE and the conservative Partido Popular (PP) as 'twin souls', and referred to the 'two banks of the river' with IU on one side and the PSOE and the PP on the other.

This refusal to differentiate between the PSOE and the PP cost IU dear. The election saw the PP get the highest number of votes, and it was eventually able to form a coalition government with the right-wing nationalist parties of Catalunya and Euskadi. At 11 per cent, IU's vote hardly increased at all. In the aftermath of the elections, a right-wing current calling itself the 'New Left' argued for a strategic bloc with the PSOE against the PP, with very little criticism of the PSOE leaders.

Meanwhile, in Catalunya, other problems were emerging. Up to now, IU has not organised in the region, relating instead to its 'sister organisation', Iniciativa por Catalunya (IC). Unfortunately, the political projects of IU and IC have been diverging for some time now. The Catalan organisation supports the Maastricht treaty and calls for an Italian-style 'Olive Tree' electoral bloc, something it was planning to put into practice in the 1998 elections to the Generalidad (the Catalan autonomous parliament). When the Galician IU tried this in October last year, the results were disastrous. The PSOE-IU bloc received only 19 per cent of the vote, beaten into third place by the nationalist BNG's 26 per cent.

The strategy of both the 'New Left' group and the Catalan IC of permanent high-profile differentiation in the media, combined with the imminence of the Catalan elections, made cohabitation both impossible and undesirable. The result was a series of splits.

This was the setting for the fifth federal assembly of IU, its national conference, held in December 1997. In the elections for the 89-member federal political council, or national executive, of 1,370 possible votes, the majority slate of the outgoing leadership gained 966 (70 per cent), two smaller slates gained about 100 (7 per cent) each, and the remaining 15 per cent of votes were not cast.

Documents and motions were passed on the struggle against neo-liberalism and Maastricht, political independence from the PSOE, a campaign for a 35-hour week, a federal Spanish state, and for the party to start organising in Catalunya following its break with IC.

The assembly criticised the outgoing leadership for some of its positions on the national question, and in particular on Euskadi. IU's position on the national question in the Spanish state is very confused. Its demand for a 'federal state' can mean almost anything, but it does not, for the majority of the leadership, mean support for the self-determination – up to and including independence – of Euskadi, Catalunya and Galicia. However, IU remains a broad-based organisation of hundreds of thousands of working class socialists, into which Marxists can, and should, intervene. **WA**

Danish general strike

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When the Social Democrats took over five years ago, they betrayed workers' expectations by retaining much of the political agenda of the previous administration. Rather than collaborate with the small left-wing parties in parliament, they formed a popular frontist coalition government with two bourgeois parties.

During the last two years, racism, which has fed on the disappointment with the established leadership and the isolation of revolutionary organisations from the masses, has become a growing menace. It has been whipped up by the populist newspaper *Ekstra-Bladet*, which has specialised in campaigns against immigration, women's rights, gays and lesbians, trade unions, pacifism and left-wingers. Although the rest of the media and the major political parties distanced themselves from this campaign, they began to discuss the need to introduce tougher immigration policies. Suddenly, there was evidence of increasing support in opinion polls for a very suspect organisation, the Danish People's Party (DFP) headed by Pia Kjaersgaard. Its name is enough to indicate what politics it stands for, since it is the same as one of the major Quisling parties during the German occupation. The main party of collaboration with the Nazis was the Danish National Socialist Workers' Party, which since 1982 has been called the National Socialist Movement of Denmark. In the early 1990s, it was for a brief time the fastest growing right-wing party, and it has some radio stations. The DFP, however, models itself more on Le Pen's National Front in France, and calls itself 'democratic'.

The general election in March was marked by disappointment in the Social Democrats and distrust of the conservative opposition. It had been widely anticipated that the Social Democrats would be thrown out, but in the event prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen's coalition, now dependent on the support of two representatives from the Faroe Islands and Greenland, clung on to power by the narrowest possible margin – one seat in the 179-seat parliament. The conservative coalition led by Uffe Ellemann-Jensen lost out to the far right with the DFP making the greatest gains – from zero to 6.8 per cent of the vote.

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Kosova

Smash the Serbian security forces!

Nick Davies calls on all socialists to give unconditional support for the right of the Albanians of Kosova to self-determination, and to help them gain the means to fight for it

As Yugoslav army reinforcements pour into Kosova and exchange fire with the guerrillas of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA), a further bloodbath in the Balkans appears inevitable. The Albanian population of Kosova, 90 per cent of the total, wants at the very least autonomy within Yugoslavia. However, a likely outcome is that the well-equipped army of the rump Yugoslavia will either defeat the poorly armed but determined KLA, or drive it underground, whereupon Kosova will be 'ethnically cleansed' of its Albanian population. They will be replaced by Serbs, possibly refugees from Croatia, and the 'reconquest' of 'old Serbia' will be accompanied by folk music and dancing, and blessed by the Serbian Orthodox clergy.

No arms embargo!

This enterprise will be made possible by a Western-imposed arms embargo which will effectively prevent the Albanians from defending themselves. Those Albanians lucky enough to escape the attentions of the ethnic cleansers will then give their life-savings for a ride in a rustbucket of a boat to Italy. The really lucky ones might get as far as Britain, where they can look forward to a spell as a guest of Jack Straw in Campsfield Detention Centre while their cases are 'investigated'. Gloomy or cynical as this scenario might seem, no-one can say they haven't seen it coming. This is more or less what happened in Bosnia. In case anyone is slow to catch on, the notorious ethnic cleanser Arkan has been seen a lot in Kosova lately – taking a break from his 'business' activities in Serbia and Macedonia to case the joint, no doubt.

Once Kosova becomes hot news, Western politicians and media will resort to lazy platitudes about 'ancient Balkan hatreds'. However, the hatreds propelling Kosova towards a bloodbath are more modern than they are ancient. Serbian nationalism owes its obsession with the region to the presence of a number of Serbian religious and cultural sites there, principally the battlefield of Kosovo Polje where, in 1389, Serb and Albanian princes fought the Ottoman Turks in what appears to have been a draw, or, alternatively, depending on which version you believe, the Serb king Lazar accepted defeat in exchange for Christian martyrdom on behalf of himself and all Serbs. Despite Serbian nationalist propaganda about the Albanians deliberately 'breeding out' the Serbs, the area has had an Albanian majority since at least 1911, a year before the whole area was seized by Serbia from the Ottoman Empire in the first Balkan War. The timing of this seizure was in part to pre-empt the plan by the Western powers to create an independent Albania which would include the

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Danish general strike

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The strike was originally planned for March, but the union bureaucrats delayed it until after the election. If they thought that the delay would undermine the willingness to strike for higher wages and a sixth week of annual paid holidays, they were wrong. Workers became more and more angry at the employers' offer of an 8.5 per cent pay rise over two years plus minimal improvements in holiday and pension entitlements, and in a ballot with a far higher participation than usual 56 per cent voted in favour of strike action, despite the fact that they were recommended to accept the deal by their leaders. On April 24, the LO was obliged to issue a statement saying it had turned down the offer and that the strike would begin on the 27th.

At first, things looked good. The most decisive sections of workers were out – manufacturing industry, transport and construction – plus media workers and smaller groups like brewery and fairground workers. It was the largest strike since the Easter strike of 1985, which makes it the second largest in Danish history. The fact that the bosses have had a union-busting policy for the last few years wasn't a big problem – those who employed scabs couldn't produce much anyway because the tanker drivers were on strike and the petrol stations were not being supplied.

However, while some workers in neighbouring Sweden boycotted work normally done by Danish workers, many did not. Swedish taxi drivers made frequent trips into Denmark to profit from the shutdown of public transport, and the ferries between the two countries kept sailing even though the Danish crew-members were on strike.

But the reason the strike collapsed after 11 days was not scabbing; it was the lack of a fighting leadership in the trade unions with the courage to stand firm against the government. After initially refusing to intervene in the dispute, apparently out of a fear that this would make it more likely that trade unionists would vote 'no' in the May 28 referendum on the Amsterdam EU treaty, the Social Democrat government did an about-turn and introduced a bill into parliament to outlaw the strike. The LO mounted a series of demonstrations, but after MPs voted for the bill by 95 votes to 12, with ten abstentions, it backed down. The government is now thought to be considering future legislation which will ban all strikes.

The defeat of the strike was followed by a victory for the 'yes' campaign in the referendum, with 55 per cent voting to ratify the Amsterdam treaty. Worse still, in a country where opposition to the EU has traditionally been led by the left, the labour movement failed to take control of the 'no' campaign, which for the first time was dominated by the poisonous politics of *Ekstra-Bladet* and the far right.

With the retreat by the labour movement, the danger now is that the DFP racists will make further gains. Socialists must fight alongside workers, many of whom had placed their trust in the trade union leaders and the Social Democrat government, to draw the lessons of the strike. The reason for its defeat was not the lack of fighting spirit among workers, but the failure to develop politics adequate to the task. **WA**

Kosova

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Ottoman *vilayet* (province) of Kossovo. The evidence suggests that up to that time, Serbs and Albanians had co-existed relatively peacefully.

It was in Kosova that the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic launched his Serbian nationalist crusade, with an extravagant ceremony to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, and his now famous promise to Serb inhabitants of Kosova, alleging maltreatment by Albanians: 'no-one will beat you again!'. Since then, his has somehow managed to keep his job, despite launching, along with his Croat partner-in-crime Franjo Tudjman, a war which destroyed the only state in modern times which managed to include all Serbs within its borders. Failure to hold on to Kosova would be politically unthinkable for Milosevic, and may bring him down. Egging him on is Vojeslav Seselj's fascist Radical Party, and the various nationalist parties who like Milosevic the Serbian nationalist, but think him too 'socialist' by half.

The Yugoslav constitution of 1974 granted the Albanians of Kosova more rights than they have had before or since: autonomy within the Serbian Republic, an assembly, their own police force and the right to an Albanian-language media and education system. These rights were torn up in 1989, and since then Kosova has been in a state of almost permanent semi-insurrection and martial law. Albanians are routinely tortured and killed by the Serbian police. Albanian state employees have been sacked, and when the Albanian lecturers at the university in Pristina were dismissed, the Albanian students left too. Kosova was already the most under-developed and poverty-stricken area of the former Yugoslavia. In the 1960s and 70s some effort had been made by the Federal Government to remedy Kosova's backwardness, but pressure from the wealthier northern republics and Yugoslavia's mounting economic problems put a stop to all that. Now, much of the economy is at a virtual standstill and unemployment among the Albanians is astronomic.

Standing in the way of Serbia's manifest destiny is the KLA, patchily armed and equipped, but growing all the time. Already, 'liberated zones' have been declared in the Kosova countryside. They say they want no compromise with the Serbs. Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) has middle-class and student support. Its strategy has been to call for a boycott of all elections, most recently the charade of a 'referendum' conducted throughout Serbia on the future of Kosova, and to build a 'parallel' Albanian parliament.

No imperialist intervention!

The crucial weakness in the LDK's strategy is its call for Western intervention. The Contact Group, which includes Britain, has been trying to organise some sort of a deal, aiming to defuse the situation. No doubt they hope that the Kosovans can be fobbed off with the low-level 'cultural autonomy' which is all that is on offer from Serbia. Rugova has been in talks with US envoy Richard Holbrooke, followed by a meeting in Belgrade with Milosevic. Rugova had been keeping the Belgrade meeting from his colleagues; when they found out about it, two of them resigned. No doubt some of the LDK are influenced by the hard line of the KLA: '[We] don't believe in Holbrooke. It makes no difference to us whether he comes here or not. It is the army which is freeing the people.' Under pressure of events, many LDK members are less suspicious than they were of the KLA. 'The KLA has made things better,' stated LDK official Rrok Berisha recently. 'Where they operate, people don't get massacred'.

The former inhabitants of Gorazde and Srebrenica could tell the LDK just how much the 'support' of the Western powers was worth to them. Throughout the previous Balkan wars, British diplomacy, and also that of the French, was either overtly or covertly pro-Serbian. Former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd is, in his capacity as a director of NatWest Bank, up to his neck in the privatisation of the Serbian economy. All the Western powers need Milosevic to stay in power as a regional strongman, and to help implement the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

No sanctions against Serb workers and peasants!

No one should be deceived by the freeze on Yugoslav assets abroad and the ban on new investment there, imposed by the UN. Sanctions-busting is always big business in Serbia. The elite have managed to live like kings, while the workers and rural poor have picked up the tab. (There is no threat to Yugoslavia's place in the World Cup, in which they are due to play the USA, Germany and Iran – you couldn't make it up!)

The unfunny joke that is New Labour's 'ethical' foreign policy has so far involved the continuing of arms sales to Indonesia and uncritical support for US state terror in Iraq. The fate of the Kosova Albanians is hardly likely to disturb the sleep of Blair, Cook, *et al*

Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians!

Socialists in Britain, and indeed the whole of Europe, must support unconditionally the right of the Albanians in Kosova to self-determination, and the means to fight for it. There must be no repeat of the scandalous and inexcusable failure by some on the left to defend multi-ethnic Bosnia against nationalist terror. Labour Party branches and affiliated trade unions must bombard Labour MPs, and the party itself, with demands that there be no arms 'embargo' which, in reality, will be an embargo against the Albanians only. The Albanians must have the right to defend themselves. As for what they are fighting for, it is for them to decide what self-determination means in practice. It might mean full independence, although an 'independent' capitalist Kosova would be barely viable in the present circum-

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Kosova

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stances; 'independence' means paying protection money to Western financial institutions. It might mean union with Albania. It might mean greater autonomy within Yugoslavia. Surprising as it may seem, this is still popular in some quarters. After the granting of autonomy in 1974, there was a popular campaign for Kosova be made a republic, like Macedonia, or Serbia itself. Between the nightmare of Enver Hoxha's Albania and Tito's de-centralised and relatively benign brand of Stalinism it was, for most Kosovans, no contest. When autonomy was taken away in 1989, demonstrators carried Tito's portrait. Even today, these have been seen on demonstrations: a rather pathetic appeal to Milosevic's 'socialist' conscience, possibly. In terms of what is being fought for, there seems to be a difference between the LDK and the KLA. The LDK may well be satisfied with autonomy. On the other hand, KLA guerrillas giving interviews to Western newspapers have talked of bringing together *all* Albanians, including those in Macedonia and Montenegro.

NATO Out!

We must demand that there be no Western military interference. Why is NATO considering sending troops to the Albania-Kosova border if not to cut off the supply of arms to the KLA? Any western aid to Kosova must be entirely without strings.

Asylum rights!

Socialists must demand that anyone fleeing from the fighting in Kosova be given an unconditional right of asylum in any country within the borders of the European Union. The reactionary Schengen Agreement aims to build a 'fortress Europe', to exclude the victims, economic and military, of the new European order. Britain hasn't signed up to Schengen because it wants its own 'tougher' set-up. We must demand that there will be no repeat of the racist discrimination and violence which greeted the Romanies fleeing from Slovakia.

Workers aid!

Socialists must also try to give practical aid in the form of food and fuel to the people of Kosova, as many did during the conflict in Bosnia. We must show them that even if Western governments abandon them, the labour movement in Europe is their ally. If we wish to criticise the illusions of the LDK in 'liberal' democracy, or the belief of the KLA that a guerilla movement alone can evict Serbia from Kosova, the right to criticism must be earned by solidarity.

The coming conflict in Kosova could be a virtual re-run of the war in Bosnia – a Bosnia for slow learners. On the other hand, it could be a kick in the teeth for Serbian nationalism, and that would be a good thing, not least for the workers of Serbia itself. **WA**

Eileen Gersh 1913 – 1998

With great regret, we record the death of Eileen Gersh on March 18 after a period of illness. Eileen was a founder member of Workers Action.

Eileen Mary Sutton, as she was, began her political life in the Labour Club while an undergraduate at Somerville College in Oxford in the early 1930s. Her parents were Liberals supporting Lloyd George, and she says that 'even when I was at school I realised . . . progressive possibilities were in the Labour Party and lay with socialism . . . at Oxford I began to read Marx. It was mostly the political and economic situation that radicalised me'.

The 1930s were the decade of economic depression and the rise of fascism, culminating in world war. Eileen recalls the reception of a hunger march from Wales in 1934: 'I was given a pail of water, a sponge and some rubbing alcohol to do their feet and tend their blisters! I don't think they would have dreamt of asking men to peel potatoes – and they didn't ask any of us women to do any of the important organisational tasks.' But she remembers hearing Dora Russell, Naomi Mitchison and Charlotte Haldane at the Labour Club. She also recalls: 'When Oswald Mosley's fascists organised a meeting in Oxford a group of us went to picket it, and some went inside to attempt to disrupt it. Then we held an impromptu anti-fascist demonstration through the city.'

Eileen graduated in 1934 with a degree in Natural Science (Botany). She was one of the first women to graduate in a science subject in Britain. She moved to London where she joined the Wimbledon, Merton and Morden Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth. It was here she first met Trotskyists – Vic Carpenter and Arthur Wimbush were active in Merton and knew the more famous Balham group, though they were not organisationally linked. 'We used to go out at weekends and set up a speaking platform borrowed from Reg Groves,' she says, and 'hold forth in the street'. Her LLY – of which she was vice-chair – was 'overwhelmingly working class in composition. We had secretaries, clerks, metal workers, dustmen. We had anything from a dozen to twenty attending each meeting'. The branch helped organise tours for Spanish children during the Spanish civil war. 'We organised a concert given by Basque children.'

John Archer met Eileen at the 1938 LLY national conference, at which he made a speech attacking the alliance of the Stalinists and the Labour Party leadership to restrict the LLY. Eileen was a delegate from Surbiton LLY and he recalls her agreeing with him. He also recalls dancing with her and then not seeing her again until the late 1980s.

Eileen left for the United States in 1938 and remained there until 1985 apart from brief visits back to Britain, on the first of which, in 1939, she picked up her Ph.D. She learned of the founding of the Fourth International when she went to see James P. Cannon, but for her first few years in the US she dropped out of political activity. In the early 1940s she married Isidore Gersh – whom Dorothea Breitmann remembers as 'one of the most prominent Trotskyists in Philadelphia' at the time – and she had two children. Eileen says: 'In the late forties I began to get involved in the anti-nuclear movement in Chicago', but there is no information about her until 1959, when she became a research assistant at the University of Chicago. She moved to Pennsylvania University in 1963, where she was a professor from 1968. Eileen recalls her daughter Ilona at seventeen bringing home a copy of the *Militant*, the paper of the Socialist Workers Party, then the sympathising party of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in the United States 'I recognised it, of course, and got in touch!'

She became a supporter of the SWP,

finally joining in 1972. She was heavily involved in abortion rights work and later the movement against the Vietnam war. Dianne Feeley writes: 'I knew her in the SWP, particularly in the 1970s. We were both active in the women's movement and members of the National Organisation for Women. This was during the time when the fight for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment [a proposed amendment to the US constitution] almost succeeded. We in the SWP pushed for developing a strategy of mass mobilisations rather than concentrating on lobbying state legislators.'

In 1981 Eileen and Isidore published their book, *The Biology of Women*. Eileen was at this time a lecturer in biology at the University of Pennsylvania.

In the early 1980s, the SWP under the leadership of Jack Barnes became more and more supportive of the Castro regime in Cuba. It also adopted an increasingly anti-democratic internal regime. Eileen says: 'They instituted new practices in the SWP. They did everything they could to avoid debating with those who opposed them in the party, and then finally they expelled us.' Typically, she does not say that the Barnes document 'Tendencies and Factions in the Preconvention Discussion', which effectively abolished the right to form tendencies in the SWP, was subtitled 'Letter from Jack Barnes to Eileen G'. Eileen was expelled along with many others in 1984. Although she never said so, one might assume that this was a particularly difficult time for Eileen because Isidore had died shortly before and Ilona had become a fervent supporter of Barnes. Chris Faatz writes: 'She was one of the many expelled by the Barnes gang. In the dead of night, at an Oberlin conference, she was hauled out of bed and brought before members of the control committee. They commenced to grill her, then expel her from the party. She fought for readmission but, as her husband had recently died, she finally threw up her arms and went back to England.' She was over 70 years old when this occurred.

Living in London in 1985, Eileen nevertheless maintained links with USec supporters in the United States. Chris Faatz continues: 'She moved in with Audrey. (Lovely little house, and they had a great cat.) She joined the British section of the USec, which was not at that time the ISG but Socialist Action. She was extremely active in her local Labour Party, as well as in party work (helping mail the press, street sales, demos, etc – it was always wonderful to watch this extraordinarily frail old woman out there mildly hawking the paper. She sold more copies than anyone I knew!).'

Socialist Action, too, was undergoing internal disintegration and immediately on joining Eileen became part of opposition grouping in support of the USec majority, while the SA majority drifted into uncritical support of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs. In 1988, the opposition left SA for the newly formed International Socialist Group – again a USec-affiliated organisation.

She revisited the United States in 1992 to attempt a rapprochement with her daughter. However, she never spoke about this trip after her return to Britain, which suggests that she was unsuccessful. Chris Faatz again: 'Expellees were pretty much anathema. "Shunned" may not be too strong a word to use.' Audrey confirms that the pro-SWP people in Britain who had been friendly with Eileen dropped all contact after she was expelled.

Having been through the political collapse of both the SWP and Socialist Action, Eileen was very strong on basic Trotskyist ideas. As the ISG in the early to middle 1990s moved away from an orientation to the Labour movement and the correct implementation of the united front tactic, she became steadily more integrated into internal opposition groupings. The USec itself was no source of principled politics, having uncritically followed various radical nationalist groups including the Sandinistas and Sinn Féin. With a heavy heart, Eileen drew the conclusion that the USec, including the ISG, had moved so far from principled, effective working class politics that she needed to find a new home. Eventually she and four other comrades left the ISG and joined the Workers International League. Since all the previous organisations she had been a member of had been linked to the USec, this was a major political change in her life.

With her very strong background in natural science, Eileen was able to play a very useful role in a revolutionary organisation. She did workshops for the ISG on various science-related issues, including one on genetics – among her main interests at this point in her life – designed to arm comrades in the struggle against racism. She was also a very rich source of knowledge on all environmental issues – from precisely why a low megaton cruise missile has to be a first-strike nuclear weapon, to how all renewable energy on earth can be traced back to photosynthesis or other effects of the sun.

She had a very dry sense of humour – and took delight in telling people that she would not make any 'Dolly the sheep' jokes because they were all the same. In fact, she was very concerned about the development of cloning, recognising that the cloning of human beings – which would raise important questions over what defines an individual – would eventually be possible and would in all likelihood be used by the ruling class as a source of 'spare parts' for the very rich.

She was recognised as a widely experienced, level-headed and scrupulously fair comrade. For this reason, she was elected for several years to the ISG's control commission (the internal body that monitors democracy and behaviour). In the brief period between joining the WIL and becoming too ill to take on political work, she also served on a WIL control commission.

Eileen was a very modest and private person who rarely spoke about herself. For this reason, there are no doubt many areas of her life that this account does not touch upon. She expressed the wish not to have a funeral because she did not want anyone to mourn for her. She kept out of the spotlight and would almost certainly have wished to be remembered as just one among many fighters for socialism. But it is this very quality that will ensure that we remember her as we continue the struggle to which she devoted the greater part of her life.

For information about Eileen invaluable in writing this article thanks are due to those quoted, particularly Chris Faatz. A lot of the details of Eileen's early life were drawn from an interview by Dave Shepherd published in 'Socialist Outlook' in November 1988.

Charli Langford

Eileen Gersh 1913 – 1998

Memorial meeting

Saturday July 4, 1998. 6.00pm to 10.00pm

Brockway Room,
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London

The economics of the Euro

by Jonathan Joseph

The latest stage of European capitalist integration is the process of monetary union and the creation of a single currency, the Euro, which will be launched in January 1999. Europe-based capital is coming together in an attempt to challenge the US dollar and the Japanese yen. Underlying this project are other important factors such as the increasing concentration of capital ownership within Europe which is leading to the development of a 'European' bourgeoisie and providing the impetus towards creating a unified economic bloc. The European Monetary Union (EMU) proposals are designed to further advance this process.

Productivity and uneven development

The current debates around the single currency should be viewed firmly within the context of Marx's theory of labour productivity and economic crisis[1]. Put simply, capitalism requires a constant raising of the productivity of labour. However, the effects of this are uneven and value is transferred from low efficiency capital to high efficiency capital.

This process also applies to the international situation where the more advanced producers realise higher profits than less advanced ones. Some of the value produced by less developed capital is transferred to the more highly-developed capital. The result is uneven development and the concentration of capital in certain areas.

Those countries with lower productivity levels and which lag behind in technological development most force longer hours out of their work force in order to raise productivity and compete with more advanced capital. However, this situation is made more complicated by the system of exchange rates operating between different currencies.

German capital, with a higher productivity level, is more competitive on foreign markets. Those countries with lower productivity levels are encouraged to pursue inflationary policies (which attempt to reduce the level of wages in real terms) or to resort to the mechanism of currency devaluation.

By devaluing its currency, it is possible for a government to protect 'national' capital by making its export prices cheaper and hence more competitive. However, with the introduction of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), this option is denied.

The Exchange Rate Mechanism

The forerunner of EMU was the European Monetary System comprised of the European Currency Unit (the Ecu) and the ERM. This kept the various member currencies within a strict band which limited the amount by which their currencies could fluctuate.

Within this system the German mark was the dominant currency. The mark is a stable, high exchange-value currency based on the fact that the productivity of labour is higher in Germany and that the country enjoys a balance of trade surplus.

However, as Carchedi argues[2], this poses a problem for weaker capitals as the ERM removes the ability of national governments to devalue their currencies in order to reduce prices and make them more competitive, or to use inflationary policies to reduce the value of real wages (or act as a redistribution mechanism). As a result, it is necessary to make capital more competitive by extracting more surplus value at the point of production.

In this way, the 'interests' of German capital dominated the ERM and its higher efficiency forced less efficient capitals to extract more surplus value by attacking labour.

When Britain joined the ERM in October 1990, it was considered the best way of pursuing the government's monetary objectives. Fixed exchange rates were seen as the best means of imposing financial discipline and pursuing an anti-inflationary policy.

But there was also an important ideological angle to joining the ERM. Membership allowed the government to distance itself politically from the consequences of austerity by arguing that its hand was forced by international commitments[3].

However, things did not go well for the government's policy. In the system of exchange rates, sterling was valued at the high rate of 2.95 DM with a 6 per cent fluctuation margin. This proved to be a costly mistake. Britain entered under conditions of high inflation, a large balance of payments deficit and a growing Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. The discipline required by the ERM proved to be too severe in a period of economic downturn. High interest rates, slow economic growth, a loss of revenue and pressure on public spending intensified the fiscal crisis of the state. Britain's stay in the ERM was short-lived.

The single currency

The ERM was a necessary precursor to the drive towards full-scale monetary union. The single currency, the Euro, will in effect be a continuation of the German mark, which requires a Europe-wide basis in order to become an international currency capable of competing with the dollar. This is why German capital is so keen on a strict interpretation of the harsh convergence criteria. Through this, weaker European capitals will be subordinated to Germany's economic policies. In practice, this has been going on for a long time within the ERM, where all the member governments cowered in fear of the Bundesbank's interest rates policies.

With the insistence on price stability, the weaker economies lose important levers by which they can make themselves more 'competitive'. Instead, they will have to increase the overall level of surplus value by attacking labour more directly. The advantage of EMU is that it legitimises these attacks on labour by claiming that they are in the best interests of the European project and that this in turn creates the best conditions for economic stability.

The Growth and Stability Pact agreed at Dublin enforces the Maastricht convergence criteria for monetary union so that government spending deficits will remain tied at no more that 3 per cent of GDP long after the introduction of the single currency. Failure to achieve this will result in massive fines. Therefore, if things go wrong, the governments of the member states of the EU have an extra compulsion to attack the working class and make savage cuts in public spending.

The experience of Britain is an indication of the future Europe as other countries are forced to make severe fiscal adjustments, requiring major cuts in public spending in order to reduce their national debt and spending deficits.

The end of the post-war settlement

The TUC has claimed that monetary union will create the conditions for a sustainable programme of long-term investment and the rebuilding of domestic manufac-

turing industry so decimated under the Conservatives. It argues that monetary union will provide protection against the uncertainties of currency speculations and provide the conditions for low inflation.

This is combined with the oft-repeated nonsense that the EU will extend workers' democratic and social rights, pointing to the Social Chapter as the main example. However, Blair has made it clear that whilst he has signed the Social Chapter, he will not necessarily implement its meagre provisions, which are subject to 'national obligations'.

Rather, as we have attempted to argue, the lack of both inflation and exchange rate policies, combined with the criteria for a hard currency, means that labour will be attacked more vigorously than ever before. Monetary constraints will have a direct impact on wages and employment and on levels of public spending.

Attacks on the working class are an integral part of the EU project and the need for a 'hard' currency. This involves the casualisation of the workforce, attacks on the right to organise, on labour costs, and on welfare and social security, the liberalisation of markets, and the privatisation of utilities and public services. The kind of attacks on the working class which occurred in Britain during the 1980s are the model for the rest of Europe. Taken as a whole, the development of the EU as a single market with a single currency, a central bank and Europe-wide political bodies will represent the end of the 1945 settlement and the important gains made by the working class in the post-war period.

However, the fact that a period of social reforms and class compromise is coming to an end does not bother the reformists in the leadership of the labour movement. Just as they were ready to act in the interests of capital and the state by accepting limited reforms during the post-war period, so now they are prepared to act in an even more servile manner, abandoning even the most basic demands in the face of a new capitalist onslaught.

Regional inequalities

EMU will intensify the problems suffered by less productive capital and will further aggravate uneven development across Europe. This will leave areas of advanced production and areas of poverty and degeneration. One effect will be to cause migration from the areas hit hardest, but because this goes beyond national boundaries there will be many barriers to movement, leaving whole areas devastated by economic hardship.

The arguments from nationalist parties like Plaid Cymru that the European Union will benefit poorer regions like Wales are just as much a nonsense as the pro-EU talk of the union bosses. The EU project will intensify regional inequalities and further strengthen the hand of strong capitals over weak. And as the EU seeks to extend its influence into the economies of eastern Europe, even the token development grants received by these regions will begin to dry up.

The EU will further the concentration of advanced production and accelerated accumulation in specific regions, and the decline of others, with the polarisation of inequalities between areas. This will affect the bourgeoisies of different countries in different ways and will lead to specific social and political problems requiring a resolution at the level of the national state.

There is no doubt that the EU is creating new pressures and weakening the economic position of national governments. However, there is no single EU state body which will take over national-state functions. The EU depends on the notion of subsidiarity so that the implementation of EU decisions must be taken by individual nation states. Rather than making nation states redundant, the EU strongly depends on them for implementing policy.

Europe and resistance

We should be clear, therefore, that the basis for EMU is a wholesale attack on the working class and the gains that it has made in areas like welfare provision, pay and conditions, social benefits and so on. We cannot therefore remain neutral on the question of EMU. Its whole basis lies in a renewed attack on the working class.

Despite the establishment of a European Parliament monitoring committee supposedly overseeing its activities, the European Central Bank will have unchallengable powers. With these it will push through deflationary, monetarist policies which will hit wages, employment and public spending, creating a more mobile, cheap labour force which in Britain, unfortunately, is all too familiar.

The convergence criteria for monetary union require sharp attacks on labour in order to create a hard currency based on the stability of the mark and the more advanced German capital. These attacks will not end with the currency's creation. The point of the Euro project is that the attacks on labour should be maintained in order to sustain the Euro's edge over rival currencies like the dollar.

However, the convergence criteria for EMU have not been successfully followed and as a result, with 11 countries entering in the first wave, the currency will be considerably 'softer' than intended. Part of the reason for this lies in the actions of labour itself, with workers across Europe protesting in defence of jobs and services and against the effects of the convergence criteria. The loosening of the interpretation of the convergence criteria was partly the result of this pressure, particularly in France where Jospin's pro-EU government was elected on the back of a mass wave of anti-Maastricht strikes and demonstrations. This situation is a good illustration of what underlies the EU project – the old antagonism between capital and labour. And in opposing the Euro and organising against it, we help weaken the power of capital, and strengthen the power of labour. **WA**

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1. These arguments are put forward in an excellent article by Guglielmo Carchedi, 'The EMU, Monetary Crises, and the Single European Currency', in *Capital & Class*, No.63, 1997.
2. Ibid., p.98.
3. See Werner Bonefeld and Peter Burnham, 'Britain and the Politics of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism', in *Capital & Class*, No.60, 1996

Cardiff EU Summit

For a workers' Europe not a bosses' Europe!

by Philip Marchant

The launch of the single currency on January 1, 1999, will be a major step towards the creation of a united capitalist Europe. It will be a Europe of the bosses, the bankers, and the multi-national corporations; a Europe of mass unemployment, poverty and racism, in which workers' rights are systematically removed in the interests of making profit.

We are not opposed to a united capitalist Europe because it will erode 'national sovereignty'. We are for the sovereignty of the working class, on an international plane. We do not stand behind our 'own' ruling class against the ruling classes of the other EU states. Our opposition stems from the fact that the bosses' Europe is being built to compete with the United States and Japan in exploiting the world's peoples and resources, and that in order to succeed, it must rationalise production on a Europe-wide basis, slash spending on social provision, and claw back every gain made by the working class since the Second World War.

The convergence criteria agreed at Maastricht in 1992 to prepare for the introduction of the single currency have already stepped up this process, but the real onslaught will come later. With the introduction of the Euro, the last significant barrier to the creation of a single market in the EU will have disappeared. For multi-national companies, there will no longer be any advantage to maintaining plants in several European countries. Previous uncertainties about exchange rate fluctuations will no longer be relevant. As long as communications are good, it will be possible to concentrate production in fewer locations.

The picture is of whole regions, possibly whole countries, being turned into economic deserts, forcing huge numbers of workers to migrate in search of work, or stay at home and starve. The most obvious example of a union of different capitalist 'states' is the USA, which has a very high rate of workers re-locating from state to state in search of work. But workers who decide to move to the more economically successful parts of the EU will not enjoy the advantages of a common language and will be forced into the lowest paid menial work, or remain unemployed. There is a real prospect that the European cities of the future will be ringed with shanty towns where refugees from the most blighted areas will scrape a living doing odd jobs.

The labour movement and European union

Although Britain is not joining the single currency in the first wave, the Blair government is committed to the project and is making all the necessary preparations. Gordon Brown's first significant act as Chancellor was to hand over control of interest rates to the Bank of England, as required by the convergence criteria. In the Euro area, there will be a uniform interest rate determined by the European Central Bank.

The TUC is aggressively pro-EU and is pushing for early entry into the single currency on the grounds that British industry and business will suffer otherwise, and jobs will be lost. The same view is held by most trade union leaders.

Many of those in the labour movement who oppose the single currency and European unity do so from a narrow, nationalist standpoint. Their main argument is that the transfer of legislative powers to EU institutions undermines British democracy, and that workers stand more chance of defending themselves against governments in Westminster than bureaucrats in Brussels. Apart from revealing a touching faith in the 'mother of parliaments', this completely ignores the seismic shifts in global economics and politics that have taken place over the last 20 years, and the impact these have had in Britain. Westminster has not exactly proved a reliable safeguard against the wholesale destruction of jobs, the erosion of conditions, the shackling of the unions, privatisation, deregulation, the casualisation of the workforce, or the attacks on the health, education and welfare services.

We oppose the centralisation of control over the European economy because that is the particular form that the deepening of the attacks on the working class is taking at this time. We do not have any illusions in British democracy, or the ability of the British ruling class to resolve its problems outside the EU. But even if it stayed out, the British ruling class would have to continue stripping the working class of the gains made in the post-war period, simply because it has to increase the exploitation of labour in order to obtain more surplus value.

What is required is a struggle that runs counter to the norms of 'democracy' – mass mobilisations of workers seeking to impose their will on the European governments. This is generally the way in which democratic rights were won, and it will be the way in which they are defended.

Internationalism

To be an internationalist does not mean being neutral on the question of the capitalist unification of Europe for fear of being thought chauvinist. In Britain, it is often – paradoxically – the more advanced sections of workers who are in favour of closer ties with Europe. Partly, of course, this is because of the lead given by the Labour government and the trade unions. But it is also because the labour movement suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Tories in the 1980s and many of the gains of the working class currently being fought over in mainland Europe have already disappeared. Unification, therefore, is not perceived as an immediate danger

to jobs and the welfare state in the way that it is in, say, France. Indeed, it may appear to have its positive aspects – ease of travel, greater cultural diversity, the breaking down of barriers between nations, peaceful co-existence with neighbouring states, and so on.

But socialists should not confuse the 'Europeanisation' of Britain with a move towards internationalism. The EU envisaged by the capitalists is just nationalism writ large, as the Schengen agreement and the attempt to construct a 'fortress Europe' demonstrate. The European ruling classes have been forced to find common cause in order to survive, but while Schengen removes all customs controls between the signatory nations, it immeasurably strengthens the external borders and internal policing. A united Europe will not overcome the nation state, it will merely extend it – a difficult enough task, but not an impossible one. So while we are taught to treat the citizens of the other EU countries as equals, anyone outside the EU is a suitable target for xenophobia – and woe betide them if they enter illegally.

We must be for the building of genuine internationalism – practical support for every struggle of the working class around the world; the smashing of all immigration and nationality laws, the welcoming of all asylum-seekers, and the granting of equal status and full rights to all immigrants and 'guest workers' in the EU; opposition to Britain's control over the north of Ireland, the Malvinas, Gibraltar, etc, and to intervention by UN/Nato forces in the former Yugoslavia, the Gulf, or elsewhere; support for the self-determination of all oppressed peoples and their right to form their own state if they wish; the cancellation of all debts to the IMF and the banks owed by the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and eastern Europe, and an end to 'structural re-adjustment' and other IMF-dictated austerity measures.

For a workers' Europe, not a bosses' Europe!

The past gains of the working class cannot be defended by seeking alliances based on the lowest common denominator. In confining their opposition to the EU to a defence of British sovereignty and democracy, the Labour and trade union lefts, and the fragments of Stalinism, are perilously close to the position of the Tory right wing and the most backward elements in society. A defeat of the single Europe project which leant on these forces would be a hollow victory, since it would be the precursor of a renewed onslaught on the working class.

This danger can only be offset by building a workers' opposition to European unity, the starting point of which is the succession of strikes and demonstrations that has taken place throughout Europe aimed against the implementation of the Maastricht convergence criteria. Socialists must fight to broaden these struggles wherever they break out, and for them to be controlled by committees of rank-and-file workers. The leaders of the trade unions and the traditional workers' parties must be put on the spot by demanding that they carry out a fight to defend workers' interests. Where struggles are not yet taking place, socialists must campaign in the organisations of the working class for an understanding of the real nature of the single Europe project. This must be conducted in sharp opposition to the policies of the leadership, both the section which openly agrees with closer integration and that which hides its refusal to fight behind slogans designed to appeal to all classes in society. Wherever possible, they must seek to build co-operation between European workers at a rank-and-file level.

The call 'for a workers' Europe, not a bosses' Europe' will strike a chord with those engaged in battles to defend their jobs, wages, conditions and welfare benefits against the ravages of the free market and the single currency criteria. As part of a series of demands, it can also help provide the link to the next stage of the struggle.

- No to the single currency!
- No to the Maastricht convergence criteria!
- Fight for the defence of jobs, services, benefits and workers' rights!
- No to the Schengen agreement and a 'fortress' Europe!
- Repeal the immigration and nationality laws!
- Equal status and full rights for all immigrant workers and asylum-seekers!
- Stop the deportations!
- For a workers' Europe, not a bosses' Europe!

WA

Archive – Black liberation and the Fourth Congress of the Comintern

Claude McKay and the Russian Revolution

by Richard Price

The poet and novelist Claude McKay (1891-1948) was born in Jamaica, leaving for the United States in 1912, where he would become a central figure in the Harlem renaissance. As a struggling writer supporting himself by working on the railroad he was patronised by various white radicals as an exotic 'Negro poet'. Between 1919 and 1921, McKay lived in Britain and was associated with Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation. On his return to the United States, Max Eastman, who would become one of Trotsky's first supporters outside Russia, and his sister Crystal, the pioneering feminist and socialist, recognised him as a writer of great promise, and he became an associate editor of Eastman's journal *The Liberator*, which supported the Russian Revolution enthusiastically. He came into contact with a spectrum of radicals and revolutionaries, including Sen Katayama, the Japanese socialist, and John Reed, who wanted him to go to Russia in 1920. But it wasn't until 1922, shortly before the fourth congress of the Comintern, that he travelled to Russia via Britain. His experiences during the year he spent in Russia form the central portion of his autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*, first published in 1937.

McKay attended and spoke at the congress, along with the black communist Otto Huiswoud, a delegate of the American party who originated from Dutch Guiana. Oddly, McKay claimed in his book to have turned down a request from Zinoviev to speak but the official contemporary record does indeed have McKay addressing the congress, and includes some pungent comments directed at the early American communists: 'In relations with American comrades, I have found evidence of prejudice on various occasions when white and Negro comrades get together. The greatest difficulty that the Communists in America have to overcome is that they must first free themselves from their attitude towards the Negroes before they can succeed in reaching the Negroes with any kind of radical propaganda.'

This is not surprising. The various groups which came together to form the Workers Party of America in December 1921 sprang mainly from the left wing of the Socialist Party milieu. The pre-war Socialist Party was an ideologically incoherent broad church. Open racists advocating restrictions on 'yellow' and black labour co-existed with those like Eugene Debs who supported, however woodenly, racial equality. Although formally committed to equality, the various revolutionary groups which existed between 1919 and 1921 conducted no special work or advanced any particular demands among black workers. Like Debs before them, they saw the 'Negro question' as simply one social question among many, to be solved by the socialist revolution. A layer of black radicals were won to the revolutionary movement in 1921 through the conduit of the African Black Brotherhood (ABB), and a recent collection of James P. Cannon's writings from the 1920s notes that McKay 'played a role bringing the Harlem ABBers into the orbit of the American Communists'. However, serious consideration of the political basis on which revolutionary work

Continued next page

Trotsky and Black Americans – an interview from 1923

Extract from *A Long Way From Home* by Claude McKay

I tried to reach some of the other leaders who I had not yet met. One day as I was passing through the grounds of the Kremlin with Andreyev, one of the young officials of the Foreign Office pointed out to me a strikingly big man wearing high black boots. That, he said, was Stalin, who was chairman of the Committee on National Minorities. It was the first time I heard the name of Stalin, and the information was extremely important. I asked Andreyev if I could meet Stalin. Andreyev said that that was difficult, for Stalin was one of the big Bolsheviks and it was not easy to meet him. But he promised to approach Karakhan about it. Perhaps Andreyev was tardy or unsuccessful in his *démarche*; at any rate I heard no more of it, and my request vanished from my thoughts when I came in contact with the magnetic personality of Trotsky.

Trotsky, although apparently so formidable a character, was, with Bukharin, the most approachable of the big Bolsheviks. I was told that any message sent to Trotsky would be certain to receive his personal attention. So I sent in a request to meet the Commissar of War. In a couple of days I got an answer making an appointment and saying that an aide would call to convey me to the Commissary of War.

Exactly at the appointed hour the following day, as I descended the stairs of the hotel, an official automobile drove up with a military aide and I was escorted to the war department. I passed through a guard of Red sentries and was ushered immediately into Trotsky's office. Trotsky was wearing a commander's uniform and he appeared very handsome, genial and gracious sitting at his desk. He said he was learning English and would try to talk to me in that language.

Trotsky asked me some straight and sharp questions about American Negroes, their group organisations, their political position, their schooling, their religion, their grievances and social aspirations and, finally, what kind of sentiment existed between American and African Negroes. I replied with the best knowledge and information at my command. Then Trotsky expressed his own opinion about Negroes, which was more intelligent than that of any of the other Russian leaders. He did not, like Steklov, the editor of *Izvestia*, imagine Negroes as a great army for cannon fodder. And unlike Radek, he was not quick to make deductions about the causes of white prejudice against black. Indeed, he made no conclusions at all, and, happily, expressed no mawkish sentimentality about black-and-white brotherhood. What he said was very practical and might sound

Continued on page 22

Archive – Black liberation and the Fourth Congress of the Comintern

McKay and the Russian Revolution

Continued from previous page

should be carried out among black workers largely took place as a result of the *Theses on the Negro Question* passed by the Comintern's fourth congress. Its conclusions are reprinted below. The projected international black congress never took place.

McKay is sometimes referred to as a 'special delegate' to the fourth congress, and as 'the representative of revolutionary Negroes'. His memoirs make it clear that he was far from happy with the idea of 'representing' black Americans. Although he was greeted in Russia with a great deal of genuine warmth, he was also conscious of being used as a propaganda symbol instead of having his views taken seriously. He had not joined - and did not join - the Communist Party, regarding himself too much of a poet to be a practical politician. There were also political differences with the American delegates. He regarded the obsession of some American Communist leaders with permanent illegality as romantic nonsense, and was only impressed by James P. Cannon - another future Trotskyist - who argued in favour of a legal party. His reminiscences also include unflattering portraits of the British leaders Arthur McManus and William Gallacher.

After the congress, McKay sought out a number of the Russian leaders. Lenin was too ill to see him, and McKay encountered social Darwinian theories masquerading as Marxism from some that he was able to meet. Steklov, the editor of *Izvestia*, for instance, remarked to him that 'he was interested in Negroes being won to the cause of Communism because they were a young and fresh people and ought to make splendid soldiers'. But of the Russians he met, McKay found Trotsky's views the most perceptive – refreshingly practical and free of racial stereotyping. His account of their discussion has the solid ring of truth to it. Trotsky's reply to McKay's questions, which McKay no longer had in his possession when he looked back 15 years later, is included below. Although Trotsky's views are largely consistent with those he set out in discussions with the American Trotskyists in the 1930s, they lack the dimension of 'national self-determination' which the Communist Party took up after 1928 and which the American Trotskyists also partially adopted. This presumably accounts for why Pathfinder Press – keen to portray Trotsky as endorsing black nationalism – saw fit only to include a part of Trotsky's already short response in the slim volume, *Leon Trotsky On Black Nationalism and Self Determination.*

On the other hand, while leftists who equate black nationalism with the nationalism of the white oppressor may try to seek support in Trotsky's warnings against 'Negro chauvinism', Trotsky's remarks must be taken in the context of the wealth of other instances in which he draws a clear distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and the oppressor.

Acting as a catalyst in directing the work of the early Communist movement towards black workers would appear to have been Claude McKay's lasting political contribution. He was never assimilated into the revolutionary movement and later in life drifted to the right, rejoining the Catholic Church in the 1930s and dying in relative obscurity in 1948.

Indispensable guides in the study of the formative years of American Communism are Theodore Draper's two volumes, *The Roots of American Communism* (Elephant, 1989) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (Vintage, 1986), and *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches*, 1920-1928 (Prometheus, 1992). The implications of the turn made after the sixth congress of the Communist International in 1928 towards 'black republics' in the southern United States and South Africa have been the subject of several articles and documents in the journal *Searchlight South Africa.* **WA**

Trotsky and Black Americans – an interview from 1923

Letter to Claude McKay from Leon Trotsky

Dear Comrade McKay,

1. What practical steps are to be taken to prevent France from employing Negro troops on the European continent? - this is your first question.

The Negroes themselves must offer resistance against being so employed. Their eyes must be opened, so that they realise that when they help French imperialism to subjugate Europe, they are helping to subjugate themselves, in that they are supporting the domination of French capitalism in the African and other colonies.

The working class of Europe, and particularly of France and Germany, must realise that their own most vital interests are involved in this work of enlightening coloured peoples. The day of general resolutions on the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples, on the equality of all human beings regardless of colour, is over. The time has come for direct and practical action. Every ten Negroes who gather around the flag of revolution, and unite to form a group for practical work among the Negroes, are worth a hundred times more than dozens of the resolutions establishing principles, so generously passed by the Second International. A Communist Party confining itself to mere platonic resolutions in this matter, without exerting its utmost energies towards winning the largest possible number of enlightened Negroes for its ideas, within the shortest possible time, would not be worthy of the name of Communist Party.

2. There is no doubt whatever that the use of coloured troops for imperialist war, and at the present time for the occupation of German territory, is a well thought out and carefully executed attempt of European capitalism, especially of French and English capitalism, to raise armed forces outside of Europe, so that capitalism may have mobilised, armed and disciplined African or Asian troops at its disposal, against the revolutionary masses of Europe. In this way the question of the use of colonial reserves for imperialist armies is closely related to the question of European revolution, that is, to the fate of the European working class.

3. There is no doubt whatever that the employment of the economically and culturally backward colonial masses for the world conflicts of imperialism, and still more in the class conflicts of Europe. is an exceedingly risky experiment, from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie itself. The Negroes, and indeed the natives of all the colonies, retain their conservatism and mental rigidity only insofar as they continue to live under their accustomed

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Archive – Black liberation and the Fourth Congress of the Comintern

A Long Way From Home

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reformist in the ears of radical American Negroes.

Trotsky said in effect that the Negro people constituted a backward group, socially, politically and economically, in modern civilisation. I remember distinctly that he used the word 'backward'. And he stressed the point that Negroes should be educated, should receive not merely academic education, but a broad spreading-out education in all phases of modern industrial life to lift themselves up as a group to a level of equality with the whites. I remember again that he used the word 'lift' or 'uplift.' And he urged that Negroes should be educated about the labour movement. Finally, he departed and proposed the training of a group of Negroes as officers in the Red Army.

Before I left, Trotsky asked me to make a summary of my ideas, in writing, for him. This I did, and he wrote out a commentary on it and published both either in *Izvestia* or in *Pravda*. Unfortunately I lost the original article and its English translation among other effects somewhere in France, but the gist of it all is given above. ■

The Comintern programme for Black liberation

i) The Fourth Congress considers it essential to support all forms of the Negro movement which aim either to undermine or weaken capitalism and imperialism or to prevent their further expansion.

ii) The Communist International will fight for the racial equality of Negroes and whites, for equal wages and equal social and political rights.

iii) The Communist International will do all it can to force the trade unions to admit Negro workers wherever admittance is legal, and will insist on a special campaign to achieve this end. If this proves unsuccessful, it will organise Negroes into their own unions and then make special use of the united front tactic to force the general unions to admit them.

iv) The Communist International will immediately take steps to convene an international Negro conference or congress in Moscow.

(From *Theses on the Negro question*, November 30, 1922)

Letter to McKay from Trotsky

Continued from previous page

economic conditions. But when the hand of capital, or even sooner, the hand of militarism, tears them mechanically from their customary environment, and forces them to stake their lives for the sake of new and complicated questions and conflicts (conflicts between the bourgeoisie of different nations, conflicts between the classes of one and the same nation), then their spiritual conservatism gives way abruptly, and revolutionary ideas find rapid access to a consciousness thrown off its balance.

4. Therefore it is of the utmost importance, today, immediately, to have a number of enlightened, young, self-sacrificing Negroes, however small their number, filled with enthusiasm for the raising of the material and moral level of the great mass of Negroes, and at the same time mentally capable of grasping the identity of interests and destiny of the Negro masses, with those of the masses of the whole world, and in the first place with the destiny of the European working class.

The education of Negro propagandists is an exceedingly urgent and important revolutionary task at the present juncture.

5. In North America the matter is further complicated by the abominable obtuseness and caste presumption of the privileged upper strata of the working class itself, who refuse to recognise fellow workers and fighting comrades in the Negroes. Gompers' policy is founded on the exploitation of such despicable prejudices, and is at the present time the most effective guarantee for the successful subjugation of white and coloured workers alike. The fight against this policy must be taken up from different sides, and conducted on various lines. One of the most important branches of this conflict consists in enlightening the proletarian consciousness by awakening the feeling of human dignity, and of revolutionary protest, among the Negro slaves of American capitalism. As stated above, this work can only be carried out by self-sacrificing and politically educated revolutionary Negroes.

Needless to say, the work is not to be carried on in a spirit of Negro chauvinism, which would then merely form a counterpart of white chauvinism, but in a spirit of solidarity of all the exploited without consideration of colour.

What forms of organisation are most suitable for the movement among the American Negroes, it is difficult for me to say, as I am insufficiently informed regarding the concrete conditions and possibilities. But the forms of organisation will be found, as soon as there is sufficient will to action.

With Communist greetings,

L. Trotsky

(First published in English, March 13, 1923) ■

1968 revisited

Thirty years on, *Revolutionary History* editor **Al Richardson**, then a member of the International Marxist Group, recalls his part in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and his visit to Paris during the revolutionary events of May 1968

By 1968, I been in the Trotskyist movement for little more than a year. I knew very little about Marxism. I had held a Communist Party card for only a week after leaving university, but that was because I had already become convinced by the Trotskyist case in general, but had been unable to make any contact with the Trotskyist movement in London when I first arrived here from Exeter.

I had been introduced to Trotskyist ideas whilst still doing my research at Hull University. A fellow research student, an International Socialism (now SWP) activist named George Box, had sold me a copy of Tony Cliff's newly published pamphlet on Rosa Luxemburg, and it had whetted my appetite to find out a bit more about this remarkable Trotsky character. So I went to the university library and devoured the three volumes of Deutscher's trilogy. The picture of the exploitation of the lower classes revealed by Marxism seemed to explain what I was then engaged in studying about the lives of the common people in the eastern end of the Roman Empire in the early centuries AD. The International Socialists were then an entrist group in the Labour Party, and got me involved in canvassing for Kevin McNamara in the North Hull by-election that was to be the first indication of the return of the party to power under Wilson in 1964 after so many years in the wilderness. It was also my first acquaintance with dissatisfaction with the party's political moderation, for a splinter group called, I think, the Radical Alliance, put up a journalist as a candidate to split the Labour vote. Fortunately, it didn't work. I also had my first taste of the demagogy of George Brown, who came up to address a public meeting in Beverley Road Baths, and had to be carted off after over-indulging himself in the Gardener's Arms at the end of the meeting.

By this time, I had already been put on my guard against Stalinism, and the IS got me to join the local folk club down in the old town in Hull to vote against the Young Communist League taking it over. The resident group there, the Watersons, pioneered the return to traditional unaccompanied singing, and were already on their way to fame. This wasn't much of an introduction to Marxism or to political activism, but my evolution must have been fairly typical of the time.

Some months after coming to London, being so brassed off with academe, I did a variety of low-paid and pretty arduous jobs – in a bakery, on a salvage gang, and in a steam laundry. None of them left me with much after paying the rent, so I drifted into supply teaching. By pure coincidence the first school I was sent to was Highbury Grove, then presided over by the notorious Rhodes Boyson. He turned out to be less than helpful with the disciplinary difficulties of a first time teacher, but in his staff room I encountered two extraordinary characters. One was an old Russian émigré, who, seeing me reading Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, described how as a young man in St Petersburg he had heard Lenin, Trotsky and Kerensky speak. Another was a highly capable Trotskyist activist, Mark Jenkins, who was later to be expelled from the Socialist Labour League and to set up the Blick-Jenkins group, before writing his important study of Bevanism. He persuaded me to go along to the meetings of the *Keep Left* Young Socialists in Lambeth, where I then lived. They met upstairs in a pub at the western end of Lambeth Walk, and I must have been with them for about six months.

I was delighted to encounter again an organisation that claimed to be Trotskyist, but the atmosphere there seemed to be strangely different from that among the IS people I had known at university. True, they sold a lot more of Trotsky's works, and I devoured them avidly. But they didn't seem to do anything in the broader labour movement. All their activities revolved around their own scenarios, which were set events prearranged from above and spaced out at quarterly intervals around the calendar. Branch meetings were dull rituals, interspersed with the occasional star speaker who seemed to spend all his time denouncing individuals or groups of whom I had never heard. One day-school I attended spent an entire afternoon exhorting us to defend the USSR in the event of a war, and condemning others who might refuse to do so. I became quite puzzled when I was told that any pacifists who were sent to prison for refusing to fight should also be denounced. And it took me some time to find out just who was this Pablo fellow who they all seemed to object to so much.

By this time I had read all the Trotsky works they had on their bookstalls, and desperately wanted more. The only clue I had of where to get them was a stamp on the back of a pamphlet giving the address of the Pioneer Bookshop in Toynbee Street, near Whitechapel. After a few visits there Alan Harris or Ernie Tate introduced me to the International Marxist Group, which had a far more congenial atmosphere, carried on much more interesting discussions, and was doing things in the wider movement as well.

The London branch of the IMG, at this time little more than 20-strong, was in a halfway position between its former labour movement activity and its new devotion to campaigning against the Vietnam war. On the one hand, we were still putting out *The Week*, which we used to collate at night around a huge table in the office, and Pat Jordan and Charlie Van Gelderen used to give regular reports of their activities as Labour Party councillors. They made a point of building up and intervening in the Institute of Workers' Control, which was playing a very positive role at this time in the trade unions under the direction of Ken Coates, whose conference I attended as a delegate under a pseudonym. They had some impressive youth around them, such as the Venesses and Frank Hansen, who had just carried out a successful entry job on the West Middlesex area [illegible]

YCL and had collapsed the whole district. I was less impressed with the Canadians, Jess and Ernie Tate, who had his famous run-in with Healy's heavies whilst selling *Healy Reconstructs the Fourth International* outside one of their meetings. From my recollection of the atmosphere inside the Healy group, I can't say that his reception surprised me, though Tate himself had more than his own share of sectarian dogmatism and arrogance.

The growth of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign

Without realising it, I was plunged into the anti-Vietnam war movement. Myself and Ken Jones set up Lambeth Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, which co-ordinated the South West London ad-hoc committee and which grew to be one of the largest in London. At the height of the Vietnam agitation it was regularly attended by 80-odd people, including Moscow-line Stalinists, Maoists, anarchists and Trotskyists of various varieties. At one point we even pulled in *Militant*. We marched as a distinct contingent on the national demonstrations and even had our own doctor in attendance. But even we were surprised when up to 80,000 people turned out for one of our twice-yearly marches to Grosvenor Square.

To begin with, the VSC was so small that it had to attach itself to the rear of the processions of the Stalinist-dominated Committee for Peace in Vietnam, but we soon left their front organisation high and dry and in the end they had to come along to ours. Even more comical was the reaction of the Healyites, which was to give out a leaflet on one of the monster demonstrations entitled *Why the SLL Is Not Marching*. So whilst the IMG was still quite small, it had a considerable effect. Although the Communist Party continued to hold on to its enviable industrial apparatus, it lost its youth and was never able to regain them. It had only just turned into the VSC, where no doubt it expected to be able to take over as it had so often done before with such things as CND and the Movement for Colonial Freedom. But the influence its numbers could have given it was immediately nullified by the Russian intervention against the Prague Spring, which horrified the majority of the supporters of the Vietnam movement. Its long decline from the split at the time of the Hungarian Revolution into the incoherent Stalinist sects we see now was massively accelerated, for a left organisation that has no youth has no future.

For the first time the VSC began to attract to the revolutionary movement prominent personalities not previously drawn to left-wing politics, particularly in the media. Among them were the Redgraves, Tariq Ali, and other film, theatre and cinema people. These were a dubious asset to us at the local level, especially through such stunts as wearing white bands around their heads on demonstrations, since apparently Vietnamese mourning drapes are white. This, and the activities of Hampstead VSC chasing each other down Hampstead High Street wearing silk pyjamas with lampshades on their heads shooting each other with plastic tommy guns made it a bit difficult to get a serious audience among trade unionists. Nor did the actions of Folkestone VSC branch help much, when in one night they struck a blow at bourgeois ideology by taking out the town's entire population of garden gnomes with iron bars.

The consciousness of the IMG's members took some time to adapt from our previous work in the Labour movement towards the new orientation, whose success certainly took us all by surprise. We still regarded ourselves as working-class revolutionaries, so that when Pat Jordan proposed Tariq Ali as a member the London branch of the IMG fell about the floor laughing. But the laugh was really on us, for while we did all the donkey work the media people got all the credit and set the tone for the whole of the VSC's future development, upstaging the Labour MPs and other working-class personalities who had been our first prominent supporters and turning the movement in the direction of radical chic. Both the IMG and the SLL, in spite of its non-participation, made a dead set for all these media people and soirées were held in someone's posh flat in Maida Vale where expensive booze ran like water, with Healy sending along Cliff Slaughter and others of his intellectuals to woo the quality. At one point, Tariq Ali got them to agree to ask a couple of spokesmen to go along and put the IMG's case, and the London branch elected me and Ernie Tate. But since I was already in bad odour with the leadership, I was never told the address. I later learned that Slaughter made short work of Tate, and the whole coterie shacked up with Healy. So in the end I was probably spared an even worse humiliation, for I didn't fancy my chances at defending the IMG's politics at the time against thinkers of his stature.

But we newcomers were learning fast. The mass agitation over Vietnam educated the people involved in it in an extraordinary number of ways. It taught left-wingers how to modify their normal technical jargon to win over people with all, or no, political backgrounds. We learned how to hold our own in street meetings (ours were mostly in Clapham and Tooting). With such experiences as my interview on Canadian radio we learned how to cope with the distorting techniques of the capitalist media. It taught us how much more effective we were co-operating with each other in a common aim, rather than wasting our energies in internecine conflict. We learned how to chair meetings, to carry out illegal flyposting, and to frame and produce leaflets, as well as how to deal with police infiltrators and how to marginalise Maoist nutters.

We also gained our first lessons in police surveillance. I can remember one summer working in the VSC offices that were immediately above the group's HQ in Toynbee Street while Pat Jordan was opening the mail, from which donations used quite literally to tumble out. He called me over and showed me a letter with a Tyneside address he was extracting from an envelope postmarked from somewhere in the Midlands (Birmingham, I think). He then indicated that in the pile he had not yet opened there would be a reverse example – a Tyneside-postmarked envelope containing a Midlands letter. And so there was. Of course this did not mean that the police had abandoned their more sophisticated technology of infra-red photography, etc. It merely meant that at the height of summer the normal staff were off on holiday, and some bobby had been drafted in off the beat who was unable to handle the equipment and had gone back to the old split bodkin stuff, or even to steaming open the letters.

The anti-Vietnam war movement even taught us imaginative and entertaining techniques for capturing the public eye. On one occasion our VSC branch decided to stage a Karl Marx Memorial pub crawl as a fund-raising stunt. Pete Ross, who was training to be a librarian, researched the map of north London when Marx was here and found out which boozers he would have used in his pub crawls back to his digs after working in the Reading Room of the British Museum. We sold an entrance ticket with the map of them all and a route printed on it, and each person had to drink at least half a pint in each pub. I had to drop out half way to be waiting with a stop watch at the last pub to adjudicate the winner, who was presented with the door knocker burgled from Lenin's digs in London, which had not then been demolished. This was all good fun, but even I was amazed when 200 people turned up at the starting point,

along with television crews and black marias. So our group became the only VSC branch to make a profit. We paid for our agitational literature and were even able to donate to the defence appeals of some of those who had been arrested. Apart from the leaders of our own group, who charged us with bringing Marxism into disrepute, it was admitted by all to be a great success.

It was also instructive to see the radicalising effect that large numbers joining it have upon the way a campaign develops. Once the VSC had been able to hold its first demonstrations of a few thousands on the solidarity position on its own, the British Council for Peace in Vietnam dwindled to a shell. The Stalinists spat back with a pamphlet by Betty Reid, *Diversions in the Fight for Peace*, but to no avail. Entire constituency Labour parties and union area committees affiliated to the VSC, though the Stalinists effectively blocked off the trade unions as a whole from the further spread of its influence. There was also a polarising effect. At our first battle with the police cordon in Grosvenor Square I distinctly remember a young policeman falling down between the ranks, and we demonstrators, afraid of his being trampled to death, helping him to his feet. After a few further encounters in which we watched them dragging young girl students along the pavement by their hair, all such goodwill disappeared.

There were at the same time some disquieting features about the way the VSC was run. Larger organisations that supported it, such as the International Socialists who first grew to some size at this time, could easily have taken it over from the numerically insignificant IMG. So Pat Jordan, whom Ken Coates nicknamed 'Baldilocks', preferred to operate through pseudo-affiliatory 'ad-hoc committees', where to avoid losing control at the last minute he would produce out of a hat non-existent entities such as '*International* Readers' groups'. The entire personnel of the group was in constant mobilisation to avoid the loss of a single directing vote on the leading committees. Jordan got so adroit at this that we began to call his technique 'Ad-Hockery and Baldilockery'. Little support was given to such people as Keith Veness who were trying to direct the movement into the trade unions. Cults of Che Guevara and Malcolm X (and even Michael X – Michael de Freitas!), and exclusive concentration upon student and middle-class youth finally led the IMG out of the Labour Party and on to its fantasies about 'the New Youth Vanguard' and 'Red Bases in the Universities'. It had by this time recruited the more stupid layers of the radicalised students, because anyone with the slightest acquaintance with Marxism immediately looked to the working class. The IS, which was less involved with the running of the movement, picked up the best of them since it talked about working-class activity around trade unions, tenants' associations and the like. All this development began to create unease amongst those of us in the London branch who had learned enough of Marxism to know that working-class activity alone produces socialist revolution. By an irony, I was quoted by a national newspaper at the time as 'a student supporter of the campaign' (which I was not) when I explained that somehow the movement had to link up with the workers.

Paris in May 1968

Unease turned to alarm when I went to Paris to share in the events of May 1968, where our sister organisation, the JCR, was playing such an important part. I was not the first of the group to go across – my flatmate Ken Jones had gone over a week earlier along with a pal of his, and had caused a scandal by lying drunk across the steps leading up to Pierre Frank's office. I set off hitch-hiking with a very attractive girlfriend from Northwood Hills, and our first excitement was seeing the red flag floating over the docks at (I think) Boulogne. The workers were definitely on general strike, for men had to be got off the boat in order to tie it up and land. Our excitement turned to alarm when the first car to respond to our hitch-hiking turned out to belong to the French police. I hurriedly cooked up a story that our holiday had already been arranged before this blew up, and we were on our way to Chartres to study the medieval sculpture and stained glass programme in the cathedral. I think I got as far as describing in detail the sixth or seventh stained glass window before the police decided that they had a harmless and insufferable bore on their hands and dumped us both on the outskirts of the town. A kind lorry driver took us a few miles to the west of Paris on his way south and we got to the city before nightfall.

After handing over our letters of introduction we were put up in Alain Krivine's vacant flat for the first night, since if he had come out of the Sorbonne area where he was staying the police would have picked him up immediately. We were told under no circumstances to open the door until we heard his lady's voice in the morning. Late at night there was a ferocious pounding on the door, which we refused to answer, which may either have been the French police or Krivine's people testing our loyalty. From then on we were moved around each night from one comrade's flat to another.

Until then I had only read about revolution and almost certainly understood little about it. Here its atmosphere was so immediate you could almost feel it. For months before the general strike, militants of *Voix ouvrière* had been put in hospital at weekends for trying to sell papers in working class areas of the city. Now the Stalinists, forced into a general strike, had sent the workers away from the factories instead of occupying them, and their own militants stood at the gates shaking collecting tins, still trying to prevent the revolutionaries from making contact with them. But because of all the publicity surrounding the assemblies in the Sorbonne the workers, on holiday and in their best clothes after all, were crowding into the square and coming to discuss with all the groups whose literature tables were lined up on all sides of it. All the various anarchist, Maoist and Trotskyist groups were selling out of their literature, some of it yellowing with age and dating back to the forties. And the workers were asking the most advanced political questions, such as 'What if de Gaulle gets the army to intervene?', 'Should we demand a general election?', 'What do you think the Communist Party should do?' They were even grabbing me by the arm and discussing these things with me, even though my deplorable French accent convinced them that I was a Norwegian. Outside, the police had been driven from the Latin Quarter, the ruins of the barricades still lay all over the pavements, and the students were directing the traffic. The city itself was silent, paralysed by the sheer scope of the strike, which was somehow symbolised by a massive banner draped around the Opéra proclaiming 'Musique en grève'. Meanwhile, a number of vehicles belonging to the notorious riot police brooded menacingly in the Louvre square, waiting for when the movement had spent its force.

I was staggered by the waste that the revolutionary organisations made of this golden opportunity. The Lambertists isolated themselves right from the start, for true to the traditions of the International Committee they had already organised the year into quarterly campaigns long before the crisis blew up, their next event in this case being an assembly at the Mutualité, and on the night of the barricades they had marched up to the students about to confront the police, and called upon them to abandon them and come to their meeting instead. They later

came up with the more useful slogan of setting up a central organisation of the factory strike and occupation committees, but not having played any part in triggering off the movement they were not really in a position to take advantage of it. All Krivine's group could do on the other hand was go on about university and school occupations, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam and Che Guevara playing at Robin Hood in Bolivia. Almost symbolically, at the side of their literature table was a discarded pile of greetings leaflets from the British *Militant*, vainly attempting to direct their attention to the working class. *Voix ouvrière* tried to compete with the Stalinists in a Dutch auction. To head off the embarrassing political implications of the whole affair – which was, after all, an insurrectionary movement aimed at getting rid of de Gaulle – the Stalinists were calling for a wage rise of 10 per cent. *Voix ouvrière*'s reply to this was to call for 15 per cent.

Other prominent figures had an even worse attitude. When the Stalinists were finally forced to allow a massive joint demonstration along with the students, they allowed the students to march in front while carefully cordoning off all the mass ranks of the trade unionists with their own service d'ordre behind. When asked by a journalist what he thought about being followed by all those Communists, Cohn-Bendit replied that that was the proper place for shit, behind the arse. He was talking about the French working class at the time. Not a single group raised the slogan that automatically stems from the experience of 1917, 'Tant pouvoir au parti communiste et au CGT, pour un gouvernement communiste de France!'

I can remember heatedly striding up and down at the side of the Seine debating this paralysis of the French Trotskyists, and wondering how they could have come to such a pass, with an American friend, Dave Fender. I had recently met him in Collett's bookshop in Charing Cross Road. Dave was then working in Paris attached to the American SWP's *World Outlook* magazine, as well as doing some secretarial work for Peng Shuzi. I remember arguing that the split with Pablo had been a disaster, for only deep entry over a long period in working-class parties would have enabled revolutionary organisations to put down roots to prepare for situations such as this. He, quite rightly, pointed out that in the present situation Pablo's AMR was even worse than Frank's JCR, which it blamed for not putting forward a transitional programme *for students*!

We never finished the argument, for shortly afterwards the word went round that the French police were after all the foreigners to make an example of them, in line with a campaign in the yellow press that it was all the work of outside agitators. I and the girlfriend were got out of France by Ralph Schoenmann, Bertrand Russell's secretary, who drove us over the border into Belgium in his car. This was very brave of him since he should not have been in the country in the first place, having been banned previously. Fortunately, the frontier guards were not yet back in place. Dave Fender got out some days later by the skin of his teeth.

In a year I was out of the IMG, for after this experience my stay could hardly be a happy one. First I got into trouble for duplicating and sending abroad a document by Peng Shuzi that had been suppressed by the United Secretariat. Then we managed to gather a majority of the London branch in opposition to the group's exclusive concentration on students and against the abandonment of working-class politics. Our demands were elementary, simply that members of the IMG who worked for a living should join trade unions and organise fractions within them, and those who were not eligible to do so should carry on disciplined entry work in the Labour Party. A great deal of demagogy was directed against us to the effect that we were sabotaging the Vietnam movement, and Bob Purdie was brought down from Scotland to lead the attack on us. It all became a bit of a laugh when he tried to organise his own VSC committee in West London and only five people turned up. The group's following national conference under-represented our support, which was between a quarter and a third of the membership, altered our documents so that no one could make any sense of them, closed off the discussion period ten days before the conference, and then greeted all the delegates with a document written freshly by the leadership slandering us as we walked in through the door. Then an elaborate slate voting system was attempted that would have selected only three of our weaker members to speak for us on the National Committee, while denying our leadership any say at all. So I rapidly worked out a counter-slate voting plan which, by voting for all their supporters removed all their top leadership from their own national committee, including Jordan and the Tates. Horror-struck, they then had to rerun the vote in order to reverse it. That must have been the last straw as far as they were concerned. A few months later I was accused of violating group discipline as chairman of Lambeth VSC by allowing one of the leaders of Hampstead VSC to address the meeting speaking against the group's current line in the Vietnam movement. A purge trial took place on my birthday, at the height of winter with a foot of snow on the ground, preventing my out-of-town supporters from coming in to vote it down, and I was out. Most of the rest of our people followed in disgust. Some years later, still using the same shabby methods, Pat Jordan provoked a similar disgust in the majority of his organisation, and he was out as well.

But the events of 1968 taught me an unforgettable lesson, that although the working class seemed to be better off than ever before, and class relations seemed to be so tranquil, things were not as stable as they seemed, and I still believe this to be the case. This crisis came to a head in a fortnight. As I write these words, I am overjoyed by the news that the French Trotskyists have gained nearly a million votes in the local elections. But unless revolutionaries root themselves in the institutions of the working class, they will remain impotent, as they were in 1968. **WA**

The AWL and imperialism in the Middle East

In this edited version of a contribution to an Alliance for Workers Liberty public meeting held in London on February 25 during the military build-up in the Gulf, Richard Price examines the political consequences of the AWL's view that Iraq is a 'sub-imperialist' power

The Gulf War of 1991, coming as it did directly after the fall of Stalinism, was a watershed in international politics. The Alliance for Workers Liberty (then called the Socialist Organiser Alliance) attempted to balance between the consistent anti-imperialism of small sections of the revolutionary left and the pro-imperialism of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. In doing so, its message was attuned to the prejudices of liberal public opinion in Britain – the kind of public opinion which, while it is none too keen on foreign wars, has always found an alibi in the horrors of Third World dictatorship to avoid clearly opposing its own ruling class.

The AWL's attitude to the developing crisis in the Gulf in late 1990 centred on its demand for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Not to make this call was 'to derive what we say from a negative imprint of the imperialists'. In fact, demanding the opposite of what the imperialists want, while not a wholly reliable guide, is generally more principled than calling for the same as them, albeit for different reasons.

Even though it admitted that US imperialism threatened to 'bomb Iraq back to the Stone Age', the AWL's main contribution in the run-up to the outbreak of war in January 1991 – the pamphlet *War In the Gulf – Issues for Labour* – failed to come out clearly and unequivocally in defence of Iraq. The justification for sitting on the fence came partly from the nature of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime. The AWL not only dismissed the idea that Saddam was playing 'an anti-imperialist role'; with less justice, it attacked the SWP for claiming that Iraq's actions were 'objectively anti-imperialist'. Doubling back upon itself, the AWL argued that Saddam's pan-Arab and pan-Islamic demagogy 'can set the ground alight under the feet of the invaders and of their Arab allies' – a description sounding dangerously close to 'objective anti-imperialism' – while reminding readers that 'pan-Arab nationalism is not really anti-imperialist'.

The nearest thing in the AWL pamphlet to a defence of Iraq lay buried in a paragraph entitled 'Iraq's national rights': 'We should support Iraqi self-determination and Iraqi self-defence against the American blitzkrieg' on the grounds that the war is not 'only a quarrel among thieves'. But every other argument marshalled by the AWL was put in such a way as to lead to only one conclusion – that this was indeed only a quarrel between thieves, in which workers in the West could not side with Iraq.

'Sub-imperialism'?

The underpinning of this stance was a hastily concocted position that Iraq was 'sub-imperialist'. So vague was the AWL in defining its discovery of sub-imperialism that patenting it proved to be a problem. The only definition in sight was the following: a sub-imperialist country is 'an aspirant regional imperialism, usually a client or semi-client of a fully developed imperialist state'. Sub-imperialists, it seems, are those who dream of becoming big imperialists.

Most corner shopkeepers probably 'aspire' to own large out-of-town superstores. But this doesn't tell us anything about the likelihood of corner shopkeepers realising their ambition. Just as both corner shopkeeper and superstore magnate have a common interest in the retail trade, so Iraq and its massed opponents had a common interest in capitalism. But that knowledge alone could not explain the roles of the various players, or the basis of the conflict between them.

Attempting to define a state in terms of the subjective ambitions of its rulers is not to be encouraged as a method. Did the boundless ambitions of an Idi Amin or an Emperor Bokassa make either a 'sub-imperialist'? Does it mean that there is another group of peace-loving capitalist states without economic, territorial or political designs on their neighbours? Is the world divided into the good democratic imperialist countries, the bad, undemocratic imperialist countries, and the ugly dictatorships of much of Asia, Africa and the Middle East? Isn't it reliance upon just this kind of simplistic reasoning that makes sections of the middle class so vulnerable to propaganda offensives against 'terrorist states'?

'Sub-imperialism' was a theory which was never theorised, and for good reason. Its role is not to tell us anything about the workings of world capitalism, but to politically justify sitting on the fence and avoiding taking sides with some unpleasant temporary 'allies'. This is closely connected to the AWL's conversion to the equally ill-defined and constantly evolving bureaucratic collectivism of Max Shachtman, and why so much of its politics are characterised by moral breast beating in place of Marxist theory.

AWL capitulates

The left was subjected to enormous moral pressure during the Gulf crisis and subsequent war. At the initial stages, much of it centred upon the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As if they were being put on trial, socialists were grilled to demand that they condemn Iraq. If they refused to back the UN/US coalition they were rubbished as apologists for Saddam. Anti-imperialism was put beyond the pale of normal political debate. A ferocious media unleashed horror stories like the infamous 'murder' of the babies in the incubators in Kuwait – subsequently revealed to be a brazen piece of lying propaganda. The clear implication was that anything short of demanding a full restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty amounted to a ringing politi-

cal endorsement of the butcher Saddam. And in an obscene example of 'that was then, this is now' politics, such cross-examinations were frequently conducted by the kind of people who hadn't lost any sleep when Saddam massacred Kurdish villagers only two years earlier, using Western-supplied nerve gas.

How did the left perform under such pressure? Most of it capitulated to various non-socialist forces – to pacifism, to Third Campism, to its own imperialism, or to Arab nationalism. In calling for Iraqi withdrawal the AWL did not call for self-determination for Kuwait, on the grounds that it was an 'artificial unit' – although this was hardly consistent with the group's positions on Israel, Ireland, Hong Kong, and the Falkland Malvinas islands. In each of these cases, in spite of their obviously being 'artificial' creations of imperialism, the AWL has advanced slogans of 'self-determination' for settler populations. Those who attempted to put a left spin on the demand for Iraqi withdrawal in late 1990 lacked the slightest grasp of political realities. The AWL claims that the Iraqi invasion was a blow against independent working class struggle in Kuwait – as if, following an Iraqi withdrawal, a democratic flowering of workers' self-activity in Kuwait was likely.

Sad to say, the only 'choice' in 1990-91 immediately confronting the oppressed sections of Kuwait's population was which one of two unsavoury dictatorships to be oppressed by. Any future workers' struggles would have to be directed against whichever dictatorship controlled Kuwait – the Iraqi Ba'athists or a restored Kuwaiti monarchy. 'National' rights could hardly hope to strike a chord with the 60 per cent of the population who were not Kuwaiti nationals. If struggles succeeded in breaking out in the future in Kuwait, we reasoned that they would be around the axis of the fight for democratic rights – for trade union, political and women's rights. In the mean time, the central issue facing socialists in 1991 was which balance of forces would most obstruct the imperialists in their drive to reassert control over the region. In any case, the effect of an Iraqi withdrawal in the face of the military build-up would not have been the outbreak of class struggle in Kuwait, but an immediate advance by US forces and their allies. By definition, a strengthening of US imperialism and its coalition partners could not at the same time be the catalyst leading to a progressive solution.

Like all pure democrats, the AWL was locked in an implausible set of manoeuvres to defend everyone from everyone else. It sought to defend its favoured sub-imperialism, that of Israel, along with the Kuwaitis and the Kurds, from Iraqi sub-imperialism; of course, it also sought to protect the Palestinians from the excesses of Israeli sub-imperialism, and it just about managed a mealy-mouthed defence of Iraqi sub-imperialism against big US imperialism. Thankfully, given its awesome complexity, nobody had the daunting task of applying AWL policy on the ground in the Middle East.

In order to cover for the manifest inconsistencies of its positions on imperialism, the AWL usually resorts to accusing every other group on the left of anti-Semitism and support for Third World despotism. At a previous debate between the AWL and the WIL, we were bizarrely portrayed – without quoting from anything we have written – as being uncritical admirers of Castro's Cuba. The AWL should at least read its own publications more carefully. Its main educational pamphlet on imperialism, Exporting misery: capitalism, imperialism and the 3rd world, contains the following gem: 'At first, many people thought that Castro was just going to modernise the system. But Castro and his comrades proved to be *genuine revolutionaries. They acted boldly. They smashed the old state machine and created a new one.*' (My emphasis – RP). This reads far more like a ringing endorsement of Castro than anything we have ever written!

Concentrated moral indignation

In throwing its old Trotskyism overboard, the AWL has thus far only come up with a few bits and pieces of half-baked theory to replace it with. Whereas for Lenin, politics was concentrated economics, for the AWL it is concentrated moral indignation. Relics of its former workers' statist position coexist alongside the latest word in outraged Third Camp liberalism. Imperialism has ceased to be an economic category – 'the highest stage of capitalism'. It has been reduced to a political category synonymous with 'aggression'. Consequently, the 1998 Gulf crisis is seen as a 'small scale inter-imperialist conflict'. Marxist analysis finds it hard to thrive in such an environment.

This notion of imperialism simply as military aggression on the part of a capitalist state is a step backwards to pre-Marxist theories of imperialism. In fact, in the case of Iraq, the size of the military establishment is in inverse proportion to the country's position within the world economy. Saddam's regional ambitions are not an expression of strength but of weakness. To describe the Iraqi economy, still shattered by the effects of the Gulf War and the subsequent economic blockade, as 'imperialist' is beyond belief. Conversely, the two most successful imperialist powers of the post-war world, Germany and Japan, have played almost no military role in conflicts beyond their borders.

Not surprisingly, such differences in how we understand imperialism are reflected in different analyses of the crisis of January–February this year. For Workers Action, the crisis is not merely a military stand-off over strategic control of oil resources, important as this factor is. It reflects wider problems facing imperialism in the Middle East.

What does imperialism want?

Why should US imperialism, after years of skirmishing with Iraq, suddenly up the stakes? This cannot be explained without reference to the failed Middle East peace process. Emboldened by the problems facing US diplomacy, Iraq opposed the US and British component of UN inspection teams last October. In November, the Palestinians boycotted talks. Iraq proceeded to threaten to shoot down US planes. Despite Saddam upping the anti, the United States was unable to assemble anything resembling its 1991 coalition. Of the Arab states, only Kuwait was prepared to allow air strikes to be made from its territory. The only other US bases in the region from which a major strike could have been launched are in Turkey. Other Arab states, despite giving tacit support to the US, looked warily over their shoulders at the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and instability at home.

The peace accord is in fact an accord in name only. US imperialism is balancing uneasily between its desire for the peace process to provide regional stability for imperialism and its need to preserve its historic relationship with Israel. The latter aim tended to win out in the run-up to the crisis, with the consistent appeasement of provocative acts by the Netanyahu government. However, there are limits. US policy has to go beyond picking up the tab for Israel; it needs to integrate Israel into its overall strategy for the region. This means recognising the central importance of Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, which since the Gulf War has increased oil production to cover the blockade of Iraqi oil.

The last minute deal brokered by UN secretary general Kofi Annan was not a climbdown on the part of the US, nor

were there any significant differences between Annan and the US, despite American grumblings about the 'detail' of the agreement to carry out weapons inspections at Iraq's so-called palaces. If anything, Annan seems more skilfully attuned to US interests than his predecessor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. It was Annan on his return from Baghdad who described US president Clinton and his most slavish supporter, Tony Blair, as 'the best peacekeepers'.

In this sense, in spite of all the sabre rattling, there has not been a major policy shift in relation to Iraq. The conflict was brought to a head to warn off Saddam from overstepping the mark. It was then defused to allow Saddam a dignified retreat. The agreement to allow increased oil production in return for food is a conscious sop to the regime. Imperialism has no wish to see the Ba'athist regime destabilised in such a way as could precipitate a popular insurrection; that was the clear message when US/UN forces halted at the end of the 1991 Gulf War to allow Iraq to butcher the rebellions of the Marsh Arabs in the south and the Kurds in the north. It would far prefer a palace coup in Baghdad which would keep the lid of dictatorship firmly upon the Iraqi masses but bring the regime in from the cold, just as formerly 'terrorist' Syria was brought into the fold in 1990.

A political 'get-out'

In conclusion, The AWL's position on sub-imperialism turns out not to be a theory at all, but more of a political get-out clause, unearthed and dusted off whenever US imperialism comes into conflict with some uppity Third World dictator. For us, the defence of Iraq against imperialism means the defence of the Iraqi masses, starved of food and medical supplies, not defence of the Ba'athist regime. The AWL consciously blurs the distinction between the two in order to misrepresent its opponents on the left. **WA**

Workers Fight – a disclaimer

The first issue of *Workers Fight* contains a number of confusing references in relation to Workers Action. In an article announcing a 'European Trotskyist encounter' in June, it is implied that this projected gathering has been called jointly with Workers Action and other comrades in the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Advertising another proposed conference – Trotskyism '98 – Workers Fight claims it is being organised 'along with other comrades of the LTT'. We have not been approached to sponsor or participate in either meeting.

This presumptuous method of gathering support – claiming it exists and only then proceeding to canvass for it – is matched by a curious schizophrenia surrounding the group's name. Depending upon which page you read, it is variously 'Workers Fight', 'Workers International League – Workers Fight', and 'Workers International League (minority)'. Three names for a group of three people might seem excessive at first sight. However, since we suspect that the members of this group, which split from us last November, are likely to take different political trajectories, it may turn out to be appropriate.

Differences arose within our predecessor organisation, the Workers International League, during the course of last year around the perspective for regroupment on the revolutionary left. A debate also began within the group on the nature of the period and what demands were appropriate. Into these containable differences was injected a wholly unexpected element when serious allegations were made against a member of the group, which resulted in disciplinary action being taken. Two members who had held similar positions on regroupment launched an intense factional struggle in the group and rallied to the defence of the allegedly 'victimised' member – this despite the fact that one of them had voted in favour of the disciplinary measures! The resulting strife brought the WIL to a standstill and threatened to destroy it.

This minority of three then announced that it would be forming a public faction of the group with its own publications and discipline, justifying this by claiming that the group which they had fatally undermined had become conservative and inactive. Faced with this situation, and realising that further protracted factional struggle would be even more destructive, the majority of the WIL voted to dissolve the group in order to continue life as Workers Action, and continue the politics of the WIL.

Workers Fight has no moral right to use the name WIL. In doing so its members are violating agreements made at the time of dissolution. Given these developments, readers will understand that Workers Action is less than enthusiastic at being referred to in the pages of *Workers Fight* as its 'sister paper'.

For the time being, the members of Workers Action and Workers Fight remain members of the international Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, and the respective status of the two groups will be resolved at a congress later this year. In the meantime, the question of which group is continuing the politics of the WIL and *Workers News* is increasingly clear. The public pronouncements of Workers Fight show that it is developing a perspective guided by catastrophism, not Marxism. A letter to the Welfare State Network paper, *Action*, by one 'Jamie George' – a pseudonym for one of the members of Workers Fight – predicts that the crisis in the Far East will lead to economic disaster 'far greater than that seen in 1929', as well as 'nuclear, biological and chemical war', not to mention 'Nazi-style fascism and other forms of dictatorship'. Similarly, *Workers Fight* saw the seeds of the Third World War in the Gulf crisis earlier this year: 'In time to come, historians could well point to the military build-up in the Gulf as a tentative "opening gambit" in a staggered build-up to World War Three.' If this is the basis on which the comrades propose to regroup 'left Trotskyists', then we would rather not be among their number.

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Workers Action welcomes correspondence and articles for publication

Workers Action is a revolutionary socialist journal produced by the former Workers International League majority. The WIL was dissolved in November 1997 after it became clear that political differences threatened the group with disintegration. Workers Action fights for the same political line as Workers News, the paper of the WIL, which ceased publication with the split. We hope that comrades who supported Workers News in the past will become regular readers of Workers Action