TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL

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The failed coup in the USSR and its aftermath

Yugoslavia's descent into civil war

The United Secretariat since 1980

The restoration process in Eastern Europe

Lessons of the Gulf War

The English language journal of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

Cover illustration: official and unofficial press from the Soviet coup

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The Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (USA) and Workers Power (New Zealand / Aotearoa) are sympathising sections of the LRCI.

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In this issue . . .

Progressive forces throughout the world continue to live in the shadow of three enormous events: the crushing of Iraq in the Gulf War, the pre-revolutionary situation in the USSR and the national disintegration of the Stalinist states. In this issue of *Trotskyist International*, we deal with all these subjects.

In the last issue of *Trotskyist International* we opened our article on the Soviet Union with the words: "Since mid-November 1990 Mikhail Gorbachev has sponsored a creeping coup against his own policy of *glasnost*". In mid-August he fell victim to an actual coup attempt, only to be swiftly rescued and then marginalised by the Yeltsinite camp. The swift consolidation of power by the bourgeois restorationists has destroyed effective resistance by the conservative bureaucrats. Their power, privileges and patronage are rapidly being dismantled. But the danger is that this process will see the working class as a passive bystander to an essentially bureaucratic purge of the old *nomenklatura*. In two articles here we outline the tasks of Soviet workers in the wake of the coup attempt and how they can take advantage of the continuing pre-revolutionary situation to defend their social position, rout the Stalinists and pre-empt the consolidation of a bourgeois dictatorship.

One of the most wretched consequences flowing out of the break up of the degenerate workers' states is the explosion of ethnic and national rivalries. For decades the Stalinist bureaucracy maintained their rule by enforcing national oppression. But the demise or unseating of this caste has unleashed, notably in the USSR and Yugoslavia, both progressive and reactionary forces struggling either for national self-determination or national privileges.

Revolutionaries must distinguish legitimate strivings for an end to national oppression from reactionary attempts to claim national privileges of other peoples. Providing clear and compelling answers to the small, isolated and confused forces caught up in this maelstrom is one of the key tasks of Trotskyism today. In two articles we examine the present situation in Yugoslavia and the main planks of proletarian policy.

The Baltic states were the first to confront Moscow with their claim for self-determination and independence. Our analysis of the national question in Lithuania, which we dealt with in the last issue of *Trotskyist International*, has provoked discussion with one of our fraternal organisations, the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency of the USA. We publish an exchange of letters between ourselves and the RTT over the method and tactics to be adopted in the national conflicts which may have been temporarily resolved in the Baltics but will reappear in more dramatic form in the rest of the rebellious republics.

The growing social counter-revolution in Eastern Europe is a negative weight in the scales in assessing the international balance of class forces. To prepare future victories we must trace the contours and impact of defeats, or perish. In this issue we explain the main characteristics of capitalist counter-revolution in the degenerate workers' states and discuss how far this process has developed in Hungary.

In the semi-colonial world, the Gulf War elicited both hope and despair, excitement and disillusionment. The masses who mistakenly saw Saddam Hussein as an "anti-imperialist" were cruelly disappointed by his refusal to mobilise the Arab masses against the imperialist offensive, and by his disastrous military "tactics". One of our comrades from Latin America takes up the prevalent arguments of those in the solidarity movements in the semi-colonial world who uncritically followed Hussein to defeat.

Would-be revolutionaries around the world continue to be miseducated and ultimately betrayed by centrism. We publish three polemical articles dealing with different organisations in the hope of combating this. We examine the positions of the International Trotskyist Committee with regard to a fundamental plank of their politics: the question of the "special oppression"—of women, lesbians and gay men and blacks.

In the second article we uncover the centrist method and mistakes of one of the largest international "Trotskyist" organisations, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, which recently held its 13th World Congress. Finally, we trace the political method and history of opportunist international manoeuvring of the Italian group, Voce Operaia, the main component of the Liaison Committee of Communists.

Since the last issue of this journal the LRCI has gained a section. The comrades of Poder Obrero in Bolivia applied to join, and were provisionally accepted into membership by a meeting of our International Executive Committee. We welcome them with enthusiasm and look forward to more advances for the LRCI in Latin America.

As we were producing this issue of *Trotskyist International*, we were deeply saddened to learn of the untimely death of one of the founding members of the LRCI, Dave Hughes. As the obituary makes clear Dave led our attempts to help the Soviet and East European labour movements destroy the hateful bureaucracy that ruled over them.

We have decided to launch a fund—the Dave Hughes Memorial Fund—as the most fitting tribute to Dave's life. Those who were privileged to work and struggle alongside him, those who benefited from his insights and training will want to mark Dave's passing from our ranks by contributing to this fund and thereby helping the LRCI's ideas and work become known to a larger audience in the USSR and Central Europe.

We dedicate this issue to his memory.

The failed coup in the USSR

Adopted by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 22 August 1991

The failed *coup d'état* of 19-21 August has deepened the pre-revolutionary situation in the USSR. It opens up a new phase in the history of the disintegration of the rule of the Soviet bureaucracy. As in Eastern Europe in the last quarter of 1989 it poses the question of political revolution or social counter-revolution. It is this question that the Soviet proletariat will face and must find a solution to in the coming months and years. On 19 August the clique of "hardliners" within the Council of Ministers, discovering hitherto unsuspected medical capabilities, diagnosed Mikhail Gorbachev as too sick to continue to wield the State Presidency. In his place stepped Gennadi Yanayev and behind him the real *junta*: Pugo, Yazov, Kryuchov and the uncertain prime minister Pavlov, representatives of the layer of bureaucratic conservatives in the military, heavy industry, interior ministry, KGB and armed forces.

The conservative clique held back from acting until the very last possible minute, on the eve of the signing of the new Union Treaty. This in itself indicates the relative weakness and desperation of the coup makers Their chosen battleground—the maintenance of the integrative ministries and mechanisms of the all-Union federation—holds no appeal for the masses and is not a decisive issue for important layers of the bureaucracy in the republics. The coup makers acted because they had no other choice. They had to act even if their hand was not strong. Had they waited a day longer, Gorbachev's concessions would have led to the radical dissolution of the powers and privileges of a major section of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

But behind this decision to oust Gorbachev lay months of a creeping coup, one which had been checked and frustrated by Gorbachev and by the Yeltsinite opposition both within the state apparatus and beyond. Late last year it was Gorbachev himself who, under pressure of the conservatives and the disintegrating economic and national situation, blocked with the conservatives and appointed his future jailors, Yanayev and Pavlov and boosted the powers of the rest. But this clique became disillusioned with Gorbachev's failure to use his new presidential powers to arrest the economic and political decline.

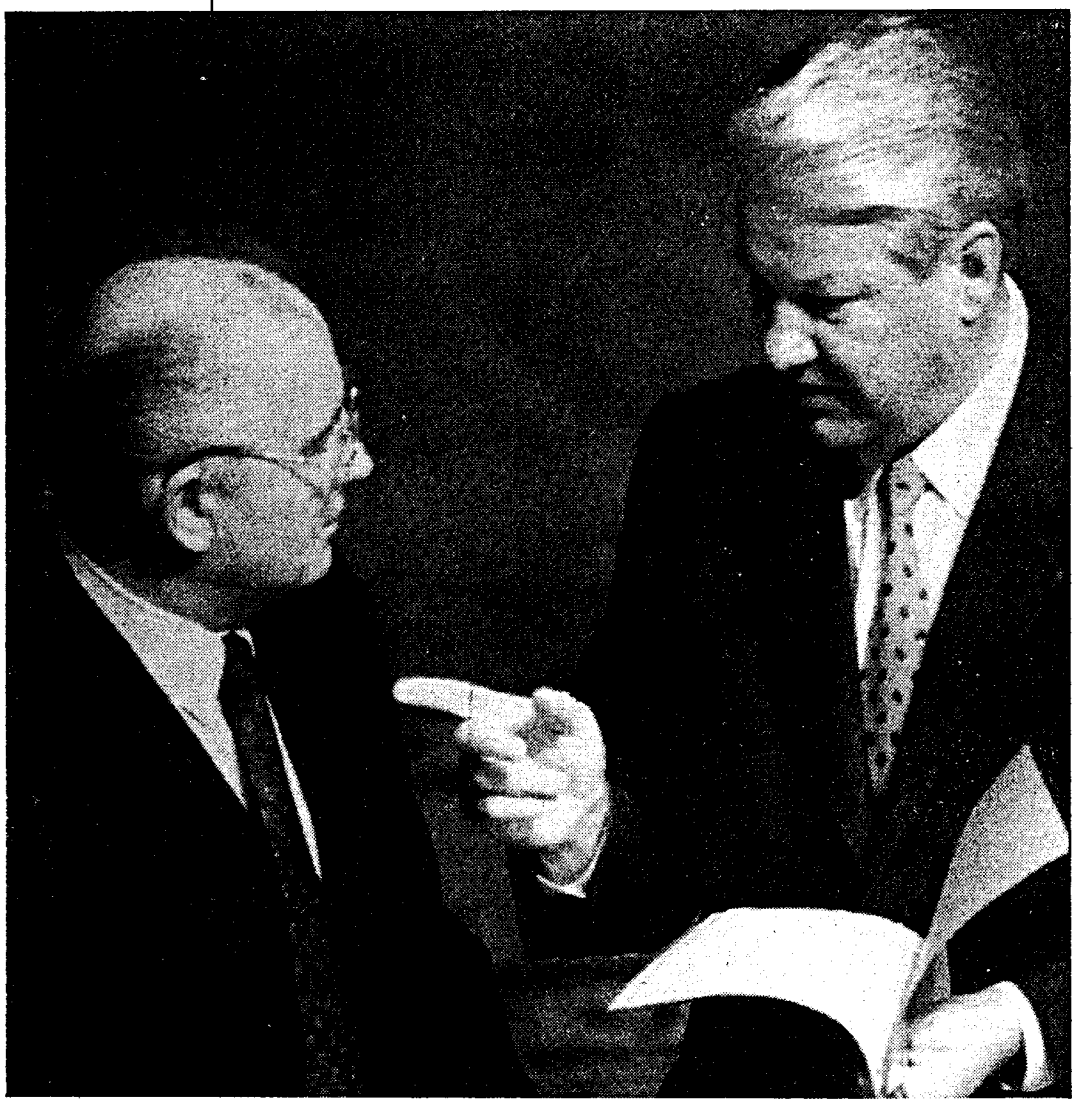
This was sharply revealed in Gorbachev's ineffectiveness in the face of the miners' strike. From mid-April Gorbachev moved back towards making major concessions to the pro-market liberals and republic leaders. In June the clique unsuccessfully tried a constitutional coup by strengthening the powers of the Council of Ministers. Another insufferable attack on the bureaucracy was delivered by Yeltsin when he banned the CPSU from organising in the factories in the Russian Republic. When in July Gorbachev returned empty handed from the G7 summit and offered to give the republics most of the powers currently invested in the centre, the erstwhile allies and appointees of Gorbachev saw the writing on the wall and tried to extend the President's holiday in the Crimea into a permanent retirement.

The State Committee's state of emergency decree *was* a reactionary attempt to clamp down upon the forces unleashed by *glasnost* in order to preserve the caste's privileges. The main orders banned political parties and strikes, proscribed opposition publications, closed down TV and radio stations; troops went onto the streets to enforce these provisions. None of decrees were undertaken to defend the post-capitalist planned property relations even if it could have led in the short term to a strengthening of the apparatus of bureaucratic control over distribution of food and essential supplies.

The members of the State Committee wanted to preserve their caste privileges and dictatorship. This might mean slowing down or even temporarily halting the process of restoration. For example, Geraschenko, the head of the state central bank, had opposed the Union Treaty on the grounds that it would make it "impossible to pursue a single monetary and credit policy"; another coup maker, Starodbtsev, in charge of state farms, feared the break up of the collectives into private holdings. But none of them dared to claim at the outset of the coup that they were defending in principle the post-capitalist property relations. Indeed, they have no strategic or principled opposition to the restoration of capitalism. Rather, they insist that they maintain their privileges in the process. In short, they wanted an authoritarian *perestroika* that would allow them to become a new ruling class in a capitalist Soviet Union.

Our tasks

It would have been wrong to have given even critical support to their actions. Our task is to get the working class to defend their post-capitalist property relations in the context of defending their democratic gains. The destruction of the democratic gains would have made it impossible to raise the consciousness of the masses to a level adequate to this task. Moreover, nothing the State Committee would have done would have halted the tempo or direction of capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe; on the contrary, the clique's actions ensured that imperialism took steps to accelerate the process of integration and provide a further ideological weapon for the restorationists against the working class of Eastern Europe. Troop withdrawals from Eastern



Europe were to continue. Finally, the coup makers rushed to assure the imperialists that all the pro-imperialist agreements undertaken by Gorbachev would be honoured.

The State Committee were emboldened to move by the widespread resentment towards Gorbachev inside the USSR, and sense that the masses are too disillusioned with his domestic failures to leap to his defense. The masses did not take up shouting Gorbachev's name on the streets of Leningrad and Moscow. The cynical decree on price freezes and wage rises was calculated to drive a wedge into the opposition between those who are sceptical about the value of the democratic rights so far obtained and those who feel they are not worth defending if food can be put on the table by the new clique.

The opposition to the state of emergency was uneven and far from generalised. Miners went on strike in protest, as did some workers in Leningrad; makeshift barricades were erected in Moscow. From the outset the coup was hesitantly and unconfidently undertaken; communications lines within the USSR and to the outside world were left intact; few arrests of key oppositional figures were made. Given the fissures that already existed within the armed forces this relatively low level of resistance was sufficient to see the coup attempt fall apart. Quite simply, neither the army nor the interior ministry troops could be relied upon to carry out a Tiananmen Square style massacre in Red Square. That this was so was due in large measure to the incremental effects of six years of *glasnost* inspired changes in the Soviet high command and officer caste. It was also due no doubt to the lessons absorbed by the army as a result of its retreat from Eastern Europe in the face of popular discontent and the unwillingness to do differently in the USSR. It also failed because the coup makers had no genuine alternative political or economic policy to Gorbachev beyond the defence of their own narrow caste interests. The events of the last week have proven that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR was not qualitively different from the bureaucracies in the East European states in terms of its willingness or ability to defend the property relations upon which it draws its privileges and power.

The manner in which the coup attempt took place illustrated the profound disarray of the CPSU. The coup makers could not get a quorum for a Central Committee meeting to depose Gorbachev as General Secretary. Gorbachev was replaced as Soviet President, not as General Secretary. Party declarations on the coup were completely absent. Just as with the Jaruselski coup in Poland in 1981 the unreliable and fragmented Stalinist party had to be bypassed by the coup makers. Power within the *nomenklatura* resides clearly within the military industrial ministries, not with the party organs. Now the coup has failed, the CPSU is revealed as no longer the principal ruling power in the USSR. If it survives it will undergo further drastic changes. Its coming Congress was already due to adopt a social democratic programme in the style of the German PDS. As a power base for Gorbachev with such a transformed programme it may survive.

In the three days of the coup attempt it was essential for all proletarian forces to have blocked with all those forces actively resisting the coup to prevent the coup makers from achieving success in their aims. It was natural and necessary to bloc with all and anyone who by deeds was prepared to resist the closure of parties (except fascist ones), publications and democratically

elected forums (e.g. republican parliaments) that the workers have expressed themselves through. As the days wore on the Russian parliament was increasingly the focus of the resistance to the coup; the mass demonstrations and the barricades was rapidly turning the parliament into the site of one side of an embryonic dual power. The strikes did not have time to spawn a network of alternative proletarian forms of organisation against the coup, and therefore also potentially against the democratic restorationists also. The ability of the pro-capitalist and nationalist Yeltsin to lead the limited resistance to the coup reveals the depth of the crisis of working class leadership. Such anti-working class forces gain a hearing in the working class due to the absence of a class conscious revolutionary leadership which would combine a struggle to destroy the bureaucracy with a defence of post-capitalist property relations. Imperialist agents have worked with the indigenous restorationists to consciously win the independent unions to their side.

But in these coup days there were strict limits to the bloc with the "democratic restorationists" and all such blocs had to be carried out within the context of no political support for Yeltsin at all. While other republic leaders appealed to imperialism for help or preached calm and sought to negotiate, Yeltsin thrust himself forward as the leader of mass resistance. He called for a general strike and openly incited the army to disaffection. It is clear why he, of all the republics' leaders, had the most to gain from the Union Treaty and most to lose at the hands of the State Committee. Yeltsin's calls—for active resistance to the coup, for a general strike against it—needed to be supported and taken up by workers' organisations, which at the same time needed to retain their political independence from the Yeltsin restorationists.

Yeltsin—the greatest danger

The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin. The greatest tragedy for the Soviet working class would be to hitch itself to the wagon of Yeltsin or the Democratic Forum. A secondary danger is to actively seek the re-establishment of the power of Gorbachev. Yeltsin is no friend of the working class. He represents all the elements in the former bureaucratic caste who have abandoned the prospect of bureaucratic parasitism on proletarian property relations in favour of becoming the new ruling class of a restored capitalist Russia.

His pro-capitalist policies spell mass unemployment and a destruction of social welfare for tens of millions of workers; he wants to open up the 120 million Soviet workers to unbridled imperialist exploitation. His actions in promoting and then ending the miners' strike of the spring show that his calls to mass action are motivated by his own narrow power struggles against a rival section of the disintegrating bureaucratic caste. In the aftermath of the failed coup Yeltsin is increasing his attempt to place the armed forces under his command. To the degree that he is successful he will deploy them in the future against the workers he has so cynically called to action.

Imperialism naturally frowned upon the coup. It feared where it may lead, how far the clampdown will lead to a retreat from the process of market reform and opening up of the USSR to imperialist penetration. But Gorbachev had already carried out most of his possible mandate; he had very nearly, if not entirely, exhausted his historic mission for them. He was a necessary detonator of the now irreversible process of reform in Eastern Europe; he was essential to the delivery of disarmament and the suicide of the Warsaw Pact. Gorbachev's stability was very important in securing the alliances for the US victory in the Gulf War and the opening phase of the new world order. But these are past conquests for the imperialists.

That is why imperialism, especially the USA, at first reacted cautiously on news of the coup. Their first response was to insist that the coup makers reassure the west they would honour their commitments and treaties. The sanctions that were announced were diplomatic courtesies to Gorbachev and a gesture of solidarity with Yeltsin, but they were not intended to inspire the isolation of the USSR's new rulers, still less re-run the Cold War. Some imperialists even voiced the opinion that a new leadership would stem the inevitable tide of economic refugees to the west as capitalism is restored in the USSR.

Only, later, when it became clear that the coup was failing, did they talk of the re-establishment of the *status quo* and even more importantly the role that Yeltsin played in rescuing Gorbachev. Indeed, new conquests for the imperialists lie in the direction of Yeltsin and the Democratic Forum. Despite their self-congratulation the imperialists are unable to guarantee a smooth and peaceful process of capitalist restoration over the next months and years. Under the leadership of Yeltsin and/or Gorbachev the transition ahead will be fraught with conflicts. The pre-revolutionary situation is far from over in the USSR.

In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup it is possible to discern only the main line of development. The events of the past week, whilst they have blocked the road to a Stalinist bureaucratic counter-revolution aimed against the political liberties of the working class, have acted as a catalyst to speed up the social counter-revolution; the cause of the democratic restorationists has been immeasurably advanced. The tempo of the demise of the *nomenklatura* has likewise been accelerated.

But it is also true that the bourgeois democratic and proletarian reform organisations will also be strengthened in the short term at least. *Glasnost* will be deepened and the working class may be awakened from its cynicism. Elections will be brought forward and become more universal as all forces seek a democratic mandate for their plans and in this way seek to dislodge the *nomenklatura* from their posts. The CPSU will fragment and a flowering and strengthening of bourgeois political forces will occur.

The future of Gorbachev is unclear. Certainly, the ground has been removed for a continuation of the pre-

vious form of Soviet Bonapartism that relied upon balancing between the camps of democratic restoration and conservative resistance. But a different kind of Gorbachev Bonapartism may emerge in the next period, one that balances between the ambitions of Yeltsin and imperialism, wherever they do not coincide. On the one side, Yeltsin seeks a further revision of the Union Treaty in the direction of more republican power and a confederation which leaves Russia with its own armed forces. But imperialism does not favour the break up of the USSR, beyond the inevitable departure of the Baltic states. They may well need Gorbachev to act as a check and balance against Yeltsin.

What is clear for revolutionaries and all those concerned with the strengthening of the newly founded organisations of the Soviet working class and of the preservation of the planned property relations is that the proletarian resistance to the coup must be deepened and broadened now into a fight against the pro-capitalist measures of Yeltsin and Gorbachev and resistance to all and any attempts to use the armed forces against working class resistance to capitalist restoration. Soviet workers must fight for:

- Out with the coup makers and their supporters at every level. For workers' tribunals in every republic to try those involved. For workers' commissions of inspection of the KGB and the army High Command
- Lift the ban on parties (except fascist ones), strikes, publications and the independent media; No coups, no constitutional dictators
- Self-determination for the republics; special armed forces and interior ministry troops out of the republics seeking independence. Recognise Estonian's declaration of independence. For soviet workers' republics in the Baltic states.
- No confidence in the help from imperialism; purge the media of bureaucrats and imperialist agents
- Release all political prisoners arrested under the state of emergency
- No political support for Gorbachev, Yeltsin or the Democratic Forum
- Down with constitutional dictators. End the Bonapartist powers of the presidencies of all republics and the Federation
- For workers' councils elected in every workplace and region of the USSR
- Elect rank and file soldiers' committees in the army. Disband immediately all special armed forces and the KGB. Open all the files of the KGB to workers' inspection.
- Against emergency plans for the establishment of the market. For a workers' emergency plan to combat the economic crisis drawn up by the workers' organisations. For working class control of the plan; for elected workers' and housewives' committees to oversee food distribution
- For proletarian political revolution to smash the dictatorship of the Stalinists and prevent the restoration of capitalism
- For a Leninist Trotskyist party in the USSR

Revolution and counter-revolution in the Soviet Union

Adopted by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 30 August 1991

The failure of the State Committee for the State of Emergency (SCSE) to carry out its coup of 19-20 August marks a turning point similar in magnitude to the 1989-90 events in Eastern Europe. Launched by the conservative core of the *nomenklatura* to halt the "malicious mockery of all the institutions of the state" the SCSE's ignominious collapse has only served to propel their arch enemies into a dominant situation within the fragments of the state power in the USSR.

The coup itself turned an eighteen month pre-revolutionary crisis into a revolutionary situation in which the ruling Stalinists lost control over their armed forces and could no longer deploy them to defend their power. The working class failed to seize the initiative and overthrow the dictatorship with its own organisation and armed power and rescue the post-capitalist property relations from their deathly grip. Within the present dual power the working class can still open up the road to the political revolution on condition that it finds a political leadership willing and able to do this.

In the early weeks after the failed coup the working class of the USSR faces a dual task. On the one hand, it must complete the destruction of the dictatorship of the Stalinist caste by its own hand; on the other, it must turn its fire on the Yeltsinite regime that will conserve as much of the old dictatorship and political apparatus as will be needed to suppress the workers in the months and years ahead as they push towards capitalism.

Ever since the 1990 elections to municipal and city soviets and the presidential elections in the republics there has been a situation of growing dual power: on the one side, the conservative faction of the old nomenklatura, and on the other, a coalition of the forces of bourgeois restoration, republican independence and the workers and petit bourgeoisie. The former hoped by their actions on 19 August to defend their privileges on the basis of post capitalist property relations and sought political legitimacy in the Supreme Soviet. Yet their real power base lay in the central economic control agencies (banking, planning industrial ministries etc), the central agencies of repression (KGB, MVD and the SAF) and the central administrative and social co-ordination apparatus (the all-Union federal administration, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the remains of the old trade unions). Those for whom the SCSE spoke were all pragmatically opposed to Gorbachev's "market socialist" reforms whenever they threatened them. On the other hand, they had no alternative programme of reform to his. Thus their only real proposals were to dilute and slow down Gorbachev's various plans, so as to preserve their own institutions and to carry out what reforms this left in an authoritarian or dictatorial fashion.

By contrast, the coalition of the forces opposed to this conservative faction were heterogeneous: proto-exploiters keen to enlarge the scope of their wealth, workers determined to defend the democratic freedoms gained during the preceding years. This coalition, gathered around the Moscow parliament, hoisted Yeltsin to power. Its origins lie in two different camps. First, in the democratic and nationalist oppositions, rooted in the intelligentsia that pre-existed Gorbachev in the underground "dissident" movement. Secondly, a whole segment of the Gorbachevite faction of the bureaucracy itself.

The former layer of oppositionists, in the period between the Prague Spring and Jaruselski coup in Poland, lost almost all belief in reforming "really existing socialism" and were oriented to western democracy and a market economy as ideals. The latter—the ex-Gorbachevites—became disillusioned with Gorbachev's utopian project of "market socialism", outraged by their leader's vacillations and compromises with the conservatives and attracted into the service of imperialism as the restorers of capitalism in the USSR. What does the Yeltsin-headed coalition of forces politically represent? Yeltsin, Shevardnadze, and indeed the whole military and political entourage of the Russian President, represent a faction of the bureaucracy that has abandoned the defence of its caste privileges and their source—a degenerate workers' state—in favour of becoming key members of a new bourgeois ruling class.

When the SCSE made its faltering grab for power they were not opposed by the elemental and inchoate forces of the masses, undifferentiated by class, formless in their opposition. On the contrary, they were confronted with real apparatuses and administrations, bolstered by "democratic mandates" and even possessing rudimentary armed forces. Moreover, utilising *glasnost* to the full they had eroded the homogeneity of the all-Union administrative and military apparatus and effected cold splits at a number of levels.

The result is now clear to see. What in Eastern and Central Europe took weeks of mass protest and months of wrestling with the nomenklatura to achieve, has been realised in days in the aftermath of the failed coup. The tempo of purgation of the *nomenklatura* is extremely rapid. Some 80% of the army high command at the level of general or above is or will be displaced. The KGB has effectively been purged of its leadership and ruling collegium, robbed of its 230,000 armed forces and subordinated to the regular army. The Soviet Union cabinet of ministers has been sacked and replacements largely chosen by the Yeltsinite camp. The conservatives headed by Kryuchkov, Pugo and Yazov have been displaced from all leading positions and their followers marginalised as a faction within the shattered and reeling bureaucracy.

The "conservative faction" is under fierce attack from the Yeltsinites and even from Gorbachev. But it still has redoubts and pockets of resistance. It still has large numbers of deputies in the Supreme and republican soviets. In Azerbaijan and some Central Asian republics it still holds power. There the duality of power has a territorial aspect. Unless they are removed in the next months they could launch a limited counter-attack as the restorationists themselves hit a crisis provoked by resistance to their programme.

An unstable partnership

In terms of the balance of forces within the USSR at present the situation is analogous to the first Solidarnosc government headed by Masowiecki but co-habiting with President Jaruselski. In short, there is now a restorationist government in office, in a very strong position because of the coup but still without undivided power over the state apparatus. The regime is headed by an unstable partnership of Yeltsin and Gorbachev. The latter has now only a shadow of his former power. He has finally abandoned his attempts to cling to the remnants of "market socialism". He is a firm supporter of a restorationist programme. But his bottom line is a defence of the centralised federal state. This obliges him to rely on the rump of the bureaucracy of the central state apparatus against the confederalists of the republics and the, as yet, undecided Yeltsin. Its inertia gives him what shrinking room he has for Bonapartist independence and manoeuvre .

The measures to deprive the Stalinists of all the levers of economic and political power are an essential stage, a prerequisite to turn to the next stage—the task of rapidly dismantling the instruments of central planning. We can expect the planning ministries, the central bank, the state farm sector to all be purged in the coming months. This process will decide whether Gorbachev retains any use for the restorationists.

The CPSU was the chief mechanism for preserving the Stalinist political dictatorship. Through its 5,000 regional offices, its factory cells, its political officers in the KGB and army and through its regulatory intervention

into the economy the CPSU was the focal point of bureaucratic rule. But faced with the state of emergency the CPSU crumbled. The reasons lie in the previous two years of internal disintegration of the homogeneity of the party. At a CPSU conference in July 1989 Gorbachev signalled that dissent and proto-factions would not be outlawed. The foundation of the Democratic Platform in January 1990 openly contravened the ban on factions and attracted 100,000 party members; the main planks of programme were to destroy the bureaucratic centralism of the CPSU and replace them with horizontal links and to displace Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the party. The emergence of the Democratic Platform served to encourage a multiplicity of tendencies within the CPSU.

Paralysis within the CPSU

The July 1990 28th Congress of the CPSU witnessed bitter debate between the factions, the resignation of Yeltsin and the open rebellion of many in the CPSU. The party was being paralysed and subject to defection of entire republican parties, as when the Baltic CPs split. During the course the 1991 the paralysis increased as the CPSU retreated more and more from the running of the economy and splits and defections mounted right up to the eve of the coup, as with Shevardnadze and Yakovlev. On the eve of the coup the CPSU was an increasingly demoralised entity.

If the military and secret police bases of the conservative faction of the bureaucracy crumbled without a serious fight the role, or rather the lack of a role, of the CPSU was truly miserable. The conspirators could make no use of it. Its Central Committee meekly succumbed after the event, but even parts of its press were banned by the decree of the State of Emergency. It tried to gather itself together on Gorbachev's return to Moscow. For this reason the party has become, with the KGB, the principal target of the Yeltsinite offensive.

Gorbachev tried for two days to shield it. He tried to stick to his perspective of a congress at the end of the year to reform the party, giving it a social democratic programme and purging it of hard liners. But all this was too little and too late. In Moscow and other cities its buildings were seized and sealed, its newspapers suspended and the activities of its cells in the army, and even the KGB banned. Gorbachev was humiliatingly obliged to resign from the party altogether and call for it to dissolve itself. Finally the Supreme Soviet, with a huge "conservative" majority has been obliged to suspend all the operations of the party. The party was the glue that bound the different elements of the bureaucracy together. With its dissolution the bureaucracy will have to face its final end with no coherent centralised leadership.

Revolutionaries share the workers' hatred for all the real and symbolic representatives of their oppression. We support the closing down of the palatial CPSU offices, private shops and sanatoria, the rooting out of the KGB officers. But we put no trust in Yeltsin or the leadership of the main soviets in the chief towns and cities to carry out the destruction of the Stalinist dictatorship. We seek at every point to involve the masses independently in the process of the destruction of the CPSU dictatorship. We do so because the masses alone have every interest in the most thoroughgoing eradication of their privileges and power. It is the forces of restoration, the forces of "law and order" and "stability" who will seek to keep the destruction of the apparatus of repression within limits.

Yeltsin and Bakhtin will seek to keep the loyal elements of the KGB and seek to turn it into the secret service that can police the working class in the coming years; it will not seek to open up the secrets of the Lubyanka jail to workers' inspection, and thereby show how far into the Yeltsin camp go the crimes of the Stalinist dictators before they converted to the dogma of the market. The workers must control the process of destruction of the Stalinists through to the end and not let Yeltsin preserve what is useful to him. In parts of the state apparatus (and even in whole republics) the tasks of the political revolution against the bureaucracy still exist and the working class must come to the head of this struggle with its own class organisations.

But the working class gives no support to the bureaucratic banning of the CPSU. All that we ask is that the privileges of the CPSU are brought to an end, that all their members in the factories lose their offices and are put back on the shop or office floor. Their press, their money, their offices must be put at the disposal of the working class organisations that have been bled dry over the years, so that a democratic and lively political culture springs up to replace the monolithism of Stalinism. The forces of restoration must not be allowed to expropriate the property and wealth of the CPSU for its own bourgeois design while bureaucratically banning all activities of the party.

Yeltsin rose to power by spearheading the drive of all the republics to free themselves of the control of the central bureaucratic stranglehold of the Kremlin, the Lubyanka and Gosplan. When these powers are safely shattered then it is likely that Yeltsin and Co will turn back towards a federal project, incorporating those other republics which are valuable and manageable. Given the exceptionally high level of economic interdependence and division between all the republics of the USSR then the erection of national barriers will send the already slumping economy into a complete tail-spin. This would minimise the possibility of stability in the process of capitalist restoration. Already there are clear signs of this change of line in Yeltsin's threat to raise border questions with seceding republics.

Can and will Gorbachev continue to play a role in the process of restoration? Imperialism at least for the moment thinks it is cost effective to keep him there in a team with Yeltsin. He is a guarantee against "conservative" revival and his support will speed the self-dissolution of the party and the purge of the KGB and the army. In military strategic terms he can help safeguard the nuclear arsenal from falling into the wrong hands. In the international arena he can supervise the surrenders to imperialism in the Middle East, South Africa, in Indo-China and in the Caribbean. The foreign ministry

and the task of relations with imperialism remain within Gorbachev's grasp for the moment.

Internally the role he has set himself is to preserve a federal union with a central government which has some measure of authority in matters of defence, monetary, fiscal and banking policy and which can relate as a unitary power on the world stage. Some, if not all, these objectives are pleasing to imperialism which does not want to see a Yugoslav catastrophe on a grand scale, with borders being forcibly redrawn. In addition there are some signs that after the first flush of Yeltsinmania Washington, London and Bonn would prefer a Yeltsin under some restraint. Yeltsin himself may have continued use for his old rival or at least for his policies. Gorbachev, deprived of his social base within the CPSU, and restored to only a shadow of his former Bonapartist power, represents for the rump of the bureaucracy their best hope to preserve what ever they can of their privileges and power but now brutally made aware that the best it can hope for is to share power, even as a junior partner with the Yeltsin led forces.

Major questions are posed by these events. Was the perspective of political revolution an unreal, a utopian perspective? Was the resistance to the conservative coup in itself counter-revolutionary? Would a successful bureaucratic clamp-down have given the working class a breathing space? The answer to all of these questions is no!

In what sense could be it be said that SCSE "defended the planned property relations"? Only in this: that it resisted their abolition to the extent that they were the "host" off which it was parasitic. However, this massive social parasite was the principal cause of the sickness unto death of the bureaucratic centrally planned economy, of the consequent disillusion of the masses in it.

Through its totalitarian dictatorship the Stalinists were also an absolute bloc on the self-activity and self-consciousness of the proletariat and its ability to crystalise a new vanguard, which alone could have not merely preserved but renewed the "gains of October". The full scale of this parasitism is only now likely to be revealed, but reports that after the coup the party's business manager was trying to send £500 billion worth of assets out of the USSR indicates that we are not dealing with minor perks, but with a vast collective and individual plunder of the social product of the workers' state. No wonder these people never could and never did put themselves at the head of the working class resistance to restoration.

The impending catastrophe and how to combat it

A prolonged pre-revolutionary situation has gripped the USSR at least since 1988. Despite the accumulated discredit that Stalinism's brutal repression of the proletariat, and its parasitism and mismanagement of the planned economy, brought to the very idea of a workers' state it would have been possible to struggle within the new strike committees and the trade unions for class independence and for a workers' government with a programme of a democratically drawn up emergency plan as a solution to the economic crisis.

As long as the bureaucracy survives with any remaining hold on power and as long as there exist the decisive elements of the "gains of October" our programme must remain that of political revolution. We cannot abandon it because of the low level of class consciousness of the masses. The loss of the gains of October would be a historic defeat for the world working class. It would strengthen imperialism against all its enemies politically, economically and militarily. The Soviet bureaucracy for its own counter-revolutionary reasons gave material aid to the other workers' states, to semi-colonial countries and to Stalinist or petit bourgeois nationalist movements against imperialism. These workers' states and semi-colonies will now be prostrate before imperialism. Already reactionary pro-imperialist regional peace treaties are in discussion in South Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. If the Soviet Union collapses then the crises of the Cuban, Vietnamese, Cambodian and North Korean regimes will be brought forward.

Though it may take longer the fate of the Chinese workers' state is also called into question. The collapse of the Stalinist parties world-wide is politically no loss but in the context of a rightward moving social democracy and the acute crisis of revolutionary leadership, it will further undermine the elementary class identification of the worlds' labour movements. In the short term the bourgeoisie and its agents will use the collapse to proclaim the utopianism of the socialist project and Marxism itself. Thus the struggle for political revolution was not an optional extra, to be posed only if the masses were already sympathetic to it. It was an objective necessity to avoid a strategic defeat for the Soviet and the world working class.

The seeming disinterest of the Soviet masses in the social gains they have inherited from 1917 is primarily and principally the result of the Stalinist dictatorship. No continuation of it could conceivably aid revolutionaries in their central task of clearing the consciousness of the proletarian vanguard through democratic debate and active involvement in struggle so that they discover who their real allies and their real enemies are. No bloc with the Stalinist clamp-down could have done any thing but put a river of blood between revolutionaries and the working masses and oppressed nationalities. Thus we had to stand with and indeed take the front ranks in the fight to stop the coup. But at the same time revolutionaries have to oppose Yeltsin's seizure and consolidation of power.

The fact that the first fruits of this present crisis is the installation of a counter-revolutionary government with mass support and considerable democratic illusions means that bringing the masses to oppose Yeltsin will not be swift or easy. Yeltsin is intent on resolving the instability of the post-coup revolutionary situation into a definitive victory for counter-revolution. He wishes to resolve the remaining duality of power with the remaining bureaucracy and create a regime with "democratic credentials", possibly by plebiscitary, means, possibly by means of parliamentary elections. Such a re-

gime would have a mandate to use the harshest police and military means to enforce its draconian economic measures to clear out all the bodies still stuffed with CPSU members.

The Soviet workers must seek to open a real duality of power between its own class organisations and both Yeltsin and Gorbachev, or for that matter the likes of Landsbergis and Gamsakhurdia. None of these people seek to bring democracy to the workers, collective farmers or the urban intelligentsia. Once installed in power and seeking to crystalise a new class of exploiters even full and consistent bourgeois democratic rights for the masses will become intolerable. Yeltsin's eagerness to ban parties and newspapers, Gamsakhurdia's repression of all nationalist opposition to himself indicates just what these democrats are made of.

The working class must launch an immediate struggle to defend its own democratic rights. But these democratic rights must not stop short—as they do in all capitalist countries—at the gate of the factory, the office, the school or the hospital. These institutions were not built by capital but by the intelligence and the sweat of three generations of Soviet workers. They must not be handed over to assorted foreign banks and multinationals, Soviet "mafiosi" and speculators let alone by Yeltsinite ex-bureaucrats.

The struggle for workers' democracy must mean the organisations of the proletariat fighting for its independent class economic interests in the face of the economic crisis and against Yeltsin's project of the rapid restoration of capitalism. Secondly, it must, in the course of such struggles, reforge its own organisations, politically and organisationally independent of the state structures of the USSR, the republican governments and the corrupting clutches of the AFL-CIO the TUC or the DGB, and countless assorted imperialist labour agencies.

The tasks of the Soviet workers are:

- to complete for themselves the most and radical and thorough smashing of bureaucratic power while resisting the consolidation of power by the restorationists.
- For workers' action to drive out the party and KGB spies in the workplace, to abolish all party privileges, putting party property under the control of the factory committees.
- For workers' inspection of all CPSU property and files and the nationalisation of all assets accumulated by it at the expense of the workers' state. The handing over of all private sanatoria, party dachas,. to independent workers' organisations and factory committees.
- Public trials by workers' juries alone of the plotters and organisers of the attempted clamp-down. At the same time we must oppose any witch-hunt of the CPSU rank and file members by the new authorities. No mass sackings of party members against whom no charges of anti-working class actions can be proved. Abolish the death penalty. No bans on political parties including the CPSU except for fascist parties like Pamyat
- An immediate end to Gorbachev's restrictions on strikes. Demand that Yeltsin and the so-called democrats who dominate the republican and city soviets repeal all restrictions on the right to strike to demonstrate to assemble.
- For workers' control of the mass media and against all state censorship whether by the Stalinist bureaucrats or the Yeltsinites.
- The workers of the USSR need no new Tsars, Stalin's or capitalist dictators either. Down with Bonapartism in all its forms! Build and arm independent workers' organisations, fight for workers'/soldiers' control of the factories/army. Abolish all the special powers of the Soviet and republican presidencies. Abolish all special armed forces in every republic.
- End Gorbachev and Yeltsin's capitulations and concessions to world imperialism. Continue and increase aid without strings to all states and movements in conflict with imperialism and its agents. Military and economic support for Cuba and Vietnam and the other bureaucratically degenerate workers' states. Support for any struggles by their workers to oust their bureaucrats including aid for a political revolution in China.
- Defend the remains of the gains of the October Revolution; defend state ownership of all large scale enterprises by putting them under workers' management; smaller economic units and those in the production and distribution of consumer goods that wish to should be transformed into worker co-operatives. All collective farms should be transformed into genuine democratic co-operatives. Drive the parasitic party bureaucrats out of the collective farm system. Transform the fake co-operatives formed in the Gorbachev period into genuine democratic bodies of producers and consumers. Expropriate the racketeers. Resist privatisation.
- Defend free and universal provision of housing, education, creches and care for the elderly and disabled under the control of the users and local workers' representatives; massively improve the quality of these services out of the expropriated wealth of the party and bureaucratic apparatus.
- Defend free abortion on demand; massively expand the availability of contraception; defend women's jobs; no forced return to the home as a result of the market.
- An emergency plan to stop the impending economic catastrophe. Immediate election of committees in every factory, office, shop, and collective farm and on the railways and in the haulage enterprises to draw up inventories of produce in all state, private and party storage. For town, city and regional councils of delegates from these committees to issue binding orders. The drawing up of an emergency plan for the winter at every level and its co-ordination by a union wide council of workers' and collective farmers' delegates. Only the workers and farmers can ensure that a speedy and equal distribution of food, fuel and clothing takes place.
- For an armed workers and collective farmers' militia to enforce the emergency plan against the bureaucrats, the mafia, and all horders and speculators. Only

such a militia can defend national minorities against pogromists, fascists and those who wish to make facts by changing borders against the will of their populations.

- For the immediate right to secession of all republics wishing to do so. Force the central government to recognise all "seceded" states and withdraw all SAF troops at once. Disband the special forces throughout the Union. For the right of self-determination of all oppressed nationalities within each of the republics, including autonomy or separation. For independent workers' council states in all the seceding republics.
- At the same time workers and their organisations throughout the USSR should render fraternal aid to workers in any state resisting privatisations and the attacks of the nationalist and restorationist governments. For workers' council states in every republic. For a voluntary federation of such states.
- Down with the undemocratic command planning of the bureaucrats in Gosplan, in the ministries, in the foreign trade bodies and in the state bank, including a thoroughgoing purge of the corrupt authoritarian and inefficient bureaucrats.
- No to the dissolution of the central planning bodies in favour of the economic institutions of the market and the capitalist state. Close the stock exchanges. For workers' inspection and control, and the transformation and restructuring of Gosplan into organs of democratic workers' planning.
- The creation in every town and city of councils of delegates elected in the workplaces and instantly recallable to co-ordinate both emergency economic planning and to organise the struggle against the attacks on all economic and social gains of the workers and collective farmers.
- As long as these gains survive the strategic task facing the working class remains the proletarian political revolution. For the creation of a democratic workers' state as an instrument of socialist construction and the international revolution against capitalism and imperialism. With the restorationists now in power in many republics and in the central institutions a fierce revolutionary struggle will be needed to carry this out. Essential as workers' councils and truly independent and democratic trade unions are to this struggle they cannot win without a centralised organisation of the best worker cadres from every struggle, of the most self-sacrificing intellectuals who reject capitalist exploitation and world imperialism. This can be nothing else than a revolutionary workers' party, an anti-bureaucratic and anti-capitalist combat force based on the principles of Lenin and Trotsky.

Dave Hughes (1948-1991)

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International has lost one of its finest fighters. The working class movement has lost one of its most dedicated and energetic members. Dave Hughes, a founder member of Workers Power and the LRCI, died on 13 August 1991, aged 43.

Dave was a revolutionary for almost a quarter of a century. He joined the International Socialists (IS—now the SWP) in 1968 while studying at Keele University. Many of the radicals of that period quickly made their peace with capitalism. Dave became convinced that everything that was evil, oppressive and mean could only be overcome through working class revolution.

In the early 1970s he moved to Birmingham where the IS put his energy and remarkable agitational talents to good use. He became a key organiser, helping to recruit and train an influx of car and engineering workers whose militancy had led to them breaking from the bureaucratic policies and practices of both the Labour and Communist parties.

But Dave's keen understanding of Marxism, his gradual rediscovery of the authentic ideas of Leon Trotsky and his fervent desire to take the working class forward from militant trade union struggle to conscious socialist action all brought him into political conflict with the leadership of the IS.

After the bombing of Aldershot barracks in 1972, IS dropped their unconditional support for the IRA. This spurred Dave and a number of other comrades to form the Left Faction within IS. Had they not shown both insight and courage, there would be no LRCI today. The Left Faction, which Dave led, was the direct forerunner of our organisation.

The Left Faction challenged IS's errors on Ireland, women and work in the unions, but they also grasped the methodological roots of these mistakes and the gulf which separated IS from Trotsky's tradition. The IS leadership would not put up with this kind of criticism and the Left Faction was expelled in 1975. Following a brief period of fusion in the short-lived International Communist League, Dave pulled together a group of supporters to refound Workers Power as an independent organisation in 1976.

The subsequent history of Workers Power, and later the development of the LRCI, are Dave's history. Our very existence, our growth and our firm commitment to the revolutionary class struggle are monuments to his work.

Dave's contributions to Workers Power and the LRCI would fill a book. In the late 1970s Dave wrote the key documents and articles that guided Workers Power towards consistent revolutionary thought and action. Together with his closest friend and co-thinker, Dave Stocking, Dave wrote a series of articles which laid the foundation stones for our re-elaboration of the revolutionary programme that culminated in *The Trotskyist Manifesto* (1989).

A lecturer in History at Leicester Polytechnic, Dave could both speak and read Russian. Using his intimate knowledge of the USSR he re-examined the history of the Bolshevik Party to equip us with an understanding of the relationship of programme and party.

Dave was the founding editor of *Workers Power* newspaper (1978), writing under the name John Hunt. He wrote much of our major work on the USSR, *The Degenerated Revolution* (1983). In the second half of the 1980s, his concentration on the USSR increased. Month in, month out, he charted the rise and significance of Gorbachev and his policies.

Even while he was ill he read Russian language papers, maintained contacts with the USSR and passed on his information and his insights into the death agony of Stalinism.

Like all great revolutionaries, Dave was a man of action. He knew that Marxist theory was barren unless it was rooted in the living experience of the class struggle. Strikes, from the smallest to the largest, were always an inspiration to him. Every leaflet and bulletin he wrote embodied the experience of the workers he talked to, fused with a Marxist understanding of the key steps on the road to victory.

He was Workers Power's industrial organiser whilst the group built bases in London Transport, in the rail industry, in Ford, in the Health Service and in local government and education. Trade union activist comrades always knew that when they faced a problem—be it mundane and routine, or be it a major question of strike strategy—Dave could be guaranteed to offer sound advice on how to go forward.

The British miners' strike of 1984-85 brought out his best qualities. He flung himself into the strike, enabling Workers Power to produce a fortnightly newspaper for much of the period and to win a large audience in the ranks of the NUM. Dave's whole being was infused with an unshakeable commitment to the strike. His work won him the love and admiration of miners in Keresley, Leicester, South Wales, Kent and Yorkshire.

Working intensively with these militants, Dave helped us draw them together in regular meetings to discuss both the strike and the politics of Workers Power. He played a leading role in organising the miners who came together in 1985 at a 150 strong conference to form the National Rank and File Miners' Movement. Workers Power had entered the miners' strike without a single contact in the pits, but entered the rank and file conference with a team of miners from several coalfields committed to our politics and organisation.

Dave's work in the miners' strike typified his revolutionary vitality. Everybody who ever met Dave knows that he was an exceptional man. His energy, enthusiasm and love of comrades were outstanding. He always had time to listen and talk, to laugh and joke, to discuss and console. His human qualities will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

That a man who had so much to give has died so young is a tragedy. In paying tribute to Dave Hughes—a revolutionary, an internationalist, a working class fighter and a great man—we seek consolation for the terrible sense of loss that we all feel by remembering the contribution he made to all of our lives, the work he undertook to build Workers Power and the LRCI, the dedication he felt towards the working class and its struggles.

Dave's hatred of exploitation and oppression never wavered. His will to build a revolutionary party carried him through months of illness. He would never give up. Only death could rob the working class of this fighter and rid the bosses of this relentless enemy. But death cannot erase the memory of what Dave stood for. We will see to that. Like him, we will never give up. That is our tribute to a comrade we loved and respected.

We send our most sincere condolences to Kate—Dave's comrade and companion, to Dave's family and to all his friends and comrades around the world. He will be sorely missed.

The situation in Yugoslavia and the position of proletarian revolutionaries

The answer to the present crisis

Yugoslavia faces the prospect of a horrific civil war between the peoples and ethnic groups that make up this most multi-national of European states. Revolutionary Marxists condemn without hesitation the fomentors of national strife. The Serbian, Croatian and Slovenia nationalists are all guilty of this. Cynically playing with the fire of chauvinism which led to hundreds of thousands of deaths during the Second World War, reviving the pogromist traditions of the Chetnik and Ustasha fascists, they have brought the country to the brink of a repetition of these events.

The nationalists' objective has been to seize power from the weakened and disintegrating Stalinist bureaucracy and compete for the favours of European imperialism in restoring capitalism in the successor states to the Yugoslav federation. But these would-be capitalist exploiters cannot agree to a peaceful distribution of the spoils of the Yugoslav workers' labours over the last forty years. The nationalists—especially those of Serbia and Croatia—are seeking a "Greater Serbia" or a "Historic Croatia". They seek to divide up the national minorities and other peoples and ethnic groups like so many cattle.

The European Community imperialists, who refuse to recognise Slovenia and Croatia's declarations of independence, have rushed to offer their "good offices" to prevent civil war and supposedly solve Yugoslavia's problems. Workers of all nationalities in Yugoslavia should beware imperialists bearing gifts. They have only two purposes. Firstly, they desire political stability and, secondly, the completion of the restoration of capitalist exploitation in Yugoslavia. The imperialists will only support Slovene and Croat rights to the extent that they advance this process. That is why we oppose the imperialists' intervention. Imperialist economic or military intervention will enormously strengthen and speed up the process of capitalist restoration.

Yugoslavia is a state in collapse. Individual republics no longer meet their obligations to the Federal institutions. The State Presidency is incapable of operating. The power of the current federal president, Ante Markevic, has been dramatically reduced. Finally, two republics, Slovenia and Croatia, have now held referendums in which the overwhelming majority of the population voted for full sovereignty and independence from Yugoslavia. All of these facts, particularly the latter one, demand a clear political response from revolutionaries.

Adopted by the International Executive Committee of the LRCI, 24 July 1991

Responsibility for the impending catastrophe does not lie solely or even primarily with the bourgeois nationalists. The originators of this crisis are the Stalinist bureaucrats whose political oppression, economic parasitism and mismanagement have brought the Yugoslav workers' state to its present collapse. Their policy has resulted in the planned economy failing to meet the elementary needs of the masses, leaving them open to the influence of the propagandists for the market and capitalism.

The bureaucracy attempted to stem the indignation and revolt of the working class by hiding behind nationalist demagogy. Milosevic lit the fuse of chauvinism in Serbia, Kossovo and Vojvodina. This was primarily responsible for bringing to power separatist, restorationist nationalist forces in Slovenia and Croatia. The attempt by the Tito bureaucracy to create one single Yugoslavian nation has now been fundamentally shattered.

The independence of the Baltic republics would only rob the USSR of its present western flank and remove some of its relatively economically advanced areas. In Yugoslavia, however, the independence of Slovenia, and above all of Croatia, would call into question the very survival of the Yugoslav state. Nevertheless we recognise and defend the right of self-determination. The break up of the Yugoslav Federation does not mean the instantaneous and inevitable destruction of the workers' state.

The workers of Slovenia could still stop the restoration measures *if* they are aroused to consciousness of the peril to their basic conditions that these entail. *If* they do not do so no other force in the world, least of all the Stalinist bureaucrats in Belgrade, will defend these gains *for* the working class.

It would therefore be wrong to identify the defence of the Federation with the defence of the planned property relations. The Stalinist bureaucracy in Serbia is not fighting at the head of the Serbian workers for the defence of the planned property relations. It is fighting to defend its own parasitic existence, the remnants of its dictatorial powers. It wants to restore Serbian privileges and oppression either in the federation as a whole or in a greater Serbia in which the minorities of Kosovo, the Vojvodina, Macedonia and even Bosnia-Hercegovina would come under the iron heel.

With the brutal repression of Croat nationalism in 1971, the Yugoslav workers' state introduced significant elements of national oppression against one of the component republics into politics for the first time since 1945. However, the fact that there were purges in Slovenia and Serbia after the repression indicates that the

pan-Yugoslav bureaucracy in the 1970s was still more interested in the maintenance of the balance of power.

The emphasis on the common interests of the Yugoslavian peoples and the repression of nationalist tendencies in all the component republics was one of the standard methods of maintaining power used by the Yugoslavian Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1970s. Until Tito's death in 1980 there was no oppressor nation in Yugoslavia, although the republics' rights to national self-determination were limited by the central bureaucracy. In this context the biggest nationality, the Serbs, identified most readily with the central bureaucracy.

This form of maintaining power implied a relative balance between the nationalist forces which cancelled one another out. This balance of power became increasingly unstable in the 1980s, with the carrying forward of the bloody oppression of the Albanian resistance by Serbia. The Kossovo Albanians' justified demands for their own republic could not be silenced by even the harshest of methods. As a result the Serbian bureaucracy was pushed ever further forward on its nationalist course.

Recourse to nationalism

To justify the oppression of the Albanians a recourse to Greater Serbian nationalism became essential. It was upon this that the republican leadership under Milosevic increasingly based itself. Secondly, the resistance based in the leading bodies of the autonomous republic of Kossovo had to be broken. The overthrow of Azem Vlasis and his indictment for high treason was a symbol of the Serbian "co-ordination" of Kossovo.

The autonomous province of Vojvodina was also "co-ordinated" with the same consequences, although not so dramatically. The result was that after 1989-90 the whole post-war system, based on the limitation of all the nationalities' aspirations for independence, was thrown out of balance.

Serbia, together with the leaderships of the "autonomous" republics of Kosovo and Vojvodina plus Montenegro (traditionally a loyal ally), now has a *de facto* veto on all decisions of the state presidency, which is composed of eight representatives. It is this stalemate which prevented the routine transfer of the state presidential office to the Croat, Stepa Mesic, and thus paralysed the state presidency.

Since at least the second half of the 1980s the other nations' fear at the resurrection of Great Serbian nationalism has been justified. National oppression resulted from two factors. Firstly, because the Stalinist state bureaucracy denied the democratic right of national self-determination and, secondly, because of the real threats to national interests posed by resurgent Great Serbian chauvinism.

Nevertheless, the nationalism of the Serbian minorities in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina is not entirely reactionary. Firstly, it is based on the real experience of national oppression by the Croat Ustasha government of Poglavnik Ante Pavelic during the war. With the protection of the Established Catholic Church in Fascist Croatia (to which Bosnia-Hercegovina with its strong Serbian population then belonged) an anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Serbian holocaust took place, resulting in hundreds of thousands of victims.

Secondly, of all the Yugoslavian nations, the Serbs are the most divided amongst the various republics and autonomous provinces. In comparison to overall population size their representation in the state presidium was, until 1988, the most seriously under-represented. Alongside the Republic of Serbia, in which approximately 75% of the population belong to the Serbian nationality, there also are big Serbian minorities in Vojvodina (more than 50%), in Kosovo (approximately 17%) in Croatia(15%) and in Bosnia-Hercegovina (30%).

We defend the right of self-determination even in the case of the Serbs. We defend the right of all Serbian areas to unite with the Serbian Republic unless this would result in the oppression and/or block the self-determination of another nationality. Where the latter would be the case we are for full autonomy for all minorities unavoidably located within other states. A denial of the democratic right of the Serbs and the unwillingness, or inability, of the Stalinist bureaucratic caste under Tito to amend the frontiers of the republics in accordance with the wishes of the population, is a further reason for the unusually strong resurgence of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s.

Today, therefore, not only are the Albanians and the Turkish minority in Macedonia oppressed nations, so are the Slovenes and Croats. The fact that Slovenia is the richest republic in Yugoslavia changes nothing in this respect. Slovenia, with 7% of the population, produces almost 25% of Yugoslavia's total wealth. Wages in Slovenia are ten times higher than in the poorest, most under-developed regions of the country. Within a common state one nation can be oppressed even when it is relatively richer than other parts of that state.

Along with the ever less concealed Greater Serbian rhetoric, the ideology of Yugoslavianism also serves the interests of the Serbian dominated state bureaucracy. This return to the ideology of a single Yugoslavia is not an expression of the limited progressive character of the anti-nationalist Yugoslav peoples' liberation struggle, but rather a return to the Greater Serbian politics of the period before 1941.

This is true not only for the nationalist opposition in Serbia, like the Serbian Renewal Movement, but also for Milosevic and his Party supporters, with whom the militaristic Yugoslavianism of Tito is combined into a contradictory unity with pre-war Great Serbian chauvinism. The Serbian nationalist denunciation of Tito as an enemy of the Serbs marks a change. However, even here the Serbian Republic's bureaucracy is not consistent. On 24 October 1990 Serbia declared Republican law to have priority over Federal law, and, thereby expressed the fact that support for the unity of Yugoslavia was nothing more than a tactical manoeuvre.

The most important bearer of the idea of Yugoslavian unity is the Federal Army. Dominated by Serbs (80% of the officer ranks are held by Serbs), it is a major factor in the internal politics of Yugoslavia. It presents itself as the guardian of Titoism and the anti-nationalist



A Croatian policeman avoids Serbian sniper fire

traditions of the Yugoslav people's liberation struggle. It is, however, a bureaucratic repressive institution which, as under Tito, is prepared to repress national unrest.

Revolutionaries fight against any army intervention which limits the national right of self-determination, even if such an intervention takes place in the name of a united Yugoslavia. However, proletarian revolutionaries would critically support army interventions wherever national sentiments have been so stirred up that no other means can be used to prevent a nationalist bloodbath.

The defence of Serbian minority areas in Croatia against attack is thus justified and supportable, whereas attacks on Croat minorities or on the independence of Slovenia are not. Slovenia and Croatia are equally justified in defending their people against brutal attempts by the Serbian army to prevent their secession. A civil war in Yugoslavia is, however, not likely to have an overall progressive character on one side or the other.

The conflict is already turning into a guerilla war to divide the areas of heavily intermixed population lying between Croatia and Serbia. This is a monstrous act of national oppression. The losers will be the workers and farmers of all ethnic groups. Only the immediate formation of multi-national defence militias based on the factories and villages can drive out the pogromists wherever they show their faces and stop the slide into a reactionary civil war.

The Yugoslav army is not defending the economic basis of a workers' state. The Markovic government, to which the army has declared its loyalty, is willing to play a counter-revolutionary role. Only the loss of power by the central Belgrade administration has hindered rapid progress on the road to capitalist restoration at the level of the whole state. Correspondingly, the independence movements are not directed primarily against the degenerate workers' state, which in any event has already been reduced to its foundations. The dominant elements are, on the one side, the real fear of Greater Serbian chauvinism and, on the other, the wish to be able to determine their own destiny at the economic and political level.

Yugoslavia is a country with massive social and economic differences. However, within Yugoslavia the richer republics have not developed themselves at the cost of the poorer. We reject the idea, often heard in Serbia today, that Serbia is backward because it has been exploited by Slovenia and Croatia. We equally reject the argument that, through a super-colonial exploitation, Yugoslavia (and above all Serbia, within the common state) has retarded the economic development of Slovenia and Croatia. The annual statistics from 1952 to 1988 show that the three republics, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia, have developed at approximately the same speed.

Although the Stalinist bureaucracy was incapable of an all-embracing development of the whole state, it is not the case that one republic really benefited from the economic disadvantage and exploitation of other republics. It is true that under market socialism since the 1960s, as is always the case under market conditions, there was a transfer of value from the unproductive to the more productive regions. However, until very recently

there was also a Central Development Fund through which a part of the national surplus product was re-transferred back to the poorer republics. On balance these tendencies cancelled themselves out.

The wish for independence at the economic level is a product of the failures of the Stalinist deformed planned economy, especially since 1979. The relatively advanced nature of Slovenia or Croatia cannot be taken in itself as an argument against self-determination. The movements for independence and sovereignty in both Slovenia and Croatia are a nationalist reflex against the stagnation of "market-Stalinism".

The strike movement since the mid-1980s, in which the Yugoslav workers fought against the worsening of their living standards, could have led to a supra-national political pre-revolutionary situation. Instead it was channelled into the nationalist movements, first in Serbia, later in the other republics. The danger of Great Serbian nationalism gave Croat and Slovenian nationalism a certain justification. The desire for independence must be accurately and concretely examined by revolutionaries.

In 1990 the Stalinist bureaucracy lost political power in Slovenia to a coalition of seven bourgeois parties. The Demos government achieved 95% support in the December 1990 referendum on independence. On this basis Bucar, the president of the parliament, declared Slovenia to be an independent state.

Restorationist dynamic

Despite the restorationist dynamic in Slovenia, and despite the bourgeois leadership through which the Slovenian people's struggle for independence has been channelled, we recognise not only Slovenia's right to state independence and to secede from Yugoslavia, but we ourselves raise the demand for Slovenian independence. The struggle against subordination and intimidation by Belgrade cannot be left to the reactionaries. Only a proletarian leadership in the independence movement could lead a fight for the justified national concerns without any Slovenian nationalist arrogance, and combine it with an internationalist perspective, the struggle for a socialist federation of the Balkans.

In the referendum campaign of December 1990 Trotskyists would have argued against a vote for independence, counterposing to this the key action slogans of the political revolution and the formation of a new free federation of the peoples of Yugoslavia and the Balkans. However, once the Slovene people had made clear their unmistakable desire for separation then we would have fought throughout Yugoslavia for an end to all coercion against them and for the immediate recognition of Slovenia's independence.

We are for an independent workers' council state of Slovenia. Trotskyists would have seized the initiative when it came to fighting the effects of independence. They would have fought against the wage cuts which would come with or without independence and they would have fought all suggestions that the $16 billion Yugoslav foreign debt was a matter for the republics which had not seceded. Only a common rejection of all imperialist debts can release all the republics from the grip of the finance capitalists.

The independence of Slovenia has no repressive dynamic with regard to other nations. In respect of the minorities who live in Slovenia (Hungarians and Italians) revolutionaries would naturally argue for the furthest reaching consideration of their national rights up to secession. We defend the right of the Slovenian minorities inside Austria and Italy to autonomy and, if they want, to integrate into a Slovenian republic.

The relationships are different in Croatia. The independence of Croatia under the leadership of the HDZ government implies a new minorities problem, above all that of the Serbs in Krajina and Slavonia. Here Trotskyists have to make their position in any referendum dependent on whether the rights of minorities (above all the Serbs) are to be guaranteed up to and including secession, or not.

After the referendum of 19 May 1991, to which Trotskyists would have had the same attitude as in Slovenia, they would have recognised the decision of the Croatian people in favour of independence and defended them against coercion. But we could take no step in common with the Croat nationalists on the question of Serbian and other minorities since we simultaneously and equally support their right to secede from an independent Croatia.

In its concern to free itself from Serbian intimidation and threats the working class of Croatia must clearly distance itself from the HDZ government, with its sympathetic attitude to the fascist Ustasha tradition. It must stand consistently for the right to self-determination for all those national groups—the Serbs, Muslims and Jews—who are fearful of an independent Croatia. Naturally, here too, the fight for national self-determination must be combined with the struggle against capitalist restoration.

Recognition of national rights

The case of the other nations is different. The desire for separation has not yet reached such a scale that we would raise the demand for independence. We concentrate on the demand for the recognition of national rights but not, however, for secession. We fight for the recognition of Kossovo as a republic with equal status, and for an end to the unworthy status of a *de facto* occupied country. We would support and raise the demand for unification with Albania should this be the wish of the Albanians of Kossovo and the other areas of majority Albanian settlement in Yugoslavia (in Macedonia and Montenegro). We would also support and raise the demand for the unification of the Macedonian nation, currently divided between Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria, if they express a desire for this. In all these cases we would fight for independence to take the form of a workers' council republic.

The secession of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia would mean the end of the state federation in its present form. The increased weight of Serbia in relation to the other republics would dramatically accelerate Yugoslavia's collapse. But we must not fall into a reac-

tionary conservatism through fear of a new potential trouble spot in Europe. We must not stand against the legitimate national interests of the Slovenes and Croats on the basis that their secession would increase the likelihood of the Serbian bureaucracy oppressing the remaining nations.

We must analyse the situation very soberly relating our positions to the circumstances which, in all probability, will be changing rapidly. Yugoslavia has lost all progressive content as a federation of its three largest peoples. Any attempt to maintain it against Croatia and Slovenia will only reinforce its prison-house character. But the defence of a continued voluntary and democratic Yugoslavian federation as against absorption into a Great Serbian nation state can have a progressive character for those other nationalities and ethnic groups in Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, the Vorozdina etc.

It will not be imperialism which destroys Yugoslavia. The nations of Yugoslavia themselves are at the point of delivering the *coup de grâce*. Because the Yugoslav state was unable to solve the national problems of the Balkans the present process can only be the prelude to a fundamental re-ordering of the relations between the peoples in the region.

Dynamic of political revolution

The dynamic of the political revolution in the Balkans must once again bring to the surface the national problems which were suppressed by Stalinism. The state and republican frontiers reflect not the free will of the peoples, but compromises between Stalinist leaders and the imperialists. Revolutionary communists have no interest in the maintenance of the existing borders.

A complete re-ordering of the region must take place through a democratic socialist federation of the Balkans. This could result from a victorious political revolution in the former Stalinist countries or through social revolutions in Greece and Turkey. However, the bourgeois and Stalinist leaderships are leading the Balkans into a new phase of nationalist hatred and probable civil wars and massacres. The nationalist struggle of all against all can no more be our objective than the enforced pacification of nations within a prison-house state.

We do not support either the dissolution or the maintenance of Yugoslavia. Rather, we support national independence where it is demanded by a majority of the working class and is not at the cost of new minorities. We also support negotiations for a re-formation of Yugoslavia wherever the working class has new hopes of a nationally and socially more just state structure. In both cases, however, we say clearly and unmistakeably that the national problems cannot be solved on a bourgeois basis.

Only the fullest recognition of the national rights of self-determination, together with the establishment of a multi-national democratically planned economy, can offer the peoples of the Balkans a perspective for development in the future. For the proletarian revolution a new, revolutionary Yugoslavia must be a step on the road to a Socialist Federation of the Balkans, and that itself a step towards the United Socialist States of Europe and, indeed, of the whole world.

Independence and the stability of state borders are not questions of principle for Trotskyists. We unconditionally defend the right of oppressed nations against the ruling caste exactly as we would against bourgeois governments. We are in favour of federations of states which offer and make possible a better development of the productive forces. The only revolutionary solution to the national question is the common struggle of the proletariat of the oppressed and the oppressor nations. This is particularly true for the area of south-eastern Europe.

South-eastern Europe in general, and Yugoslavia in particular, is a region where the areas of settlement of the various peoples is exceptionally intermixed and, even with the best will in the world, clear national borders are difficult to find. Thus in Vojvodina representatives of twenty different peoples live in a crisscross pattern. Amongst the majority Serbs and the Hungarians, who make up 20% of the population, there exist some 7% Croats, more than 3% Slovaks and Romanians, tens of thousands of Gypsies, and so on.

In such areas where an appropriate border line could not be drawn, where as many as half-a-dozen nationalities live together in the villages and the cities, we should be for their recognition as multi-ethnic territories, with full protection of each group's national and cultural identity. But the limits of national self-determination are reached where this right seriously impinges on the legitimate national and social needs of another nation. In such regions any other position would lead to mass expulsions and deportations and the destruction of a cultural framework which has developed over centuries. This would poison the relations between the various nations for a very long time to come.

The situation in Bosnia-Hercegovina is similar. The 1990 election results quite accurately reflect the national composition of approximately 50% Muslim, 30% Serb and 20% Croat. A division of Bosnia-Hercegovina, as for example that negotiated between the presidents of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Hercegovina in June 1991, carries within it the danger of expulsions and deportations. In particular there is the danger that such a division would be carried out over the heads of the population. We would decisively reject this and stand for the maintenance of Bosnia-Hercegovina as a multi-national republic. However, we recognise the right of self-determination of all national groupings even there.

In both republics striving for independence we are confronted with the problem that the overwhelming majority of all social classes, including the proletariat, is nationalist and has united behind the bourgeois leadership. The task of revolutionaries is to differentiate between the progressive and the reactionary aspects of this consciousness and to open the way to the development of a revolutionary class consciousness.

On the one hand we support the struggles for national independence and separation from the collapsing Yugoslavian federation. On the other, the Slovenian and the Croatian proletariat must be broken away from their bourgeois leaderships, the parties of the Demos coalition and the HDZ in Croatia or other bourgeois parties,

and the nationalist rubbish driven out of their brains. Our slogan cannot simply be for independence.

We raise the slogan of an independent workers' state for both Slovenia and Croatia. However, such a slogan has only a conjunctural significance and would be withdrawn if the differentiation within the Slovenian leadership deepens, the experiences of accelerating restoration in Slovenia or Croatia lead to a change of mind within the working class (the enthusiasm for independence is already beginning to decline) or above all if the Serbian working class differentiates itself from the national demagogues and offers to the other peoples of Yugoslavia a new federation not under the domination of the Serbs. We do not entirely exclude the possibility of a renewal of Yugoslavia, but ultimately it must be a socialist renewal under proletarian leadership.

Independence means the immediate strengthening of tendencies in the direction of capitalist restoration. However, the Markovic government is anything but a guarantee of the maintenance of a workers' state, even a degenerated one. It is trying to open the road to capitalist restoration. If it could get the reins of power firmly back into its own hands it would accelerate the process of restoration at a pan-Yugoslav level, smoothing the way for the transition to capitalism.

The central task is to mobilise the proletariat against capitalist restoration. The greater part of industry is still not privatised. The capitalist market is still not fully dominant. Only an independent workers' movement can stop capitalist restoration. Proletarian revolutionaries must clearly highlight the consequences of restoration and mobilise against every measure take in that direction.

"In order to come together more closely and more honestly one must first separate" (Trotsky).

The task today is the defence of the possibility of this first step. As Marxists, however, we must not for a moment forget the second step, the revolutionary unification once more of the workers' states. It is for such a policy that revolutionaries must stand in Yugoslavia today.

- Down with the organisers of pogroms. For a multinational workers' militia to stop the slide into reactionary civil war.
- For the full right of national self-determination for all the peoples of the Balkans!
- For an independent soviet Slovenia!
- For an independent soviet Croatia with full recognition of the right to self-determination of the Serbs in Croatia!
- No to capitalist restoration! For a proletarian political revolution against the ruling bureaucracy! Croatian and Slovenian workers throw out the restorationist regimes in Llubjana and Zagreb.
- Down with the counter-revolutionary nationalists in all the republics of Yugoslavia!
- For a federation of independent workers' states of the Balkans!

The crisis in Yugoslavia

Adopted by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 29 June 1991

The intervention by Yugoslav army troops in the republic of Slovenia, following hard on its declaration of independence, must be condemned by all socialists and working class fighters world-wide.

The forcible retention of any people within the borders of another state is not only a violation of democratic principles but, far more importantly, poisons the relations between the working classes of different peoples and in this case splits the unity of the Yugoslavian working class.

Yugoslavia is a workers' state but not a workers' state where the working class has ever held direct political power by means of workers' councils. It was from birth a degenerate workers' state. Therefore, it has always lacked key features inseparable from workers' democracy, including a real, rather than a formal, right for any republic or oppressed nationality to secede from that state.

Marxists are no admirers of small states for their own sake. Nor do we advocate the creation of tiny statelets for every nationality, linguistic or ethnic group world-wide. On the contrary, we see in the existing national borders so many restraints on the forces of production and above all on the most important one—the working class itself. But if the unity of the working class is injured by the network of frontiers even more so is it injured by the national oppression of any people within an existing multi-national state.

Our answer to this is to fight for an elementary demand of bourgeois right: for self-determination up to and including separation, for the unhindered right to secede. In the imperialist epoch, despite including this principle in all their charters, declarations and constitutions, the bourgeoisie (whether imperialist or semi-colonial) denies this right in practice.

Thus in the Middle East the thirty million strong Kurdish people's right to an independent state is denied by all the great powers and not only by the regimes which partition it. Those vicious hypocrites the British imperialists have for the last seventy years imprisoned a large minority of the Irish people within the "United Kingdom".

Therefore, the EC imperialists, who refuse to recognise the declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, have rushed to offer their "good offices" to prevent civil war and solve Yugoslavia's problems. The working people of all nationalities in Yugoslavia should beware the imperialists bearing gifts.

They have only two purposes. Firstly, they desire political stability and, secondly, the completion of the process of the restoration of capitalist exploitation in Yugoslavia. They will only support Slovene and Croat rights to the extent that they advance this process. That is why we oppose their intervention. Imperialist economic or military intervention will enormously strengthen and speed up the process of capitalist restoration.

The election of openly bourgeois restorationist governments in Ljubljana and Zagreb delighted the imperialists. Some of the adjacent capitalist countries (Italy and Austria) may have flirted with the prospect of gaining client statelets out of any break-up of Yugoslavia.

The bourgeois restorationist government in Hungary has secretly sent arms to Croatia. It may harbour designs of re-uniting the half-million strong Hungarian minority in the Vojvodina with the fatherland, as well as restoring some sort of economic linkage to Croatia. As these two republics are the most developed parts of the Federation they would be a valuable acquisition for their neighbours.

Backward Serbia, with its large and militant working class as well as its Stalinist regime, is clearly much harder to handle. The EC powers do not want another poverty stricken claimant to EC membership and EC funds. A controllable flow of Yugoslav cheap labour to the factories of Germany and Italy in the boom years was one thing. A mass exodus of economic refugees in the present recession is quite another.

The EC and the CSEC have therefore rushed to mediate. Their objectives are to prevent a complete break up of the federation, to promote the weakening and eventual downfall of the Serbian republic's Stalinist regime and to strengthen the restorationist federal government of Ante Markovic.

We do not take as our starting point the preservation of the Yugoslav Federation as such. This federation is itself too narrow to resolve the national problems of the Balkan peoples. Its borders divide one and three-quarter million Albanians from their co-nationals in Albania. They divide one and one-third million Macedonians from their co-nationals in Greece and Bulgaria. They divide nearly half a million Hungarians from their fellow nationals.

Revolutionary communists from the early years of this century have seen the answer to the extreme national complexity and intermixing of the peoples of south-east Europe in the creation of a Federation of the Balkan Peoples.

National borders and customs posts crippled the already under-developed economies of the peninsular between the two wars. Stalinism was unable to over-

come this legacy of economic backwardness. It was also unable to overcome the legacy of national oppression.

At various times, and most recently in the period of the crisis of the regimes in Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, the Stalinist dictators deliberately inflamed the old national antagonisms.

Zhivkov persecuted the Turkish minority, Ceaucescu the Hungarians, Gypsies and Germans. In Yugoslavia, since 1987, Slobodan Milosevic has held on to power by inflaming first anti-Albanian chauvinism amongst the Serbs over the autonomous region of Kosovo, and then the historic antagonisms dating from the bloody "civil war" between Croats and Serbs which was a component of the 1939-45 war.

Yugoslav Stalinism is in its death agony. The Yugoslav League of Communists (YLC) has disintegrated and its rump, now named the Serbian Socialist Party, still maintains a semi-dictatorial hold on power in Belgrade. To preserve this power its leader, Slobodan Milosevic, has for three years mounted a campaign to "restore" Serbian dominance in the Federation, lost in his view, in 1974 when a new constitution created autonomous regions in the Vojvodina and in Kosovo.

In addition the Yugoslav army, dominated by a largely Serbian high command and officer corps, will only survive if the Yugoslav Federation holds together. That is why it is willing to use bloody means to ensure this. Any Yugoslav military dictatorship, any restoration of the Stalinist one party tyranny would not constitute a defence of the planned property relations which still exist in Serbia, albeit in a disintegrating condition.

To be sure, Milosevic has sought to preserve his hold on the working class by opposing rapid moves to denationalisation and the abolition of the "workers' self-management". This in turn has fuelled illusions in him by workers fearful of the economic disintegration that would be intensified by the secession of the Slovenes and the Croats.

But Milosevic is also committed to restoration. His only proviso is that a Serb dominated Yugoslavia must continue and that the Stalinist bureaucratic caste should hold onto a dominant share of power whilst it transforms itself into a part of the new capitalist class or into the political servants of this class.

Serbian workers are being dragged into a reactionary civil war, not in defence of the planned property relations but in defence of the parasitic bureaucracy. Only a political revolution against the SSP bureaucrats and the defeat of the bourgeois opposition (e.g. the Serbian Renewal Movement of Vuk Drascovic *et al*), only the support by the Serbian workers for the *right* of the oppressed nationalities to independence if they wish it, can be a basis for solving the enormous problems facing the proletariat.

Serbian chauvinism has in its turn fuelled Slovene and Croat separatism. The Slovenian and Croatian Stalinists have been swept from power by openly restorationist bourgeois nationalist governments that, as the elections showed, unfortunately have the the support of the great majority of their populations including their working classes.

The programmes of the governments of Milan Kucan and Franjo Tudjman will bring unemployment, poverty and social insecurity to the workers of Slovenia and Croatia. But they can hide this now, not only by the usual deceitful propaganda envisaging a rapid transition to the prosperity of an Italy or an Austria, but also by appearing as the only defenders of their peoples against a brutal Serbian dictatorship, whether Stalinist or bourgeois nationalist.

This latter claim is false in essence. They themselves have inflamed chauvinism by their blaming of all Yugoslavia's ills on the Serbs, whom they claim exploit them by taking "their" taxes to develop the backward parts of Yugoslavia. The Croatian nationalists have glorified reactionary "national heroes" like Ban Jelacic (leader of the pro-Habsburg counter-revolution in 1848) and the leaders of the Nazi puppet state of "independent Croatia".

In addition, the Croat militias have attacked and murdered Serbian villagers. This, in turn, has given another twist to the upward spiral of Serbian chauvinism.

The obstruction and then the military prevention of Croatia's and Slovenia's bid for independence has wounded, perhaps fatally, the hopes for a solution to the national question within the framework of the Yugoslav state. Only a rapid break of the working class from their Stalinist and bourgeois misleaders can save the fraternal union of the toilers and avoid either a bloody and reactionary civil war or an imperialist-restorationist imposed settlement.

What should be the key demands which constitute such a break?

- Imperialists, hands off Yugoslavia. No to an EC intervention. No sanctions or withholding loans to the Federation.
- Yugoslav Armed Forces out of Slovenia and out of all but the majority Serb enclaves of Croatia. For the withdrawal of all Croat militia from the Serbian regions of the Croat republic and the right of these regions (like the Krajna) to secede if they wish to. Fraternise with the Yugoslav armed forces; for workers' and soldiers' committees and the election of officers.
- For the right to self-determination of all nations, including the right to autonomy or participation in a free and equal federation with no privileges to one nationality.
- For the immediate recognition of the Slovene and Croat declarations of independence and the recognition of the independence of the Serbian majority areas within Croatia.
- For the maintenance of the planned property in Croatia and Slovenia, against the restoration plans and mass unemployment, for the defence of workers' ownership and control of the factories, for a new democratic workers' plan.
- Break with the bourgeois and Stalinist restorationists. For independent workers' militias to safeguard all minorities and full democratic rights to the workers and peasants. Down with the pogromists.
- For workers' council states in Slovenia, Croatia and all the republics.
- For a new voluntary federation between the republics as the first step to a socialist federation of the Balkans.

Centrism in its dotage:
The United Secretariat of the Fourth International 1980-1991

by Emile Gallet

Of all the international tendencies claiming to be "the" Fourth International (FI), the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) has the best claim on at least one score. All the other tendencies (the Lambertists, the Morenoites and the Healyites) are rooted in a national leadership that either left or was expelled from the FI during the period between 1951 and 1963. The USFI can claim an international leadership with a substantial continuity—at the level of personnel—with the young militants grouped around Michel Pablo who carried out the post-war reconstruction of the International.

But here the claim to continuity with Trotsky's Fourth International stops. For what is important in the question of revolutionary continuity is not some Marxist version of the apostolic succession. If that were so then the 13th World Congress held in February 1991 represents the "laying on of hands" and the passing of the symbols of office to a new generation of leaders who have come to the fore in the last ten years as the old team have died or retired.

But the tradition and the method they are inheriting is not Trotsky's. Rather, the method and politics of the USFI owe everything to the decisive degeneration into centrism that took place in the years between the second (1948) and third (1951) world congresses of the FI.

Through nearly four decades the USFI has zigzagged in opportunistic response to the twists and turns of the international class struggle. Travelling ever further from their origins the USFI and its predecessors, the International Secretariat and the Socialist Workers Party of the United States (SWP(US)), have revised and re-revised a centrist version of "Trotskyism" until it bears scarce any resemblance to the ideas and work of the founder of the movement.

Over the last eleven years the face of the USFI has changed dramatically. One of its major sections, the SWP(US), undertook repeated waves of expulsions, degenerated into neo-Stalinism and finally left the USFI. Once-strong sections in Britain and France shrank or fragmented. Fundamental tenets of revolutionary Marxism—notably on the nature of the state, permanent revolution and on the political revolution—were openly repudiated.

The question naturally arises then as to why, despite its centrist method, the USFI has been able to maintain itself for so long? Why has it not been forced by the major events of the international class struggle to cross over once and for all time into the camp of counter-revolutionary Stalinism, social democracy or some other bourgeois current within the workers' movement?

The answer lies in the USFI's marginalisation from most of these historic contests. Distanced from a leadership role the USFI has repeatedly been allowed to shuffle off responsibility for the political betrayals it has presided over: Bolivia 1952, Sri Lanka 1963, Portugal 1974, or Nicaragua or Iran 1979.

Eventually the disastrous consequences of one gross opportunist surrender after another to alien class forces becomes undeniable—leading to the loss of whole sections and the dispersal of generations of cadres. The USFI then makes a repentant—and excedingly brief—self-criticism and sets off to adapt to some other alien class force. Despite the continuous vacillations and the steady degeneration there remains the continuity of a specific and identifiable centrist method—an ossified centrism—that lies behind all the twists and turns. [1]

The FI degenerated into centrism between 1948 and 1951 due primarily to the world-wide expansion of Stalinism, to the bureaucratically imposed overturns in Eastern Europe, China etc. These historic events apparently refuted Trotsky's characterisation of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism as well as his perspectives and prognoses. But the essential confusion was not to be found in Trotsky's analyses but in the interpretation given to the post-war events by the Pablo-Mandel-Frank-Cannon leadership.

If "revolutions" could be made by Stalin, Tito or Mao then the FI and its programme were unneccessary at least for a whole "first stage" of the world revolution. This neatly explained the failure of the FI to become "the decisive force on the planet" as predicted by Trotsky at the onset of the Second World War.

At the 1951 Third World Congress the entire International adopted a centrist method. It consciously "re-armed" itself with the method of systematic political adaptation to currents within or orbiting Stalinism, petit bourgeois nationalism and social democracy. The fruits of this abandonment of the "old Trotskyism" (now stigmatised as sectarianism) were not long in coming.

From 1953 the International split, re-unified, split and split again as factional feuds erupted over which non-proletarian class force was to be given hallowed place on the altar of opportunism. This method has led to erroneous perspectives, faulty tactics and disastrous turns in every decade since then.[2]

1 See *The Death Agony of the Fourth International*, Workers Power/ Irish Workers Group (London 1983)

2 The first article in this series, dealing with the USFI between 1963 and 1974, appeared in *Trotskyist International* 2

The 1980s were no exception. Centrist error was piled on centrist error. From Nicaragua, through Poland to the USSR, the USFI's method has led directly to political and organisational collapse.

What is more, the decade ended with world historic events, the death agony of Stalinism, events that are finally undermining the states whose existence provided a pole star for the FI's centrist course. The disintegration of Stalinism in all its variants, including in Vietnam and Cuba, the collapse of petit bourgeois nationalism, including in Nicaragua, all deprive the USFI of credible "alternative, empirical unconscious" leaderships to follow.

In the years to come events will occur which will bring the USFI to the precipice, to the point where its forty year old "method" can lead it no further and where any continued identification with "Trotsky's mantle" will be seen as a dead weight. The events of the last ten years show an "International" that History is beckoning ominously with the words of decision: *"Hic Rhodus Hic salta!"*[3]

Nicaragua casts a long shadow

This relatively rapid decay began with the 1979 Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. Following an initial "sectarian" hesitation, the USFI made a typical capitulation to petit bourgeois nationalism. Abandoning any programme for a working class seizure of power, of a workers' and peasants' government and of course of a revolutionary party to lead this fight, they opted for supporting the Sandinista-dominated popular front government.

Since it would have been too embarrassing to publicly junk Trotsky's condemnation of support for popular fronts, they committed an even more bizarre revision of Marxism. They fell into a ferocious factional struggle over whether Nicaragua was (and still is) a healthy workers' state, or whether it was (up to Violetta Chamorro's victory at the polls) a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government. The theoretical implications of these positions were to fuel a series of faction fights which persist to this day and directly led to the SWP(US)'s final departure from the USFI.

What both sides had to come to terms with was the fact that this "workers' government" in all its transformations remained absolutely wedded to preserving Nicaraguan capitalism. Indeed, they were unable to deny this. Veteran USFI leader, Livio Maitan, wrote in 1985:

"Five years after the victory of 19 July, the bourgeoisie as a social class maintains a considerable force; it controls vital—not marginal or minority—sectors of the economy of the country as a whole."[4]

Nor have the results of this preservation of the capitalist economy been hard to see, even if the USFI were unable to foresee them. The workers at least know it from bitter experience. Again according to the USFI, real wages in Nicaragua were cut by 99% during the 1980s![5] Yet astoundingly the USFI has described this savage attack as "a tactic" which was "undoubtedly necessary".[6] This shameful support for anti-working class policies is the bitter fruit of the USFI's characterisation of Nicaragua as being a workers' state from 1979 onwards despite having maintained capitalist property relations for twelve years.

After a twelve year binge on Sandinism, after the "unforeseen" debacle of Daniel Ortega's presidential campaign in 1990, the USFI have suddenly become more critical of their former idols. As little as two years ago the Sandinistas were praised for improving on Lenin and Trotsky in their commitment to pluralism and bourgeois democracy. Today the USFI dare to point out the "grave errors committed in the course of its years in power", such as the FSLN's oppression of minorities, its bureaucratic control of the mass organisations, the IMF-inspired austerity programme and the adoption of bourgeois democracy[7]—precisely the kind of criticisms which the USFI previously stigmatised as hopelessly sectarian.

Yet even now the USFI continue to make pathetic excuses for the FSLN leaders. The 1991 13th World Congress absolved them of all blame. Soviets and workers' militias would perhaps have been better, our revolutionary tourists muse. But there is, after all, the great difficulty of how "to develop direct democracy . . . starting in the period of revolutionary euphoria."[8]

The FSLN's refusal to break with capitalism and their preparedness to make the masses pay for the crisis were due to the fact that the economic policy of the Sandinistas "was fundamentally due to the limits of the international situation".[9] The USFI's rejection of Trotsky's line on China (i.e. their rejection of the strategy of permanent revolution)[10] leads directly to the conclusion: "The Sandinista strategy for the taking of power was the only one possible in a country like Nicaragua."[11]

A final absurdity is that for the USFI, despite the bourgeois character of the Sandinistas' programme and policies, despite the uninterrupted existence of capitalism, despite the absence of workers' democracy, despite the savage austerity programme, despite even the coming to power of the Chamorro government, Nicaragua remains a workers' state! Why? Because the Sandinistas still control the army, therefore the "the revolutionary state has not been dismantled".[12]

Generalising from the experience of Nicaragua

The 11th World Congress of the USFI was held shortly after the FSLN came to power. Broad conclusions were difficult to draw for the strategy of party building at such close quarters; it was enough for the USFI to give their usual knee-jerk reaction of unconditional and uncritical support. But over the next few years the leadership of the USFI were given plenty of time to muse over the results and implications of the Nicaraguan revolution for their own strategy and tactics.

It has long been a defining hallmark of the USFI that its political perspectives were imbued with a passive optimism in the forward march of the international revolution. For the USFI the "Process of world revolution" seems to act like a disembodied demiurge or a force of nature. The 1969, 1974 and 1979 congresses—set against the genuine world wide revolutionary or militant class

3 "This is Rhodes, Now jump!"

4 *Quatrième Internationale* 16, March 1985, p53

5 *International Marxist Review* 5(1), Summer 1990, p34

6 *Inprecor* 291, 6.7.89, p5

7 *International Viewpoint* 206, 13.5.91, p19

8 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, pp93-4

9 Ibid, p95

10 *Quatrième Internationale* 15, November 1984

11 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p97

12 Ibid, p98

struggle events of that decade—were the most frenzied. The 11th (1979) Congress, for example, argued that "the revolution is once again knocking on the door of the imperialist mother countries".[13]

But by the May 1982 meeting of the International Executive Committee, Daniel Bensaïd argued that the time had come for a dose of realism: "We should set aside any type of Messianic megalomania, look reality squarely in the face, including our own reality, and patiently set ourselves to work."[14] What was to replace the hysteria of the 11th Congress perspectives, however, was a return to the 1974 10th Congress's analysis of a perpetual "recomposition of the world labour movement", coupled with yet another version of the USFI's objectivist and processist understanding of the "world revolution".

Bensaïd outlined the new orthodoxy within the USFI leadership. The perspective was only a slight retreat from that of the 11th Congress: "We now stand merely at the threshold of a new wave of radicalisation of international scope that will be incomparably deeper and more proletarian than that of the late 1960s"[15] he argued.

The revolution might no longer be "knocking on the door" but it seemed at least to be observed coming up the garden path. This required the usual heavy dose of impressionism and exaggeration:

"Now more than ever, we can see the dialectical unity of the world revolution verified on a day-to-day basis. There isn't a single major event of the international class struggle that doesn't set off an immediate chain reaction all the way to the antipodes."[16]

The objective basis for these apocalyptic perspectives was the Sandinista revolution. The USFI, having re-categorised Nicaragua as a workers' state, had also begun to ponder the consequences of the FSLN victory and the guerrilla war in El Salvador. Coupled with the retreat of the European working class under the hammer blows of the capitalist offensive and betrayals of the reformist leadership, the stage was set for a new "turn" in the USFI's perspectives, towards revolution in the "third world". This was effectively carried out at the 12th World Congress in 1985.

At first sight the Congress seemed to be learning some pretty fundamental lessons about the USFI's past errors of method. "Each major period in the life of the International has been dominated by a perspective of an overall breakthrough in the short or medium term".[17] Like an alcoholic claiming to have decisively kicked the booze, the USFI went on to argue that the "function and future of the Fourth International does not lie in any short-term miracle solution . . . The real perspective is a much longer and more complex process of reconstitution of a vanguard on an international level".[18]

But this apparent accession of modesty and realism was not what it seemed. Rather than marking a turn to building propaganda groups (which is what the sections of the International were and are) as the nuclei of future revolutionary parties, this "modesty" was the pretext for chasing after another replacement leadership.

As usual the USFI leadership saw their public sections and even the "Fourth International" itself as an obstacle to the recomposition of yet another new vanguard.

"At this very moment, the international development of the class struggle, the advances of the revolution, the establishment of new workers' states, are fostering a general trend towards a recomposition of the workers' movement and its vanguard. In this context, currents can emerge that no longer vacillate between reformism and revolution, but between revolutionary internationalism and the soviet bureaucracy; or in yet more complex fashion, between revolution, reformism, the Soviet bureaucracy and the Chinese bureaucracy."[19]

This analysis was composed of two parts. First, there was the usual objectivist optimism that can draw no balance sheet that includes defeats as well as victories:

"We stand now merely *at the beginning of profound and lasting transformations* in the workers' movement."[20]

Secondly, there is a clear targeting of "future Sandinistas in several countries"[21] and any other tendencies which could be claimed to be "recomposing". The Congress clearly expected other "Sandinistas" to emerge. The task of the USFI sections world-wide was to seek out these elements and urge them on to fulfil their destiny.

The way in which the USFI sought to orient to these tendencies was, of course, not the way that Trotsky sought to relate to a genuine leftward centrist current in 1933-36, which involved proposals for united actions, blocs aimed at outright fusion and in the case of mass parties, the entry tactic.

The 12th Congress claimed that the 1933 "Bloc of Four" proposal by Trotsky implied that "he did not envisage an International limited to revolutionary Marxists but a broader international of which they would be a decisive component."[22] The Congress theses on Party Building, claiming fidelity to Trotsky's line, stated:

"a rapprochement with other forces can take various forms, ranging from systematic united action to the establishment of stable liaison committees and unification. In cases of fusions with revolutionary organisations or mass leftward-moving currents, the united organisation's affiliation to the Fourth International should not constitute a principled precondition."[23]

But Trotsky's organisational flexibility was combined with an insistence on the clearest criticism of the centrist leaders and the most unremitting struggle for the programme. Above all, the objective—not hidden for one minute—was to build a new revolutionary communist international, the Fourth International.

The USFI's position heralded the complete opposite of Trotsky's practice. The clear signal was given to all the sections of the USFI:

"If you can fuse with another group, you should do so; the next international we want to build will be a bloc with the Sandinistas and their imitators, so forget about the FI for the next historic period."

The sections put the new turn into practice

The first section to take up the 12th Congress' advice and dissolve itself was the German GIM. At the beginning of 1985 they fused with the KPD, a group of ex-

13 "1979 World Congress of the Fourth International", Supplement to *Intercontinental Press*, January 1980, p39

14 *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* XVIII 6, September 1982, p33

15 Ibid, p26

16 Ibid, p30

17 "12th Congress of the Fourth International", Special Issue of *International Viewpoint*, p41

18 Ibid, p.42

19 Ibid, p37

20 Ibid, p40

21 Ibid, p38

22 Ibid, p43

23 Ibid, p40

24 *Quatrième Internationale* 22/23, pp117-131

25 *International Viewpoint* 210, 8.7.91, p22

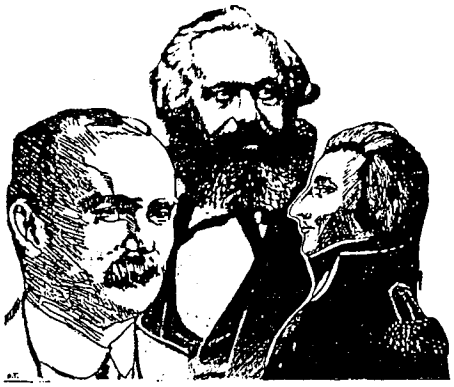
26 *International Viewpoint* 208, 10.6.91, p7

27 Ibid

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Maoists, to form the reformist VSP. The fusion programme not only left the question of the international unresolved, but also the nature of the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, the nature of the SPD and the Greens, revolutionary tactics in the trade unions, "socialism in one country" and the nature of the socialist revolution![24]

This fusion not only set a world record for unprincipled lash-ups, it was utterly self-defeating as a minimal basis for common action in Germany. This, of course, was far from being at the forefront of their minds. Their main concern was to orient to part of the "recomposing world labour movement". Unfortunately, the GIM was fusing, not with a recomposing new leadership, but a decomposing leftover of 1970s' Maoism. Thereafter it became a race to see which element could decompose the fastest.

In Peru, a similar tactic was carried out. But whilst the GIM was long past its prime the Peruvian section, the PRT, had been relatively strong. In 1978 Hugo Blanco, the internationally-known leader of the Peruvian section, had won over 9% of the votes in the presidential election. Despite this strong base, in 1985 the PRT was "formally" dissolved into the left-reformist PUM. Soon it became clear that there was nothing formal about it. The Peruvian section simply ceased to exist.

Entry into the PUM soon drove the old PRT leaders into ever more opportunist positions. The PUM called for a vote for the reactionary neo-liberal bourgeois candidate, Fujimori, in the 1990 Peruvian presidential elections. The excuse was that the masses had illusions that reactionary Fujimori was "better" than the reactionary Mario Vargas Llosa.

The USFI has never criticised its supporters for this line. The 1991 World Congress passed over it in silence. Even faced with the ferocity of Fujimori's austerity attacks, the most the USFI supporters in Peru have been able to muster is to mumble about the "confusions" caused by calling for a vote for Fujimori.[25] Hugo Blanco, elected a senator with only 0.2% of the vote, is, however, quite unrepentant for advising the Peruvian workers and peasants to vote for a bourgeois candidate. This despite the fact that, as he freely admits, "Fujimori is of course following the same programme as Vargas Llosa".[26] He blithely says of this betrayal "I still believe it was not a mistake"[27] for the bizarre reason that because the masses now feel deceived by Fujimori they are fighting harder than if the Thatcherite novelist had been elected!

Never mind the duty of revolutionaries to say what is, to warn the masses in advance so that later at least their vanguard will say: this party warned us, it did not share our foolish illusions, it knew how to hold to a class line.

Opportunism in relation to bourgeois figures has been a regular feature of the USFI's policies, from Péron in Argentina and Ben Bella in Algeria onwards. Most recently the jewel in the USFI's Latin American crown, the Mexican PRT has followed this well trodden path. The object of its attention is Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, a radical bourgeois who split from the ruling PRI. His programme was a return to pure populist nationalism.

Without openly supporting Cardenas the PRT began to imitate his politics.

Rosalia Pereo-Aguilar, one of the PRT's public figureheads and deputies, argued in parliament before Cardenas split:

"To make this country progress another road needs to be taken, a national, popular and democratic road which enables the needs of the workers to be satisfied and the sovereignty of the country to be defended against foreign aggression."[28]

The PRT's policy was described by another of its leaders as "building political fronts with other forces in order to put pressure on the bourgeois nationalists".[29]

Cardenas ran the PRI candidate a close second in the presidential elections of July 1989. A minority of the PRT, under veteran Mexican Trotskyist Adolfo Gilly, dissatisfied with the party's decision to stand an independent candidate, split from the PRT to support Cardenas. The PRT—whose politics were not so distinct from those of Cardenas—got the worst of both worlds and saw its vote slump to 0.38% according to the official figures and 1.5% according to its own, thus losing its parliamentary representation.

For the PRT there is no question of building working class and poor peasant resistance to the policies of the bourgeois nationalists. Rather the leaders of the bourgeoisie have to be "pressured". Since the elections the PRT's opportunism has been refined—or rather reduced—to the simple class-collaborationist project of establishing "a privileged alliance" with Cardenas' PRD.[30] Having lost a number of members to Cardenas, the PRT is coming back for more.

At the 13th Congress this line was codified in a set of theses on Latin America. The Congress considered that "the revolutionary left neglected the struggle for democracy and the defence of the oppressed nation".[31] The key lesson to be learned, say the USFI, is the importance of "the people"—a sociological characterisation based on wealth criteria, without any explicit class content—and the strategy of "forming political fronts" which are "the basic instrument in the fight for hegemony in possible alliances or in society. They have a function that is not just conjunctural, but long-lasting".[32]

The political basis of such organisations, and the objectives that justify their inevitable longevity, are left unstated. Are they united fronts, or blocs for common propaganda? Are they crypto parties or some amorphous combination of all of these? The only thing that can be guaranteed is that they are a pretext for not building *parties* on a clear programme.

Between the 12th and 13th Congresses the trickle of unprincipled fusions and pacts became a flood as USFI sections around the globe rushed to dissolve themselves in any nationalist, reformist or right centrist organisation that would have them

- In Colombia, the section disappeared without trace into a vague reformist front, A Luchar.
- In Italy the LCR entered Democrazia Proletaria (DP), only three years after having refused to do so on programmatic grounds. DP has itself recently decided to join the MRC, formed by ex-PCI members who refused to go along with the social democratisation of the party.
- In Britain the USFI's supporters split into two camps over which section of the Labour left should be adapted to. John Ross's *Socialist Action* merged with the Livingstone-ites, whilst *Socialist Outlook* became the foot-soldiers for Tony Benn. Both sections refused to countenance a sharp criticism of the "left" trade union bureaucrats in the 1980s as they searched for ways in which to "recompose" the vanguard.
- In the Basque country, the LKI fused with the nationalist MKE on the basis of a completely opportunist position on the national question.[33]
- Corsican members of the French LCR fused with a Corsican nationalist group in the middle of 1991, leaving their USFI membership behind them.
- The Bolivian POR-Gonzales effectively collapsed having participated in Lechin's DRU slate in the elections to the COB trade union federation in 1985. Lechin, a nationalist reformist bureaucrat, was in turn an ardent supporter of the reactionary MNR coalition.
- In Switzerland the PSO participated in a "Socialist Green Alternative" slate during the November 1990 elections. One of the PSO leaders, Hanspeter Uster, was elected Minister of Justice and Police in the Canton of Zug, south of Zurich!

The fusion manoeuvres did not always succeed. Where the sections failed to fuse, the results have been as telling as in the so-called "successes":

- In France the LCR did its best to fuse with the ex-Communist Party members around Pierre Juquin. Despite a long series of flattering articles and resolutions, and the LCR doing a great deal of leg-work for Juquin in the May 1988 presidential election campaign, Juquin turned down their overtures, having first recruited a number of LCR members.
- In Belgium, the PTB proposed fusion with a Maoist organisation which claimed that Trotskyism was counter-revolutionary! The Maoists turned out to be more principled than the USFI and refused to go along with this opportunist proposition.

In other areas of the world where the USFI did not have sections and where it decided there were already actual or potential "Sandinistas", no attempt was made to bring together an open revolutionary nucleus.

- In South Africa the USFI was unable to make up its mind as to where the "leftward moving current" was to come from. Initially pinning its hopes on AZAPO and the National Forum, by February 1986 the IEC decided that the National Forum had lost out in its struggle for the hegemony of the mass movement. Although the IEC resolution mentioned—once!—the need for a revolutionary party in South Africa,[34] the key question for the USFI—as in the USSR today—was that of pressurising the mass leadership. The inevitable conclusion was drawn less than a year later when the IEC stated that "the organisations of the Fourth International should everywhere try to particularly develop their links with the ANC".[35]
- In the Philippines, the USFI refused to try and build a section and advised revolutionaries to tail the Cory Aquino bourgeois leadership, arguing in favour of passive support for Aquino in the presidential elections in order "to avoid at all costs breaking the unity of the struggle against Marcos".[36]
- In Sri Lanka this class-collaborationist "anti-impe-

28 *Inprecor* 238, 16.3.87, p18

29 *International Viewpoint* 157, 20.2.89, p13

30 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p100

31 Ibid, p86

32 Ibid, p87

33 *International Marxist Review* 5(1), 1990, pp113-122

34 *International Marxist Review* 2(1), p56

35 *Inprecor* 247, 13.7.87, p22

36 *International Marxist Review* 2(4), p105

rialist" electoral line has also been applied. The NSSP, having broken its links with the British Militant Tendency, was accepted as a sympathising section at the 1991 13th World Congress, despite its collaboration with the reactionary Bandaranaike.

In the words of Salah Jaber, who gave a report on the NSSP to the Congress:

"The NSSP . . . publicly accepted to support Madame Bandaranaike as the common opposition candidate in case of elections, but with a separate platform presented by a candidate of their party (the NSSP), who they would, however, not call to vote for."[37]

Jaber continued, somewhat disingenuously: "In the specific conditions of the island, the broad masses might possibly not see this as a tactical question".[38] Indeed! The NSSP's position—still not publicly disavowed by the USFI—was a betrayal of the struggles of the workers' and peasants' of Sri Lanka, to say nothing of the national struggle of the Tamils, all of whom have been subject to bloody repression by the Bandaranaike government. Their "tactic" of presenting a fake candidate was nothing more than a fig-leaf to hide their reformist positions.

37 *La Vérité – The Truth* 2, May 1991, p50

38 Ibid

39 See *Trotskyist International* 4

Political revolution in Poland

The 1980s began and ended in major upheavals in the Stalinist states. The political revolutionary crisis which wracked Poland in 1980-81 was a dress rehearsal for the tumultuous events of 1989-90. An acute crisis of the bureaucratically planned economy led to mass workers' struggles against Stalinist dictatorship. For the first time an independent trade union movement, Solidarnosc, won legal recognition. Embryonic workers' councils came into existence.[39]

The question of leadership was posed particularly acutely. The Walesa leadership of Solidarnosc adopted



Martial law crackdown in poland, December 1981

a programme that envisaged a "reformist" road to the restoration of capitalism. The working class as a whole, however, was far from united behind the Walesa leadership's programme, and the potential for a struggle for political power for the working class remained until the day that Jaruzelski's tanks crushed the movement in December 1981.

The USFI, as was to be expected, quickly rolled up and stowed away the banner of political revolution. Not a word was spoken of the need to build a revolutionary Trotskyist party to lead the anti-bureaucratic revolution. Instead the latest "blunt instrument" of the world revolution was none other than the Walesa leadership and its programme. Criticism of Walesa was muffled in the extreme.

Instead of orienting towards the proto-soviet organs of struggle, fighting to develop them into instruments of the struggle for power the USFI leadership tailed the parliamentarism of the Solidarnosc leaders who argued for a second chamber parliamentary chamber (the Sejm), trying to render it more profound by arguing "for the centralisation and development of workers' committees and their national representatives in a second chamber of producers."[40]

The first chamber would be elected by "normal" bourgeois means. Borrowing this "combination" of workers' and bourgeois democracy from the right centrists of the early 1920s, they touted it as a "transition" to workers' council democracy. In fact, as the experience of Germany after the 1918-19 revolution or the Polish workers' councils of 1956 showed, any workers' councils that allowed themselves to be thus neutered would be doomed to disappear in short order

The atomised indirect democracy of bourgeois parliaments which enforces passivity on the workers maximises the dead weight of the peasantry and the "middle class". It allows the executive and the state bureaucracy to act systematically against the interests of the producers. In short, it is no neutral organ. It is, even in the absence of a bourgeoisie and of capitalist property relations, a bourgeois instrument, one aimed against the proletarian dictatorship.

The Stalinists used these fake and ornamental parliaments to replace workers' soviets and to disguise, however ineffectively, the dictatorship of the party of the bureaucracy over the workers. The triumph of real parliamentary democracy over the bureaucratic dictatorship will in its turn be a diversion and a disguise for the triumph of political forces intent on rapid restoration.

To advocate or support bourgeois parliamentarism is a terrible betrayal of the programme of political revolution. Workers' councils, of which Poland and Hungary have direct experience, should have been the centre of revolutionary agitation and propaganda. We make no apology for saying that, far from combining bourgeois and proletarian democracy, Trotskyists should have counterposed the latter to the former. This was not simply or mainly a propaganda task but a task of concentrating on winning the inter-factory committees to an action programme for conquering power and using it to solve Poland's economic crisis by a democratically worked out plan.

After Jaruzelski's coup a series of debates broke out inside the prison camps, in exile and in clandestinity, as the Polish left struggled to learn the lessons of Solidarnosc's failure. Supporters of the USFI played a key role in trying to assemble the nucleus of a new organisation in Poland. But already they were looking for another replacement leadership to tail. This time a key component was the openly counter-revolutionary WSN (Liberty Justice Independence) led by Jacek Kuron. This organisation was formed after the dissolution of the KSS-KOR in October 1981, and clearly favoured parliamentary democracy and the restoration of the market as an integral part of the future Polish revolution.

The USFI refused to characterise the WSN as seeking the restoration of capitalism, and trimmed to Kuron by arguing that "in no way does the character of the property of the means of production flow from the system of parliamentary democracy".[41] Pure sophistry! It may not flow from parliamentary institutions, but parliamentary democracy is a mighty instrument for bringing it into existence! Kuron, whilst undoubtedly grateful for the left cover given to him by the USFI, had bigger fish to fry, and he increasingly rejected even the fig-leaf of "socialist" rhetoric.

Paralysis and adaptation faced with Gorbachev

Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* seem to have caught the USFI off guard. Their first programmatic statement came at an IEC in 1987,[42] over two years after Gorbachev came to power. However, as a precaution against the possibility that the Soviet Bonaparte might prove to be an empirical agency of Trotsky's programme, they shuffled away from any mention either of the political revolution or of the need for building a section in the USSR to fight for it.

Instead, the IEC advanced a programme for "deep *glasnost*", as USFI Soviet expert Catharine Samary put it. This combined a series of basic democratic demands (abolition of censorship, freedom of political prisoners, right to strike, etc) with a maximum and abstract call for "generalised workers' control over all economic activities"[43] which as usual left out that little question of workers' councils, something that the deluded Trotsky thought was the keystone of the *Transitional Programme*.

As in the previous crises of the 1950s to the 1970s the USFI sought instead to pressurise the reforming wing of the bureaucracy. For the USFI, "political revolution" (on the few occasions they dare to speak its name) is simply a description of mass involvement in reform, not the seizure of power by the workers. When "forms of self-organisation" are mentioned, it is as vehicles for propelling the bureaucracy towards radical reform, not as embryonic organs of political revolution.

Four years on Gorbachev is totally discredited in the eyes of the masses. Moreover he stands exposed as the chief usher on the door that leads to capitalist restoration in the USSR. In the light of this the 13th Congress finally dared to raise the "perspective" of creating sections of the USFI in the USSR. But they still see this as happening through developments inside the CPSU:

"The CPSU remains a composite organisation which must certainly explode and disappear as an instrument

40 "12th Congress of the Fourth International", op cit, p55

41 *Quatrième Internationale*, January 1984, p44

42 *International Marxist Review* 2(4), Winter 1987

43 Ibid, p43

of the bureaucracy so that a real workers' party can be built."[44]

The crisis of Stalinism in Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe during the events of 1990 the USFI were not only completely unable to offer an action programme for the political revolution: they actually hailed the coming to power of the social counter-revolutionary forces.

When the Mazowiecki government was formed in Poland in August 1989, Zbigniew Kowalewski, a Polish USFI member who passed for a "left" at the time, hailed this development as "a new step on the road of the anti-bureaucratic political revolution"[45] and, in what was to become a refrain for the USFI over the next two years, called for "the formation of a Solidarnosc government without bureaucrats, for immediate free elections and for the convocation of a constituent assembly". [46]

Not a word was said about the profound changes which had taken place between the foundation of Solidarnosc the mass independent trade union in 1980 and the creation of Solidarnosc the political party which effectively won the election in 1989. Indeed, Kowalewski insisted that no such change had occurred.

The USFI did not consider what such a Solidarnosc government would mean for the Polish masses, nor the problems of limiting their programme to the call for a constituent assembly. History, however, played them a cruel trick. Their programme was realised! The results can be seen today as the last vestiges of planning are demolished and capitalism prepares to reign in Poland for the first time in over forty years.

Three months later, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, USFI leader Ernest Mandel scuttled any notion of workers' councils or proletarian political revolution in the DDR:

"The objective of free elections for a parliamentary-type institution is completely correct. It deserves the support of all revolutionary socialists who are not completely blinded by sectarian dogmatism."[47]

Substantial illusions in bourgeois democracy clearly exist amongst the masses in the degenerate workers' states. Following decades of brutal and stultifying Stalinist dictatorship, this is hardly surprising. The key question, however, is how to break those illusions. For the USFI, the only solution is to reinforce them! It was in fact possible to challenge these illusions, and using the transitional method, open the road to political revolution.

The LRCI did just this when in November 1989 we argued:

"In reality parliamentary elections have an unlimited ability to deceive the masses . . . The working class can and should start the process of 'free elections' for itself by electing factory committees, town and city workers' councils. In these elections there should be freedom of parties, programmes and platforms so that workers can decide which parties they recognise as their own. If, however, the bureaucracy is obliged to call parliamentary elections then we call for the workers to call prior mass meetings to select their candidates and to hear the candidates of all parties. The workers should demand annual elections and deputies who are recallable by their constituents. They should demand of all candidates a pledge to defend statified and planned property. By these means the fraud of bourgeois parliamentarism can be exposed, its dangers minimised and the principles of a system of workers' councils fought for."[48]

Another striking example of the USFI's opportunism during the anti-bureaucratic movements of 1989-90 was displayed in Czechoslovakia. Following the 1968 Soviet invasion, leading USFI member Petr Uhl had repeatedly been persecuted and jailed by the Stalinists for his refusal to bow before bureaucratic rule. He had enormous prestige as an oppositionist.

But despite his undoubted personal courage Uhl showed himself incapable of steering any course for political revolution. In the autumn of 1989 he was a founder member of the Left Alternative, soon to be swallowed up by the bourgeois Citizen's Forum. The Left Alternative put forward a reformist programme for . . . the restoration of capitalism! It argued:

"We consider that the development of the market, that is the rehabilitation of financial and market relations, is an economic necessity."[49]

The political form which would correspond to these relations of production was also pretty unvarnished:

"We consider that representative democracy should form the basis of a future democratic system; it should be of a parliamentary type."[50]

The danger signals had long been there for those who cared to see them. Petr Uhl's "Trotskyism" was never particularly strong. At the beginning of the 1980s he published a book in which he clearly distanced himself from the politics of the Bolsheviks[51] and scotched all talk of organising a Leninist party in favour of "an ideological grouping of intellectuals which would better defend the interests of the workers",[52] and opposing all attempts to build a clandestine organisation.[53]

It is therefore hardly surprising that Uhl—still a leading member of the USFI!—went on to become the spokesperson of the restorationist Havel government, as director of the official CTK Press Agency.

At the same time as vouching for the harmlessness of bourgeois parliamentary forms in the degenerate workers' states, the USFI severely under-played the danger of restoration throughout 1989 and the early part of 1990. Ernest Mandel, once again playing the role of Karl Kautsky, the eternal optimist, blithely declared in April 1989:

"The European bourgeoisie does not look favourably on this destabilisation. It has no hope of recovering Eastern Europe for capitalism."[54]

In October 1989 leaders of the French section insisted that it was necessary to "put aside the idea that at stake in the current developments in these countries is the restoration of capitalism".[55] Mandel again repeated the same line: "The main question in the political struggles underway is not the restoration of capitalism."[56]

The refusal to recognise this palpable danger flowed from the whole adaptationist history of the USFI. First, there was the idea that the degenerated workers' states were a superior transitional mode of production that

44 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p71

45 *Rouge*, 31.8.89, p3

46 Ibid

47 "Quand le stalinisme s'écroule", 7.12.89, *supplément Inprecor*, December 1989

48 *Trotskyist International* 4, p28

49 *Inprecor*, 11.12.89, p7

50 Ibid

51 P Uhl, *Le socialisme emprisonné* (Paris 1980), p83

52 Ibid, p35

53 Ibid, p37

54 *International Viewpoint* 160, p12

55 *Critique Communiste* 89, p8

56 *International Viewpoint* 172, 30.10.89

could not be overturned by a more primitive one—capitalism. Though this theme had been down-played in the 1980s it clearly played a role in bolstering Mandel's congenital passive optimism. Secondly, there was Mandel's faith in pluralism and in the neutrality of democracy. Thirdly, there was the commitment to the various dissident alternative leaderships whose pro-capitalist views were seen as little more than personal foibles.

The restoration of capitalism in the GDR must have been a very rude awakening for these centrist sleepwalkers!

Perspectives for Eastern Europe—and for the USFI

The failure of the crisis of Stalinism to immediately give rise to a viable socialist alternative has posed revolutionaries with a major dilemma. Is the current situation the opening of a new period? Does it represent a temporary setback or a major defeat on the road to socialist revolution?

At previous turning points in the international class struggle the USFI announced the impending victory of the socialist revolution; today it foresees a major period of reaction. The fundamental analysis advanced at the 13th World Congress was that "The era when the international workers' movement situated itself in relation to the victory or degeneration of the Russian Revolution is coming to an end".[57]

In explaining this position and detailing how "to make the socialist project attractive and credible",[58] the USFI shows how far they accept the bourgeois argument that Bolshevism led inevitably to Stalinism, and have adapted to the anarchistic and social democratic prejudices amongst intellectuals in the workers' states, junking all favourable references to the Bolshevik project.

The Congress claimed that a qualitatively new situation has arisen, one which the revolutionary programmes of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky were not designed to meet:

"The desire to decide consciously on one's fate has become the characteristic feature common to popular movements . . . Increasingly complex societies cannot be managed by a system of economic centralisation . . . Generalised self-management is taking shape as the socialist alternative to Stalinism . . . a decentralised mode of regulation."[59]

Despite the USFI's obsession with the "newness" of all this, it is the very stuff of revolutionary politics and has been for 150 years. Of course, the masses wish to control their own lives—both at the political and economic level. That is precisely the driving force in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. It is the lesson of the Bolshevik Revolution. It runs through every line of Trotsky's writings.

The workers' and poor peasants' councils of 1917, and the subsequent preliminary attempts at national, co-ordinated planning, represent the real "socialist alternative to Stalinism". The USFI's version of this alternative is a catalogue of petit bourgeois prejudices relating to individual "liberty" and individual production, a recipe for the total dislocation of the economy of any workers' state so foolish as to attempt to put it into practice.

The USFI gives us the reason for this retreat into pseudo-scientific socialism, redolent of Proudhonist co-operatives:

"The impasse of reformist policies in the capitalist countries and the bankruptcy of the bureaucratic system result in doubt being cast on any socialist project . . . it puts a brake on this social energy being crystalised around a new revolutionary project of social transformation and weighs heavily on the development of class-consciousness."[60]

Or, more poetically, "Memory and hope must be rebuilt".[61]

The collapse of Stalinism and its failure to be replaced by a revolutionary socialist alternative has undoubtedly demoralised certain sections of the international working class, notably those in capitalist countries with once-strong Stalinist parties. But the situation is not entirely negative. Far from it.

From the very outset, the Trotskyists were those who argued that Stalinism did not represent a new social class, that despite its brutal dictatorship it would inevitably collapse, shaking the world order to its foundations. The decline of what Trotsky termed "the syphilis of the labour movement" represents a tremendous opening for revolutionary Marxists. The new democratic liberties in Eastern Europe provide us with opportunities which would have been dismissed as fantasy a mere two years ago. The collapse of Stalinist police dictatorship gives us a freedom to intervene which should be a source of enthusiasm, not pessimism, amongst revolutionaries.

Stalinist fellow-travellers, wilfully blind to the bureaucratic horrors of life in the degenerate workers' states, are most shocked by the current situation. So too are the USFI, whose systematic adaptation to Stalinism in Eastern Europe and elsewhere extends back to the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International itself in the period 1948-51. The demoralised centrists of the USFI are like hung-over revellers, paying the price for their excesses of the night before. And like all such penitents, they clutch their heads and say "Never again!"

Not everything in the East European garden is rosy. The temporary ideological triumph of the west means that hard political battles will have to be fought, within what remains of the degenerate workers' states and without. But to win such battles the starting point must be to keep a firm grip on our main political weapons—political revolution through revolutionary workers' democracy, democratic planning, the centrality of the revolutionary party. In every respect the USFI are junking "the old Bolshevism". The feeble "combat" they will engage in is doomed to failure. They are preparing their own future defeats.

The SWP(US): from gangrene to self-amputation

The degeneration of the 1980s within the majority of the USFI was bound to have consequences in two directions. On the one hand, the most rightist elements would draw the conclusion that there was little point in

57 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p18

58 Ibid

59 Ibid, pp18-19

60 Ibid, p20

61 Ibid, p23

staying within the "Fourth International" with these politics. On the other hand, the pace and scope of the degeneration was inevitable going to spawn some oppositional disquiet. The best example of the former development was provided by the SWP(US).

Throughout the 1970s the USFI was marked by a long and bitter faction fight between the International Majority Tendency (Mandel *et al*) on the one hand, and the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction (SWP(US)) on the other.[62] All this was par for the course in the internal life of the international.

At the beginning of the 1980s, however, a qualitative change occurred in the relations with the SWP. The relatively new Barnes-Waters-Jenness leadership, which replaced the old Hansen-Novack team in the mid-70s was deeply affected by the Sandinista revolution. Possessed by the perspective of actually forming an international organisation with the Castroite and Sandinista "revolutionary leadership", they began to make a series of ever deeper political adaptations to Stalinism which were to make them break first with the ideological remnants of their Trotskyism and after some years of cold split to sever all relations with the USFI.

In August 1980 the SWP's Educational Conference in Oberlin, Ohio, centred on the need to orient to the Cuban CP, the FSLN and the Grenadan New Jewel Movement. As Jack Barnes put it in March 1982:

"A glorious new chapter in the socialist revolution opened . . . This, of course, was quite a help to us. How could the extensions of the socialist revolution under revolutionary leaderships be otherwise!"[63]

Over the next decade no praise was too fulsome to be heaped on the heads of Castro, the FSLN and Maurice Bishop. Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks were unfavourably compared with these new heroes. Their long winded and tedious meanderings to captive audiences in the plazas of Cuba and Managua were reproduced in full in the SWP's press. The baggage of formal Trotskyist positions, and indeed the very name, were an impediment to closer relations with a Castro or a Tomas Borge.

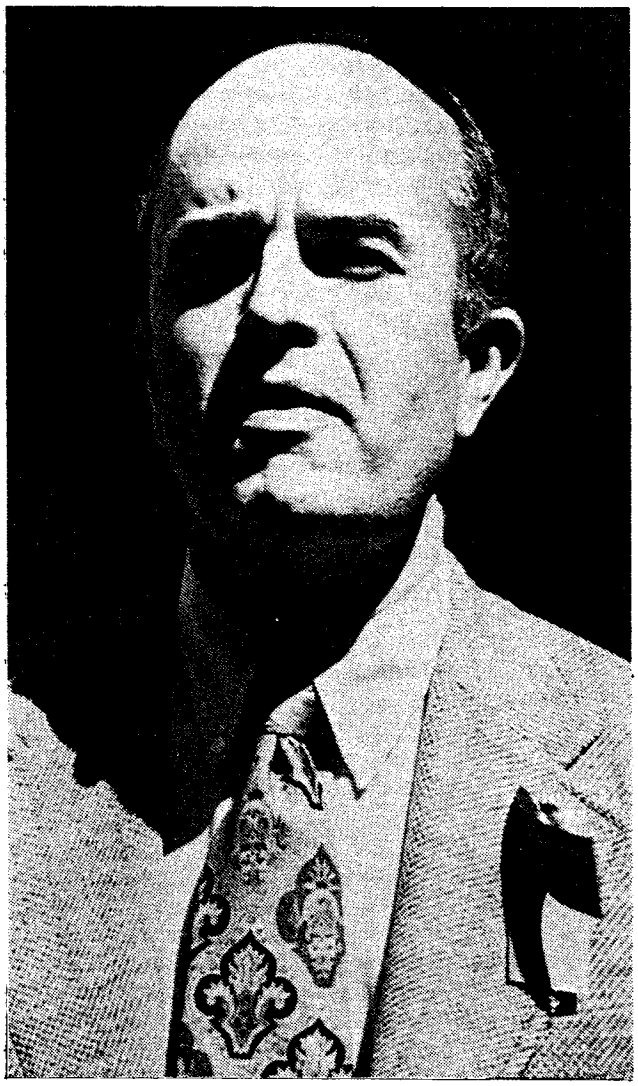
By 1983 Barnes argued:

"Permanent revolution does not contribute today to arming either ourselves or other revolutionists to lead the working class and its allies to take power . . . it is an obstacle to reknitting our political continuity with Marx, Engels, Lenin and the first four congresses of the Communist International."[64]

This embracing of Stalinism was described by Barnes as "coming out of more than twenty-five years of semi-sectarian existence".[65]

Between 1982 and 1985 a series of polemical articles were exchanged between the SWP and the European leadership over the question of permanent revolution, the nature of the Bolshevik revolution and the relationship between Lenin's programme and that of Trotsky. From the outset the SWP argued that the October 1917 revolution heralded "a workers' and farmers' government" which presided over capitalist property relations.[66]

This reborn "stageist" theory of revolution was rapidly put to the concrete test of the class struggle in the shape of the South African revolution. Here the SWP



Jack Barnes led the SWP(US) into the arms of Stalinism

firmly allied themselves with the Stalinist ANC's perspective of a democratic stage, rejecting all question of a socialist revolution. Even as early as 1981 the SWP had aped Castro by refusing to participate in demonstrations against the crushing of Solidarnosc by Jaruzelski's coup.[67]

This shift to the right went hand in hand with a wave of purges. Between 1982 and 1984 veteran members of the SWP, unable to swallow this rubbishing of the entire history of the party, were expelled. At the same time the SWP effectively withdrew from all leading bodies of the USFI, which it described as "an ultraleft sect" led by "a secret faction",[68] denied the USFI access to minutes of all its leading committees,[69] and with astonishing impudence stated:

"The concept of an International made up of parties that will take orders from 'higher bodies' is alien to everything the Fourth International has ever stood for."[70]

This assertion, scandalous as far as Trotsky's Fourth International or Lenin's Communist International were concerned, is all too true of the SWP in the post-1953 period. In fact it was in essence the real reason for Can-

62 See *Trotskyist International* 2

63 *SWP Internal Information Bulletin*, September 1982, p3

64 *New International* 1(1), p13

65 *SWP Internal Information Bulletin*, September 1982, p2

66 *International Socialist Review*, June 1982

67 *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* XVIII, April 1982, p25

68 *SWP Information Bulletin* 6, October 1984, p23

69 Ibid, p38

70 Ibid, p23

non's split in that year, and it was a pre-condition of reunification in 1963.

The USFI leadership's response, far from insisting on the necessity and purpose of democratic centralism in an International, emphasised the federal nature of the USFI and pleaded pathetically that there was no question of the international leadership "laying down a line".[71] When the SWP bureaucratically expelled majority supporters, the USFI congress limited itself to impotent calls for their re-admittance and to recognising three-and-a-half USFI groups in the USA![72]

Even on the question of permanent revolution, the USFI were incapable of mounting an effective defence. Although Mandel could repeat Trotsky's analysis of the October revolution, his understanding of permanent revolution is that of the weakest side of the pre-1917 Trotsky. The latter's error on the nature and centrality of the party in the pre-war period was not merely an organisational question, but affected his spontaneist, objectivist first formulation of theory: "No matter under what political flag the proletariat has come to power" Trotsky wrote in *Results and Prospects* (1906) "it is obliged to take the path of socialist policy . . . The barrier between the minimum and maximum programme disappears immediately the proletariat comes to power".[73]

Of course Trotsky thought this was a question of the masses correcting their own revolutionary party, rather as Rosa Luxemburg thought the SPD could be corrected. Both of them saw Lenin as a sectarian, and his splits and factional struggles as an example of Russian backwardness. To rely heavily on the 1906 formulations rather than on those of his 1928 work *Permanent Revolution*, is in its own way as shady a method as the SWP's use of the pre-October Lenin. The weak formulations of *Results and Prospects* have been repeatedly stretched by Mandel and co to "explain" how Tito, Mao and Castro were obliged to become "unconscious revolutionaries" by the objective logic of the permanent revolution.

Although the political break between the USFI and the SWP(US) was codified by the mid-1980s, it was not consummated at the organisational level until June 1990.[74] This is very different from the Australian SWP, whose degeneration into pro-Soviet Stalinism was more rapid, and whose departure from the USFI in 1985 more explosive. The reason for the SWP(US)'s relations with the USFI decaying rather than being sharply broken off is to be found in the balance of forces within the SWP leadership. Important sections of the leadership, such as Malik Miah and Barry Sheppard, accepted theoretical revisions but insisted on retaining the link with the USFI. It was only once these elements had been driven out that the final split could take place.

The political and organisational collapse of the SWP into Stalinist policies and practices shows that despite the relative longevity of the USFI's ossified centrism it is not possessed of eternal life. Sooner rather than later, without a revolutionary programme, without a healthy, international democratic centralist regime, it will collapse either into an openly anti-Trotskyist form of right centrism or into some variant of left reformism.

Can the new oppositions save the USFI?

The impasse of the USFI, coupled with crises within key sections, led to the emergence of new opposition groupings which challenged the majority line on one question or another at the 13th Congress.

The three oppositions—the Tendency for Building the Fourth International (TBFI) led by Matti in France, Socialist Action (US) and the Left Tendency led by Franco Grisolia in the Italian section—all restrained their opposition to the level of building tendencies. None of them was prepared to declare a faction—which would imply a struggle, not against this or that policy, but against the whole political method of the leadership and attempt to replace it. Still less did they dare to openly characterise the leadership as centrist.

The largest of these, the long standing Matti grouping, insisted that it did not even consider the leadership to be "opportunist"[75] and dissolved itself as an international tendency at the IEC meeting immediately following the Congress.

Such tendencies are little more than implements for winning positions for clique leaders. Factional struggle, which Trotsky considered a necessary *evil* even when it was over principled questions, has been converted into essential mode of political existence for these characters.

All three oppositions were united in their criticism of the majority with regard to party building. The USFI majority has always been in doubt as to the "Fourth International's" historic *raison d'être*. Even less are they committed to the existence of its sections. Faced with an empirically revolutionary force they have repeatedly demolished the obstacle that a USFI section might pose to "fusing with the mass movement". This policy goes back to the FI's centrist adaptation to Stalinism in Yugoslavia after 1948, and has been repeated in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and Nicaragua etc.

In 1979 the international opposition led by Nahuel Moreno made the question of "building sections in every country" one of the key planks of its platform. This refrain has been taken up by all subsequent opposition groupings, most recently with regard to the USSR. Following the Gorbachev reforms and the opening up of political debate in the USSR, the USFI majority, especially the East European cell led by Sandor and Verla, argued against trying to build a section of the USFI in the USSR. This was to open the way to amalgamation with "opposition" tendencies within the CPSU (a policy still being ardently pursued to this day with regard to Buzgalin's "Marxist Platform") plus a marked reluctance to raise the slogan of political revolution.

This opportunist blemish was a tempting target for the three opposition tendencies, all of which, from 1989 onwards, responded by calling for the building of sections of the USFI in every country. Left at a purely organisational level this criticism is utterly toothless. The majority can say that they are approaching this task by tactical compromises (entrism etc) practiced by Trotsky.

Unless you point to what programmatic surrenders

71 "12th Congress of the Fourth International", op cit, p48

72 The SWP, the Fourth International Tendency, Socialist Action and the FI Caucus of "Solidarity"

73 L D Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (New York 1950), p101

74 *International Viewpoint* 189, 16.7.90

75 Declaration of 2.3.90, *International Discussion Bulletin* 2



Has German unification been good for millions of "short term" (meaning unemployed) workers like these?

are being made in the name of this misnamed tactic then to harp on about the need for sections appears the merest organisational fetishism. Since these oppositions have no deep rooted objection to the method of the USFI, once the musical chairs of a World Congress is over for another five years, they can all carry on as before.

Worse, they can be outflanked by the leadership deciding to call for the building of a section. Thus the 1991 World Congress document on the USSR—albeit somewhat half-heartedly—proclaims that the USFI is in favour of building section(s) of the USFI in the USSR. The question is how and on what programme? Here one waits in vain for a reply either from the majority or its critics.

The Matti tendency's only attempt to address this problem was abject in the extreme. For them the key programmatic question in the construction of a section was merely that of "support for the revolution in the three sectors" (i.e. the imperialist and imperialised world and the degenerate workers' states). Yet the TBFI was the most successful of the oppositions, in terms of votes at the Congress (11%). Matti has long been an oppositionist within the French LCR, still the European flagship of the USFI due to its size, history and proximity to the international centre.

Matti's politics—and those of his British co-thinkers in the TBFI—are what used to be known as "orthodox Trotskyism", i.e. they draw their inspiration from the Stalinophobia of the old International Committee tradition, notably its Lambertist variant, which is particularly strong in France. Like their political parents in Lambert's organisation, the PCI, the TBFI's hallmark is the combination of radical sounding critiques of the USFI with gross opportunist adaptations towards social democracy and even to radical bourgeois tendencies.

Faithful to their Lambertist forebears, the TBFI argued in favour of the unification of Germany without even considering the consequences for post-capitalist property relations in the ex-DDR. Matti went so far as to deny that there was anything progressive in the post-capitalist property relations which characterise the degenerate workers' states: "These systems did not constitute a progress and were in no way and under no circumstances an advance over capitalism." [76] Indeed, for Matti, the reunification of Germany "is good for the whole of humanity and first and foremost for the workers".[77]

This mechanistic view, unable to grasp the political and class dynamics at work, was coupled with a wild enthusiasm and catastrophism, again typical of the rotten International Committee tradition. Freed—according to Matti—from the counter-revolutionary influence of Stalinism, the working class East and West:

"... will tend to unify their social gains at the highest level, to win new ones and to enlarge the range of democratic liberties and political democracy. This reality is already clearly undermining all the plans of the European bourgeoisie."[78]

It is certainly the case that a future united German working class will fight against the capitalist offensive and will win new social gains. But the first step for revolutionaries is to say "what is", and the East Ger-

76 *Le marxisme aujourd'hui* 5, March 1991, p11

77 *International Marxist Review*, 11/12 Summer 1991, p208

78 *Critique Communiste*, December-January 1990-91, 102-3, p61

man working class suffered a substantial defeat by being unable to seize the moment and fight for political leadership between November 1989 and April 1990.

The destruction of the bureaucratically planned property relations and of the few social gains which the Stalinists were obliged to accept, represent a defeat for the working class, east and west. The current capitalist ideological hegemony amongst large sections of the working class will change, but we need to recognise that this unfavourable situation for revolutionaries is our starting point, rather than indulging in consolatory fantasies about future struggles.

The Stalinophobia of the TBFI further blinds them to the reality of differences within the Stalinist bureaucracy, which they see as an undifferentiated block. For Matti *et al*, as for the Lambertists, the bureaucracy is purely and simply the agent of imperialism in the labour movement, and is therefore utterly and totally in favour of the restoration of capitalism:

"In our view there was a class polarisation between two camps—imperialism and the bureaucracy on one side, the working class on the other."[79]

The unreality of the TBFI's position on Eastern Europe is further shown by their blithe indifference as to the threat of capitalist counter-revolution. As late as March 1991, Matti argued that "Capitalist restoration will not happen tomorrow in Eastern Europe and the USSR."[80] Poland and Hungary will soon prove him very wrong.

In another homage to Lambertism, the TBFI agues that the key line of advance for the world proletariat is that of democratic demands. "Radical democracy pushed to the end is revolutionary" claims Matti.[81] It was this position that led the TBFI to raise first and foremost the slogan of a constituent assembly in a united Germany rather than that of workers' councils.[82]

From the outset, the TBFI accepted that there would be a "democratic" stage to unification, that it would inevitably pass through a period in which the constituent assembly was the key slogan. Even as late as the beginning of 1990, the TBFI failed to raise any call for workers' councils.[83] This is no "accident". It is a product of their right centrist method, which seeks to follow the "democratic" road rather than fighting for workers' democracy and workers' power.

Socialist Action (US) provided another trend of opposition to the majority's line that a workers' state was created in Nicaragua. On the other hand, they insist that the FSLN is "a party of revolutionists-of-action",[84] implying that the FSLN merely need pushing in the right direction a bit, and they are deliberately vague on the need for political revolution in Cuba, preferring to say that they "advocate soviet forms of government".[85] Despite their statement that "without a change of leadership in the International, the FI will be led to its demise".[86] Socialist Action offer no qualitative break with the centrist method of the USFI.

Given the similarity of many of the positions of Socialist Action and the TBFI, it is difficult to see why they did not form a joint opposition, as was initially proposed in 1989. For whatever factional reasons, negotiations broke down, and at the beginning of 1991 Socialist Action was severely weakened by a split to the Lambertists which took several leading members, including the instigators of many of their Lambertist positions.

At the same time, a series of ex-SWP leaders (e.g. Sheppard, Miah and Lund) have joined Socialist Action over the last 18 months proclaiming their complete political agreement with the SWP's neo-Stalinist positions. It thus seems at least possible that SA will drop its "left" mask and re-enter the majority fold over the next period.

The Left Tendency (LT) comes from a different political tradition, but is equally wedded to the centrism of the USFI. They rightly state that "the politics of the International over the last few decades have been a series of errors of analysis, strategy and tactics"[87] but do not draw the obvious political and methodological conclusions: the leadership of the USFI is irredeemably centrist and the USFI as a whole cannot be transformed into a revolutionary organisation.

The LT document as finally presented to Congress (where it got one vote) is substantially shorter than that originally presented internally. Criticism of the leadership line on Nicaragua was replaced by a vague and oblique reference to permanent revolution. Whether this was done to escape the wrath of the leadership or to weld an opportunist alliance, the end result was the same: despite their pretensions, the LT showed themselves to be a loyal opposition within the USFI.

In neither version of the document was there one word about Gorbachev or the crisis of the USSR. Not the slightest concrete criticism was made of the USFI's record on the key question of political revolution. As is traditionally the case with USFI oppositions, general remarks are taken as coded explanations of precise political differences. This will not do. Diplomatic formulas and a refusal to say what is are the marks of centrism, not of Trotskyism.

With regard to the "specially oppressed", one of the LT's fetishes, they are completely in tune with the USFI's method, arguing for "autonomous" cross-class movements and a "strategic alliance" between the oppressed and the working class.[88] Finally, the whole strategy of the LT and their co-thinkers in the International Trotskyist Committee is shown by the reaffirmation of their position that the USFI is a representative of a special kind of "centrism of Trotskyist origin" which is qualitatively superior to centrism coming from Stalinist, social democratic, nationalist or syndicalist origins.

In a remarkable statement which owes more to metaphysics than to Marxism, they claim that "the Fourth International is living but it lives through the life of its different organisationally separate factions".[89] In other words, despite the errors which the LT points to, when it comes to the crunch, our brave revolutionaries see Mandel, Lambert and the rest as leading organisations which, collectively, make up a "Fourth International" which merely needs "politically regenerating".

Whilst this centrist nonsense may comfort supporters of the LT inside and outside of the USFI, it does nothing to clarify the programmatic issues at the heart of refounding a revolutionary communist international, nor does it clearly state the centrist bankruptcy of all the organisations which claim the banner of the Fourth

79 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p211

80 *Le marxisme aujourd'hui* 5, March 1991

81 Ibid, p12

82 *International Viewpoint* 181, p26

83 *International Discussion Bulletin* 3, July 1990

84 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p232

85 Ibid, p236

86 Ibid, p238

87 *Bulletin de Débat International* 7, p26

88 Ibid, p32

89 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p243

International. It is a recipe for centrist confusion, a pledge of loyalty to a rotten centrist tradition which has continued for over forty years.

The writing on the wall

The lack of confidence with which the USFI faces the future is nowhere expressed more clearly than in its slow organisational collapse. At its 13th World Congress in February 1991, the European sections registered a dramatic 25% loss in membership.[90] Half a dozen sections have dissolved themselves in the last five years in the name of the latest turn. Others have split. The Swiss section did not even bother to attend the Congress.

Demoralisation is widespread within both the rank and file and the leadership. During the 1980s the leadership bodies of the USFI increasingly adopted a "hands off" approach. The supposedly six-monthly IEC did not meet for nearly two years between 1982 and 1984, and has barely scraped an annual rhythm since then, whilst the monthly Secretariat was meeting quarterly.

The quality of documents produced by the various bodies is increasingly poor, generally based on verbal reports or articles, with even lower programmatic content than usual. The 13th Congress revelled in the loose-knit federal nature of the USFI:

"Each national organisation has its own political profile, its own united front relations and its own responsibility and competence to make decisions."[91]

No wonder the international leadership meets so infrequently and intervenes so little! What difference would it make? Each section effectively has national sovereignty over its line.

The USFI is preparing its own disintegration along national lines. The disappearance of so many of its sections into reformist, nationalist or right centrist organisations is the first phase of an organisational collapse which neither the leadership nor the membership seems inclined to halt. The continued existence of slender political and organisational threads will prevent the complete disappearance of the USFI, but the "Fourth International" is clearly approaching a watershed.

There is no sign that a thoroughly critical and revolutionary opposition will develop to halt this degeneration. Even if the leadership were to execute a new centrist turn and "save the day" at the last minute, the reprieve could only be temporary. Only a total break with the four decade-old centrist method of the USFI will enable the rank and file to find a programme and an organisation which can chart the road to political revolution in the east and social revolution in the west.

The USFI, despite its claims to be the Fourth International of Trotsky, is ridden with doubts and uncertainties as to its historical role. Rightly so. In 1938, Trotsky finished his *Transitional Programme*, the founding programmatic document of the Fourth International, with a resounding rallying cry: "Workers—men and women—of all countries, place yourselves under the banner of the Fourth International! It is the banner of your approaching victory!" In 1991, the best the USFI could muster was a pathetic: "We are convinced our programme and analyses deserve to be known".[92] The difference says it all.

There is little sign of life inside the USFI. Nevertheless, they remain an important tendency on an international scale. They will continue to peddle their degenerate version of Trotskyism in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Their politics will confuse and miseducate future generations. In a few countries they will be a major roadblock to the construction of a revolutionary party for many years to come.

The fight for the revolutionary programme within the working class is not only a question of political clarity, it is also a matter of political criticism and the combat of differing programmes. Those members of the USFI who are repulsed by their organisation's battered and degenerate version of "Trotskyism" should learn the lesson of history, rather than repeating it. The USFI cannot escape from its ossified centrist method. The time has come to break with it.

90 *Sozialistische Zeitung*, 28.2.91

91 *International Marxist Review* 11/12, Summer 1991, p13

92 Ibid, p15

Understanding the restoration process

by Keith Harvey

The final collapse of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe arose from the developing crisis of the bureaucratically planned economies. By the mid-1970s the economies of Eastern Europe faced stagnation. In the 1980s they suffered outright decline.

The downward economic spiral undermined the regimes' political legitimacy in the eyes of the workers and the intelligentsia. Dissident movements, originating in the intelligentsia, were isolated at first both by repression and the indifference or hostility of the masses. The breakthrough came in Poland where Solidarnosc—a mass workers' movement—drew into itself the whole spectrum of democratic, national and religious oppositionists. The failure of the regime to crush Solidarnosc in the years 1981-85 was of strategic importance for the whole region. It showed that if the bureaucracy were to lose control of the working class then the days of its undivided power were numbered.

Another essential factor in the events of 1989-90 was the Kremlin bureaucracy's attempt to carry out "market socialist" economic reform and to achieve a far reaching agreement with imperialism, designed to remedy the economic stagnation of the USSR. Gorbachev's barely disguised support for reform elements throughout the Eastern Bloc was intended to achieve both objectives. He made it clear that the Kremlin had neither the will nor the means to crush the reform movements by force. The tanks would not roll to defend Husak, Zhivkov or Honecker. Moreover the democratisation process made big strides forward in the USSR itself in 1988 and the first half of 1989.

All this unleashed the revolutionary events of the events of October 1989 to January 1990. The isolated circles of dissidents found themselves at the head of millions. Gorbachev only intended to install duplicates of himself, i.e. "market socialist" reform Stalinists. He planned a carefully controlled democratisation of Eastern Europe that would leave the USSR's strategic interests safe and sound. Now he was obliged to go along with events. Quite simply a 1956 or 1968 style intervention would have wrecked Gorbachev's project in the USSR.

Thus 1988 and 1989 witnessed *pre-revolutionary situations* which exploded in the autumn and winter of 1989 into revolutionary upheavals in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania. These mass, popular and proletarian movements initially had no orientation to the goals of restoring capitalism. They were aimed, as their slogans show, at the destruction of the police dictatorship, the rule of the Stalinist parties and the punishing of those guilty of corruption.

A situation of dual power emerged in which the Stalinist regimes were unable to utilise repression. This "democratic phase" had the potential to become a proletarian political revolution.

Instead, after some months of disorientation, a social counter-revolution unfolded. This was the product of the crisis of working class leadership, not only in these countries themselves but world-wide. No powerful alternative leadership existed, armed with a programme of demands to create a workers' council democracy, to draw up a democratic workers' plan to solve the economic crisis.

As a result of the discredit that the crisis of bureaucratic planning and the repression cast on "actually existing socialism" the anti-Stalinist movements of the late 1980s were not "socialist" or "communist" like the movements of 1956 and 1968.

This crisis, and the victories of neo-liberal capitalism in the west, meant that the pro-market and "anti-communist" tendencies were predominant within oppositionist circles. The bureaucracy had lost all confidence in "planning" and sought legitimacy in marketising and nationalist ideologies. The most class conscious forces were limited to a syndicalist ideology ("workers' self-management") which accepted the triumph of the market and left the terrain of politics to bourgeois democratic pluralism.

But only in Poland by the beginning of 1989 had a consciously counter-revolutionary leadership gained control over the broad masses of the working class. This triumph was not inevitable but to avoid it would have required intervention by revolutionary communist forces—a Trotskyist international—if a serious conscious movement for political revolution was to develop.

In country after country during the spring of 1990 weak Stalinist regimes either gave way to coalitions with restorationist opposition forces or ceded power to them altogether. The exceptions to this were in Romania and Bulgaria where the Stalinists were able to keep the initiative for some time. However they too proclaimed themselves eager to restore capitalism.

Tasks of the restorationists

What were the political tasks of the restorationist governments? They first had to break the resistance of the *nomenklatura* and whatever remained of its armed power. For the restoration of capitalism the power of the top layers of the bureaucracy had to be destroyed.

In the first place the Stalinist parties' decisive influence at all levels of the state and civil society had to be dissolved. In a degenerate workers' state the Communist Parties are the machinery that subordinates all political and economic life to the power of the central bureaucratic clique. The structure of this party apparatus down to its factory cells and party militia had to be destroyed. Regional secretaries, party secretaries in the enterprises, and all their attendant special party armed forces and informer networks; it is with these that the restorationists' purge of the state apparatus had to start.

The working class itself, during the revolutionary period, began much of the work of this purge. It demanded the expulsion of the party organisations from the enterprises, the disarming and the dissolution of the party militias.

However, important as the repressive apparatus was for the maintenance of bureaucratic rule, it did not constitute the nerve centre of that rule. This lay in the centralised apparatus itself, whereby the bureaucratic caste decided its objectives and reproduced itself through the *nomenklatura* system of appointment to all key decision-making posts.

This system and its personnel could not be trusted to dismantle itself. It had to be swept away by the restorationists before they could preside over a state machine reliable for the task of introducing capitalism. The Stalinists in the judiciary, army, secret police, top management of the economic ministries and media, also had to go. How far the bourgeois governments can dispense with the services of lower level (previously party-card carrying) civil servants, economic experts and technicians, without sabotaging their own need for efficient organisation, depends upon concrete circumstances in each country.

In the Balkans the revolutions and palace coups dislodged the Bonapartist familial cliques that held the *nomenklatura* itself in terror. By releasing the *nomenklatura* from the grip of a Ceaucescu or a Zhivkov a process of fragmentation and ideological differentiation was started within it. The old Stalinists are gradually being reduced to a mere rump, while the great majority strive to perform a metamorphosis into various types of social democracy with the aim of restoring a "social market" capitalism. Despite its oaths of loyalty to the market and its voluntary relinquishing of key positions in the old state apparatus the continued existence of the caste remains a hindrance to the restoration of capitalism.

The re-establishment of a capitalist state apparatus does not simply involve the taking over, in a purged form, of the old state apparatus of the degenerate workers' state. Qualitative changes in the structure of the state apparatus take place. The reintroduction of the division of labour between the executive, judicial and legislative parts of the state is vital in allowing the general interest of the capitalist class to be imposed over parts of the bourgeoisie.

To complete these tasks has required, and still requires, the resolution of a crisis of leadership within the bourgeois parties inherited from the revolutionary period. The multiplicity of parties was welcomed then as a triumph over dictatorship. In "normal" bourgeois democratic politics parties represent fundamental classes or serious fractions of them (and therefore serious ideological fissures within them). But the present array of parties represents the triumph of localism and regionalism or worse.

In addition the "democratic" intellectuals proposed extremely liberal electoral laws with proportional representation and low thresholds for gaining seats in parliament. Where this panoply of parties gains representation it can impede the ruthless and necessary decisions of the serious pro-capitalist parties. With continuing weakness in the economies of Eastern Europe, capitalist transformation will be accompanied by ever greater strengthening of the state machine, the erosion of democratic liberties and increasingly Bonapartist forms of rule.

Economic tasks

What are the economic tasks facing the restorationists? The economy of a degenerate workers' state is characterised by three features:

- state ownership of the decisive means of production;
- their co-ordination and functioning according to the objectives set by the ruling bureaucratic caste, which necessarily involves the suppression of of the law of value within the state;
- their protection from the global operation of the law of value through a state monopoly of foreign trade.

The law of value is the fundamental objective law of the capitalist economy. Planning, state ownership and the monopoly of foreign trade are the vital measures a workers' state has to take to suppress this law and introduce production for need instead of profit.

In the restoration process it is the destruction of planning in the decisive sectors of the economy which involves the destruction of the proletarian character of the property relations. The point at which planning is destroyed is the point at which the state can no longer be called a workers' state of any kind. In practice however this point of transition can be obscured by several factors:

- the disintegrative effects of bureaucratic planning itself;
- the continued operation of the law of value in important sectors of the economy, legally or illegally despite bureaucratic planning;
- the conscious promotion of the operation the law of value by "market socialist" reforms in some areas of the economy.

The existence of these features in Yugoslavia, Hungary and Poland over a long period of time may obscure the qualitative break that occurs when the central co-ordination of the planning institutions is removed.

On the other hand even when the centralised co-ordination is destroyed the effects of this may also be disguised by sheer inertia. A national economy will continue to exhibit the proportions, dispositions and linkages which planning first established. In addition each of the degenerate workers' states suffers from *different*

crises of disproportion and economic mismanagement. Each has its own restorationist tendency with its own strategic programme and ideological baggage.

Consequently, the tempo of restoration and the sequence of measures by which it is undertaken is not pre-determined and not universal. Certainly, the definitive ending of bureaucratic planning will not be immediately followed by the full functioning of the law of value.

The critical moment in the destruction of planning is not, as at first it might seem, the dissolution of the State Planning Commission or the failure to set a new annual plan. The critical moment is finally reached only when the centrally administered investment fund no longer determines the accumulation process of the industries, enterprises etc.

Under Stalinist rule the state bank did not advance credit for carrying on production on the basis of profitability. It charged no real interest rates and was unable to make a firm bankrupt. Even after the the plan ceases to dictate production the state bank continues to extend free credit to keep production going. As yet no decision has been taken to allow profitability to be the deciding factor for banks, industry and commerce alike. Thus the proportions and commands of the planned economy continue to exist until the last central co-ordinating power is destroyed.

When the structural reforms in the banking sector are functioning then we can say that a qualitative transformation has occurred. State monopoly capitalism exists and the rest of the process is one of deepening the new social relations (i.e. ensuring the full operation of labour power as a commodity and the end of the national wages fund).

It is at this moment that the concrete task for the restorationists boils down to the extension of the role of money into money as capital.

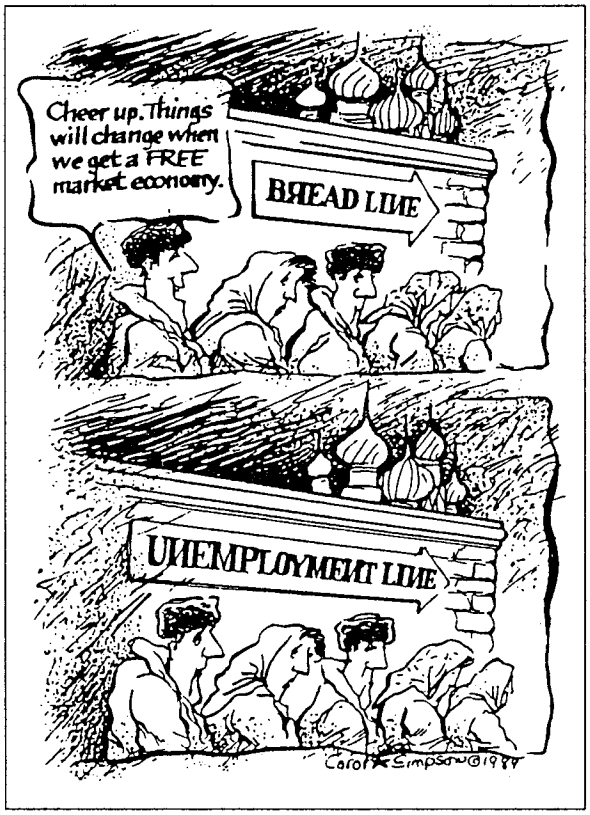
Money as capital

In a workers' state money is mainly used as money of account. Money has this function in pre- and post-capitalist societies as well as in capitalism. But money functions in capitalism above all else, and uniquely, as self-expanding money, that is, capital.

Money is converted into means of production, raw materials, labour power. In the production process surplus value is created. If that surplus value can be realised by selling the product a profit emerges.

To arrive at this situation it is necessary to implement several inter-connected measures so that money can be freed to act as capital. Specifically the state must free prices (so that generally the market acts to create clearing prices). It must transform the nature and quantity of subsidies so that state protection against enterprise bankruptcy is removed. The state must introduce positive real interest rates and—together with the abolition of the state monopoly of foreign trade—implement currency convertibility.

In short, the new governments must transform the national economic framework to facilitate the operation



of money as capital and encourage full commercialisation in the relations between the state enterprises.

The second essential ingredient in the restoration process, and one that comes chronologically after the transformation of money into money capital, is to free labour power so that it once again functions fully as a commodity. Then society becomes a society of generalised commodity production—capitalism. The ability of money to function as capital is essential but surplus value cannot arise in the circulation process. Only in production can it do that, and therefore the secret of its creation lies in the existence and nature of labour power as a commodity.

In a workers' state labour power is restricted in its movement. It is not disciplined by a reserve army of labour The contractual relationship between the enterprise and the worker is often absent or the reverse of what is found in a capitalist economy.

Even in states far along the road to restoration, such as Hungary, one residual element of central planning that obstructs the emergence of labour power as a commodity is the central allocation of the wages fund. This must give way to a system of plant-by-plant, or sector-by-sector pay bargaining. This must be carried out by the legally independent representatives of labour and capital so that a differentiated system of wage rates can emerge that reflect the market for labour.

Lastly, the government must transform the relations of ownership of the means of production. In a degenerate workers' state property rights are vested in the state or even in organs of self-management in the enterprise. This represents the fact that the workers are the ruling class, although it may not appear that way to the working class! Property can be used but not disposed of or sold. To restore capitalism legislation must change all this and sanction the rights to possess and dispose of private property in the means of production (including the enjoyment of rent, profit, the right to hire and fire etc). It must put state force behind the enforcement of contracts between property owners. Without this legal framework no significant investment will take place.

Restorationist state monopoly capitalism

Having sanctioned the rights of private property nearly all the restorationist forces recognise that the first form of private property will in fact be "public ownership" of the main means of production: in short, restorationist state monopoly capitalism. The bourgeois state will own the main means of production but it will prioritise the introduction of strict commercial relations between the state enterprises, while seeking at the same time to break up these monopolies as soon as possible.

The near absence of a native capitalist class, the need for the state to supervise the destruction of the inefficient means of production before imperialism will invest, and the need to sustain some kind of social stability through selective negations of the law of value, all ensure that such a phase is inevitable in the restoration process.

Moreover, in the present situation of global capital shortages and recession, which are destroying more productive plants in the imperialist countries than are found in Eastern Europe, the phase of restorationist state monopoly capitalism will be protracted.

The pressures for privatisation are strong because ownership changes are necessary to force changes by management at enterprise level and to encourage foreign investment. But the objective conditions are not favourable to this process.

Having destroyed the central regulatory planning mechanisms the government must go further and make the factories act in accordance with this new framework. Often the workers "elected" the manager. The trade union/works' council and the manager operated to keep employment high, prevent closures, reach targets and distribute the wages fund.

In some cases (e.g. in Czechoslovakia) these organisations are now consciously working towards privatisation. In other instances (e.g. Poland) the organisational remnants of factory life in the workers' state can serve to obstruct the plans of the managers and bourgeois forces.

This institutional resistance to the operation of the law of value has to be ended. The manager must cease to be beholden to the workers in any sense and his/her decisions have to reflect the orders of the new owners and their representatives.

A painful road

This process of capitalist restoration will be a painful road for the working class of Eastern Europe. Indeed it already is. The working class is already paying bitterly for its loss of direction in the political revolutionary crisis of 1989-90. Yet a powerful contradiction is lodged in the fact that it was the working class itself that raised the restorationists to political power. This contradiction is between interests of the class that seized the spoils of victory and interests of the class that helped it attain that victory. Now the contradiction is unfolding.

In Germany the struggle against the effects of capitalist restoration has already passed through several stages. In Poland, in the final critical stage before restoration, major sectional wages struggles have taken place. The working class is spontaneously (i.e. as yet unconsciously) resisting the transition to capitalism as its fundamental class interests dictate.

To date this resistance already displays many of the classic features of trade union resistance under capitalism; namely, sectional struggles against employers over wages and jobs. Although grievances are naturally directed at the new governments these grievances do not spill over into political demands as rapidly or spontaneously as they did in former proletarian upheavals in the Stalinist states.

Such working class resistance is inevitable. It will be a material factor in determining the pace of restoration. The development of workers' struggles to the level of a challenge to the process of restoration itself, through a conscious defence of the remaining gains of the workers' state, will remain difficult as long as the crisis of leadership of the working class remains unresolved.

Nevertheless it remains the objective of revolutionary intervention.

Capitalist restoration in Hungary

by Peter Sinclair

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Hungarian economy has found itself in a long-lasting impasse. The first half of the decade was characterised by stagnation; worse was to follow when this toppled over into a serious recession at the end of the 1980s. Neither the acceleration of the economic reform process—in particular the development of the private economy—nor the stronger orientation towards the west could prevent mushrooming debts to the imperialist banks nor the downward spiral of living standards.

The roots of this crisis can be traced back to the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and its aftermath. The brutal suppression of this workers' revolutionary challenge to the bureaucracy led to complete alienation of the working class from the Stalinist oppressors. After an initial period of bloodletting the Kadar regime initiated a process of political reform in 1961. Kadar coined the slogan, "he who is not against us, is for us". This turn was essential if the Stalinists were to restore any meaningful social support for their continued parasitic rule.

In 1968, Kadar complemented this with the launch of the "New Economic Mechanism", a series of decentralised reforms of the economic planning system which gave expanded scope for the market and entrepreneurial initiative. Planning remained but the devolution of economic decisions to the enterprises and the scrapping of the centre's mandatory output directives ensured, in the words of the Economist Intelligence Unit, that "the government sought to control the economy through macro-economic credit, price, wage and foreign trade 'regulators'".

But, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, the introduction of the market and enterprise autonomy did little to enhance labour productivity or boost growth. Only genuine workers' democratic control of the plan on the one hand, or real enterprise autonomy—free from any controls from the centre and subject only to the pressure of capitalist competitive accumulation—could boost production. Market socialism, or "goulash communism", fell between two stools.

The reformers suffered a set-back between 1972-74 but recovered their ground sufficiently by 1978 to drive on towards the market. But this only succeeded in demonstrating to those devoted to the market that any restrictions were an anathema and that market socialism was a failure.

At the same time the Hungarian bureaucracy was under strong pressure from imperialism. In the course of the 1980s, as a consequence of its huge debts, it had to make big concessions to the IMF. It could not deal with the debts the way the Romanians had: the resistance of the people would have been too great and the bureaucracy would have been too divided. Imperialism forced the Stalinists to prepare the ground for restoration through encouragement of the private sector, introduction of elements of the market, employment laws etc, while simultaneously attacking the living standards of the masses.

Most workers had to take "second jobs" to survive; this meant that a 12-16 hour working day was the rule rather than the exception. This situation, together with cynicism inherited from the defeat of 1956, left the workers even more disillusioned with the Stalinist party. There was certainly no widespread support for the ruling party. When the HSWP collapsed and fragmented in the second half of the 1980s this was the result of a number of factors.

In the 1970s a distinction opened up between party and state bureaucracies within the *nomenklatura*. The party bureaucracy was recruited from the working class. The state bureaucracy was composed of a section of the technocratic intelligentsia lacking any ideological commitment to the party or the property relations. Their career prospects were best served by co-operation with the party bureaucracy. Economic pressures in the 1980s led to the party bureaucracy becoming more dependent on the state bureaucracy. This was reflected in the reform-minded economists gaining ever-greater influence.

Elements in the bureaucracy saw no future in the old system. They saw their real interests lying within capitalism. Counterposed to them stood a section of the bureaucracy who saw no real hopes for themselves under capitalism. But faced with bankruptcy after two decades of reform socialism they had no alternative to offer and could mount no resistance.

Up until the mid-1980s the intelligentsia's oppositional stirrings were expressed through the reform circles within the HSWP. Oppositional elements—from which the Democratic Forum was later to be established—were promoted by the so-called "reform communists" or "career bureaucrats" around Poszgay Nemeth and Horn, and the "old social democrats" around Nyers. They were also supported by those sections of the state bureaucracy which saw a future for themselves in a change of system.



The HSWP could not survive the loss of political legitimacy that came in the wake of the 1985 elections, when the regime staged the first multi-candidate elections in nearly forty years. Although there were no other political parties besides the HSWP, non-party members of the managerial-intellectual *nomenklatura* were encouraged to stand in order to be co-opted into the flagging economic reform project. One section of the intelligentsia preferred to remain outside of, and refused to take responsibility for, the government.

The opposition movement began to coalesce around these layers in 1987. From this time the opposition began to overcome its "circle" existence and to appear as a political force. An important impulse for this was the recognition that the Hungarian Stalinists had exhausted their reform mission. In spring 1987 the HSWP proposed a new "action programme" which could offer only further reductions in living standards.

The party's conference in early 1988 was an important turning point. With the sacking of Kadar a third of the Politburo or Central Committee were removed. Although Grosz remained at the top, together with his supporters who wanted to retain the bureaucratic system, the open restorationists around Poszgay were already gaining ground. In the first six months of 1989 Grosz was replaced as Prime Minister and was increasingly forced back into his post as General Secretary of the HSWP. The acceleration of the reform process took place through the government, not through the party. This was only possible because the party apparatus was apparently paralysed and could offer no alternatives.

In an effort to recoup lost support, the reform Stalinists made a vigorous turn towards nationalist ideology. There were changes in the party leadership, from the so-called "internationalists" (Kadar and company) to the "sturdy Hungarians" (around Poszgay, Nyers). The reinterrment of Imre Nagy, the change of name from "People's Republic" to "republic", the mobilisations over the Hungarians in Romania and the re-evaluation of the events of 1956—all were the result of Opposition pressure on the HSWP and an attempt to retain its influence over the population. The Opposition gained a toehold, but the HSWP took the initiative. They tried to divert discontent into nationalist channels and, thereby, take advantage of it. Although this tactic appeared successful until November 1989 (with the Opposition's success in the referendum), ultimately it did not work.

The opposition outside the HSWP was initially composed of two main currents: the intelligentsia in the capital—who later formed the BFD (Free Democrats) and FIDESZ—and the rural intelligentsia who later composed the UDF (Democratic Front). There were no "communist" or "socialist" oriented groups. The opposition first showed its ability to mobilise forces in 1989 with a series of demonstration and protests, culminating in its opposition to the referendum on the election of the State President.

The destruction of the *nomenklatura* system

During 1989 the essential steps towards the destruction of the *nomenklatura*'s political power were taken. The most important was the dissolution of HSWP organisations in the state, the army, the workers' militias and the factories. The People's Army was renamed the Hungarian Defence Force, the High Command was dissolved and the armed forces were depoliticised and their "national" character reinforced. Most of the career officers reacted favourably to the political changes although about 1,200 quit during the first half of 1990. The Defence Minister and all the State Secretaries were replaced, half the Generals pensioned off and the army began to be reduced by about 25%. The reform wing around Poszgay not only supported these moves, it was actually behind many of them.

The HSWP took important steps towards restoration. The reform wing initiated the privatisation of the state economy, ended the leading role of the party, dissolved the workers' militia and the party cells in the factories and took the most important steps towards parliamentary elections. With the dissolution of the HSWP and the founding of the HSP on a social democratic programme, the bureaucrats gave a clear signal that their

objective was restoration. Nevertheless, their concessions and initiatives were not enough to gain sufficient support in the elections and they were eventually pushed into the background by the process of restoration.

This process resulted in the influence of the most conservative forces within the bureaucracy being suppressed. A sizeable part of the *nomenklatura*, especially the upper and middle layers, survived into the "new Hungary" and its top-most layers were only gradually replaced. Of 71 state secretaries in office in July 1990, 29 had worked for the Nemeth government or its predecessors.

By October 1990, only a few hundred out of approximately 6,000 national and regional posts within the *nomenklatura* had new occupants. The top bureaucrats of the Finance Ministry and the other state economic agencies have, for the most part, taken up the key management positions in the joint ventures. The first few months of 1990 were characterised by a change in the HSWP apparatus in the state enterprises. Although a layer of the *nomenklatura* managed to hold on to its positions, it appears that the structure which embodied its power has been smashed.

A unique feature of the Hungarian restoration process has been the limited participation of the masses in the destruction of the Stalinists monopoly of power or in the final destruction of the *nomenklatura* system. There were few mass mobilisations in 1988-90, with only episodic opposition to the governing HSWP. There were no mobilisations worthy of note either in the factories or over social questions.

During this period a pre-revolutionary situation existed in Hungary. The bureaucracy could no longer rule in the old way and the population did not want to be ruled in the old way. But the installation of a bourgeois government was not the result of mass protest culminating in mass mobilisations. Two separate factors meant that an openly bourgeois government could come to power, and the *nomenklatura* system—even its special armed forces—could be dismantled, all without major mass demonstrations still less civil war. Firstly, the strategic defeat of the Hungarian working class in 1956, from which it has yet to recover, and secondly, the inner disintegration of the HSWP resulting from its compromises with the technocrats after 1961.

The rise of Gorbachev played an exceptionally important role in the reform process within Hungary. Key measures such as the opening of the borders for DDR citizens were only carried out with Soviet agreement. The reform process was accelerated only after the most conservative sections of the Soviet bureaucracy around Ligachev had been forced to retreat. His demise took the wind out of the sails of conservative HSWP forces inside Hungary.

The triumph and difficulties of the open bourgeois forces

From the outset the government established in May 1990 was riven with divisions. Compensation for expropriations carried out by the Stalinists was an issue of central importance. The Smallholders' Party demanded that everything be returned to the original owners or their heirs. The other parties rejected this because of its possible implications, particularly for agriculture. Nothing was resolved until April 1991 and until then little could be done in parliament. The consequent uncertainty over the question of property rights discouraged foreign investment, despite Hungary's favourable stance towards imperialist capital.

There was disagreement over whether Hungary should proceed with economic "shock therapy" on the Polish model, or opt for a slower transition. This caused deep divisions within the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), and led to the collapse of the first government in December 1990, followed by a major reshuffle. These divisions continue to exist, leading to a slower pace of restoration than in Poland.

The government's handling of social conflicts such as the taxi strike in October 1990, reflect the weak and heterogeneous nature of the HDF, which brought together liberals, populist nationalists and christian socialists. If confronted by a major social conflict it will probably collapse, leading to the possibility of a coalition between the populists and the former Stalinists. Poszgay is already planning to build a national party centre. The Free Democrats and Fidesz are more homogeneous. A collapse of the Antall government could result in a coalition of these two forces but such a government could only be a short *intermezzo* to the acceleration of the final defeat of the old structures. Consequently, there are unlikely to be clear and long term majorities for one or another bourgeois parties in the next period.

At the moment it is extremely difficult to tell which political force exercises political hegemony over the working class. The various political parties have only limited influence over sections of the class which, due to its atomisation, seems largely uninterested in electoral politics. Relative social peace means that at present there are no tendencies towards the limiting of democratic rights or a strengthening of Bonapartist tendencies.

The recomposition of the caste into a class

The bureaucracy can be divided into two groups: the "pro-Moscow" former Kadarites, and the openly restorationist "career bureaucrats" and "old social democrats". The latter have, for the most part, made the transition into "pluralist politics" or, more particularly, into joint ventures established by foreign capital. For example in the Finance Ministry all five State Secretaries or Deputy Ministers as well as nine of the eleven section leaders of the Nemeth government now work for foreign finance capital, usually in the top positions in banking joint ventures. The majority of the managers of state undertakings have so far been able to hold on to their positions and some have even become property owners via "spontaneous" privatisations.

The "Kadarite" section of the bureaucracy have, for the most part, found positions in state enterprises. The

social downgrading of sections of the bureaucracy has been limited and the redevelopment of state enterprises may help rehabilitate them. The idea of bureaucrats being sent to jail in Hungary is completely unheard of. Although an open settling of accounts with a section of the HSWP bureaucracy would be very popular, the HDF—alongside the HSWP and the HSP—have strongly opposed this, indicating that a large number of former HSWP members have gone to ground in the HDF.

The new class of employers is being recruited, on the one hand, from already existing capital and, on the other, from the ranks of the bureaucracy itself, especially from the former managers of state enterprises. But imperialism and its agents will have to play an important role in the stabilisation of bourgeois rule. The IMF and World Bank, with their "development programmes", not only took care of debt repayment to imperialism. They were central to social transformation laying the basis for long term capitalist exploitation, through reduction in subsidies, establishment of a labour market etc.

The openly restorationist section of the bureaucracy is an important ally of imperialism. Lacking sufficient money capital to become capitalists themselves, they can, nonetheless, offer their knowledge, their political and economic decision-making structures and their connections, acting as advisors and playing leading roles within joint ventures.

In the last few years, the working class has lived through some drastic changes. Not only is it confronted with permanently falling living standards but it is now exposed to the evil of unemployment, even if this is initially on a limited scale. The rise in unemployment to 100,000, together with the increasing differentiation in wages—particularly between the private and state sectors—indicates that the main elements of a capitalist labour market are developing.

An important feature in the transformation process has been the development of council organisations within the self-managed enterprises. For the Antall government it is essential to reduce their rights in order to enable the transformation into (state or private) capitalist undertakings. The government set about trying to win over the council organisations and enlist them consciously in the process of privatisation.

They had some success during 1990 with the HDF controlling many of the workers' councils. However, at a congress of these councils early in 1991 the Left Alternative made some inroads against this influence as workers began to realise that state ownership may be essential for the survival of their own enterprises in the face of market forces.

The death agony of a workers' state

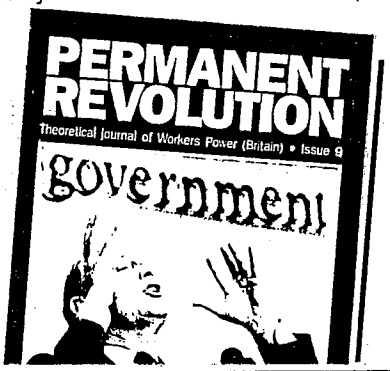
The central planning mechanisms which were responsible for directing input and output to the enterprises have long been left to wither on the vine. The plan did not govern the operation and direction of production and the allocation of the key means of production after the 1970s. But this did not mean that the law of value held sway: the state and party's central economic administration kept all the macro-economic fiscal and monetary levers under its control. These were deployed to ensure that the investment and accumulation process was guided by essentially political rather than commercial considerations.

The banking reforms of 1987 marked the beginning of the restorationists' final assault on these remaining planning mechanisms. Around thirty commercial banks were founded and the national bank was separated from them. But this reform contained several features in contradiction to a capitalist banking system. The commercial banks do not have to take responsibility for loss-making businesses. They offload large-scale refinancing projects onto the national bank and, for lack of any alternatives, have the big state enterprises as their partners. This leads to these enterprises, which are often loss-makers increasingly deprived of state subsidies, being issued credit on a very large scale and not according to capitalist criteria.

These credits, which are supplemented by mutual loans between the state enterprises (reaching about Ft300,000 million in 1990—15% of GDP), even now allow the loss-making state enterprises to carry on virtually unaltered. In order to complete the counter-revolution, reforms are necessary in this sphere. A banking law effective from 1 July 1991 will allow greater access for foreign capital—up to 40% in general, 25% in the big commercial banks. In addition, credits from the National Bank to the commercial banks, which they receive by taking over non-profit bearing credits, had already been reduced in 1990 from Ft100,000 million to Ft20,000 million, and will be reduced still further.

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The bulk of privatisation is to be achieved in four years. This will require the ending of non-profit bearing credits and, in future, extension of credit only on capitalist criteria. However, despite the cuts in subsidies, the removal of the protection from bankruptcy in the big state enterprises has barely begun. On the contrary, there has been a change in the protective mechanisms from subsidies to credits.

Aside from these important restrictions, much else has already been achieved on the road to capitalism in Hungary. The monopoly of foreign trade has been almost totally removed: about 90% of goods can now be freely traded, approximately 12,000 enterprises have the right to trade abroad (in comparison to only 360 in 1987) and import controls exist on very few of goods. In addition most prices are no longer set administratively, resulting in big price rises.

Unlimited profit transfer abroad, the possibility of hard currency deposits (no compulsory exchange) and also the effective freedom of foreign trade, all show that substantial progress towards convertibility of the Forint has already taken place. This process is set to continue with the intention of full convertibility by 1995.

As far as the transformation of labour power into a commodity is concerned, here too, important steps have been taken. Unemployment has begun to rise, hitting 145,000 by the end of March 1991, compared to 80,000 at the beginning of the year. Official estimates anticipate 300-400,000 redundancies by the end of the year with unemployment up to around 300,000. The majority of job cuts are concentrated in the biggest state-owned factories.

Provisions for unemployment benefit in the 1991 budget have been massively increased, underlining further expected increases. There is a growing differentiation in wages between state and private concerns, with wage increases varying between 5% and 25% in state and private sectors respectively. Hungary is already well ahead of Poland in this regard.

Protection of private property was already guaranteed under the HSP government. However, the privatisation process itself is proceeding very slowly and, after a big increase in "spontaneous" privatisations in 1988-89, has actually slowed down. At present, around 90% of all factories are still state owned.

The main problem in privatising is the lack of capital. At the start of 1991 some of the last obstacles to foreign capital were removed: the need for permission before 50% or more foreign ownership was allowed, restrictions on foreign trading in real estate, unlimited profit transfer. The government aims to reduce state ownership to 40% by 1995, which means the retention of a large state capitalist sector.

The greater part of the statified economy will be exposed to the direct influence of the world market by reorienting foreign trade away from the Comecon and towards the European Community, coupled with basing the calculation of East European and Soviet trading accounts on the dollar. One problem arising from this will be finding markets for many firms, the best known example of which is the relatively technically efficient bus producer, Ikarus.

The final act?

Hungary has already travelled a long way down the road to capitalist restoration. The central planning mechanisms have been liquidated and the monopoly of foreign trade removed. The country is moving towards the end of a transitional phase in which the ultimate triumph of the law of value is impeded by the near universal extension of banking credits to the major enterprises regardless of commercial considerations, coupled with the mutual extension of credits between plants. These credits should come to an end with the privatisation programme in the banking sector.

The chain of linked credits must be broken in order to save at least the viable concerns. This task will be on the agenda in the coming year and its realisation will see the last safety net against the turmoil of the market economy disappear. It will be accompanied by the creation of a free market in labour and the removal of the councils' influence in plant decision-making.

The demolition of the last bulwark against the law of value is an immediate prospect. After that we will finally be able to speak of Hungary completing its transformation into a restorationist state monopoly capitalism. Even if this step leads to mass unemployment for the working class, the most likely response in the short term is a syndicalist-oriented resistance, which will tell us how much the proletariat is still influenced by the former state-controlled trade union. However, the stabilisation of a capitalist system can and will take years. The further transformation from restorationist state monopoly capitalism into private capitalism is scheduled to begin only in the second half of the decade.

If the Hungarian proletariat can overcome its passivity and its illusions in the west—politically and economically—then the 1990s could become a revolutionary decade for the working class, with the rediscovery of the revolutionary tradition of 1956.

Debate on Lithuania

The Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT) of the United States has fraternal relations with the LRCI. We are pursuing a series of discussions in order to try and overcome the differences which exist between us and forge the necessary programmatic agreement which would enable us to join our forces. We reprint here an exchange of letters between the International Secretariat of the LRCI and the RTT. This exchange is of interest not only because of the important issue which is raised, but also as an example of the fraternal way in which we are endeavouring to overcome our differences.

Letter from the RTT—6 June 1991

Dear Comrades,

Parts of the LRCI resolutions on Lithuania (11 April and 22 April 1990) which appeared in *Trotskyist International 6* are problematic and need clarification. The resolutions called on the imperialist countries to recognise Lithuania, and asked those countries to provide economic assistance to Lithuania with no strings attached, in order to ease the economic blockade that had been imposed on Lithuania by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

We understand that the intention behind the resolutions was to expose the hypocrisy of the imperialist countries who were unwilling to recognise and help Lithuania for the sake of their relationship with Gorbachev and company. But despite this intention, the effect of the resolutions is to foster the illusion that imperialism can be pushed to take the side of the masses in Lithuania if the workers (mainly in the west) apply enough pressure.

If the logic behind the resolutions was to expose imperialism, we believe that there is absolutely nothing to expose. Every worker in Lithuania and the west knows that imperialism will only assist Lithuania (or any part of the USSR) if it fits the imperialist plan for capitalist restoration. Nobody is pretending otherwise, including imperialism.

Bush was perfectly open recently in making it absolutely clear to Gorbachev that the availability of economic aid and more open trade depends on "reforms", i.e. movement towards restoration. So why ask for imperialist help and recognition for Lithuania if every worker already knows that such aid would be conditioned on capitalist restoration? Asking for imperialist aid "with no strings attached" is purely utopian.

In any event, the current restorationist government in Lithuania agrees with Bush about his *fundamental* economic and social goals in the area—the return of capitalism. They only differ on timing and tactics. While the Sajudis movement wants immediate assistance for the establishment of an "independent" capitalist Lithuania, Bush would rather ally himself for now with the section of the Stalinist bureaucracy (Gorbachev) that wants to preserve the Soviet Union as one country on the basis of gradual capitalist restoration.

From the imperialist point of view this is a purely transient tactical consideration. Recently the Stalinist bureaucracy has been more receptive to the idea of letting Lithuania go. What then? When imperialism does recognise and "assist" the process of dismantling of the planned economy, the Sajudis (who are begging for this) will insist that there are no strings attached from their side. They have already accepted in advance all the the consequences for the working class (mass unemployment, etc). Thus, we don't need to expose the Sajudis either. If tomorrow imperialism does recognise and assist Lithuania, will the LRCI support it? We think that this should not be the case.

The LRCI calls for *unconditional* support for the struggle for Lithuanian independence. But imperialist recognition and "aid" are *always conditioned* on the interests of imperialism, i.e. capitalist restoration in Lithuania and the rest of the USSR. Since help and recognition from imperialism will inevitably lead to the subordination of Lithuania to imperialism as a semi-colony, calling for such help and recognition contradicts the struggle for Lithuanian independence rather than supporting it.

We believe that we should tell the masses the truth that they already know—that imperialist recognition and help will bring only capitalist restoration. Such restoration is not in their interest. Revolutionaries therefore must call for an independent socialist Lithuania that will be *independent* from imperialist recognition or aid.

Comradely
Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (USA)

Reply from the LRCI—10 July 1991

Dear Comrades,

Thanks for your letter on the national question in Lithuania. You object that we should not have called on imperialist nations to recognise Lithuania and, secondly, that we should not have asked them to provide economic assistance with no strings attached to help break the Stalinist bureaucracy's blockade.

The reason you give is that "every worker in Lithuania and the west knows that imperialism will only assist Lithuania if it fits the capitalist plan for capitalist restoration". We do not know about "every worker" in the USA, but we suspect that many or most workers in Europe, East and West took Bush and Major's demo-

cratic rhetoric about democracy and self-determination seriously.

They present "restoring capitalism" as the "freedom to return to a market economy" rather than opening the degenerate workers' states up to Wall Street and the City. We would also guess that the Lithuanian workers had big illusions at first that the west would help them gain their independence.

Thus to demand elementary democratic rights inseparable from the right of self-determination seemed to us not only permissable in principle but actually called for by the practical conditions. Neither recognition nor economic aid without strings would *ipso facto* aid restoration any more than independence.

Anyone who is not in favour of recognising Lithuanian independence and not in favour of trade and so on is not really in favour of the country's independence. We are in favour of it, not because there is no danger of restoration—clearly there is. A Sajudis government would be restorationist and would have to force this through against the objective interests of the Lithuanian workers.

We are, of course, absolutely opposed to a Sajudis government. But we believe that only by standing up as unequivocal champions of Lithuania's independence and opponents of the Kremlin's attempts to coerce it, can we win a hearing for the programme of defending statified property and installing a democratic workers' plan. En route we expose not only the Stalinists' brutality and distinguish Trotskyism absolutely from it, but also the hypocrisy and double-dealing of the imperialists and the weakness and cowardice of the Saujudis leaders.

You raise the objection that our resolution of 11 April 1990 says that we "unconditionally support the right to self-determination". This passage is referring to the general Leninist position on self-determination. When we say that *when* we support self-determination this is unconditional we mean precisely that we do not place any pre-conditions on this. "*If* you promise not to restore capitalism, *if* you promise to defend the planned property relations then we will support you": this precisely would be no sort of support.

If the Lithuanian workers' class consciousness was so high that they were likely to commit themselves in advance to this then it is unlikely we would be concentrating so heavily on the national separation issue anyway. The inflamed resentment against national oppression is the problem to be resolved by the socialist vanguard taking it up in a thoroughly consistent democratic fashion.

If the formulation were read to mean that we give a general and absolute promise to every nation and nationality that we will support its separatist demands no matter what the overall conditions, then this would be wrong.

If for example, the Russian proletariat had risen in political revolution and the imperialists were seeking a bridgehead in Lithuania (or Georgia or wherever) then we would have to judge the issue there and then like Lenin and the Bolsheviks did with the issue of Finland, the Baltics and Poland in one manner and Georgia and the Ukraine in another.

Wherever possible we seek to carry through the most decisive demand of the democratic programme as regards nations, so as to deprive the bourgeois forces of the lever of patriotism with which to split the proletariat. The same method applies to Yugoslavia, which in miniature presents all the same problems.

The sectarian-opportunists such as the IBT and the Spartacists are tempted to say: the nationalist-separatists are bourgeois restorationists; the Stalinist centralisers are either defenders of the plan or at least slow restorationists, eager to preserve themselves as a caste. They therefore support the latter.

This position has one merit—consistency. Yet its faults are obvious; it looks to the Stalinist bureaucracy as the last bastion of the workers' gains against . . . the workers! Our position starts from the axiom that either we can win the workers to defend their own gains or these gains cannot be progressively defended.

When and if the workers resist restoration under Stalinist leadership then we will support them (e.g. Romania 1990). But on the question of crushing the freedom of assembly or the right to secede, we will not only not support them, we will fight them tooth and nail and arms in hand. This is the only way of fighting the influence of nationalism and laying the basis for successful political revolution.

Trotskyist Greetings,
The International Secretariat of the LRCI

The revolution diverted

Bill Clinton reviews *Downfall—the Ceausescus and the Romanian Revolution* by George Galloway and Bob Wylie, 1991, Futura

The 1989 Romanian revolution presents a paradox. It was a violent mass uprising, unique in scale in Eastern Europe during that winter. Yet when the bullet-riddled bodies of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu lay still in a provincial military barracks and the provisional government assumed responsibility for running the country it appeared that less had been achieved than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Prominent Stalinists remained in key posts, especially the army.

Downfall—a racy journalistic account of the events, backed up by a mass of evidence and a series of eyewitness interviews—provides us with some answers as to how this could happen. Despite the crypto-Stalinist leanings of the authors (George Galloway "the controversial Labour MP" and Bob Wylie "a former Marxist") the book provides a compelling account of the class dynamics of the Romanian revolution, cutting through the usual bourgeois offerings of a chaotic collision of strong personalities.

Any story of the Romanian revolution has to begin with the tyrant it overthrew. Nicolae Ceausescu joined the already Stalinised Romanian Communist Party in 1933 at the age of fifteen. After ten years of arduous underground and legal work against the right wing dictatorship of King Michael, Ceausescu became a senior member of the RCP. Whilst other, less cautious and cunning members of the RCP were displaced by RCP leader Gheorghiu-Dej in the post-war struggle for leadership, "Ceausescu watched and parroted the line as one by one his erstwhile comrades were incarcerated, reduced to 'non-personhood' or simply murdered".

By this route Ceausescu completed his rise to the top with the death of Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965. Over the next twenty-five years he relentlessly purged all dissidents from the RCP and put his own creatures in place. According to Galloway and Wylie "almost fifty members of the Ceausescu and Petrescu families were appointed to high government posts."

The personality cult grew to religious proportions. Elena Ceausescu insisted on being described as "the first women of the country, the homage of the entire country; as star stands beside star in the eternal arch of heaven, beside the Great Man she watches over Romania's path to glory". The centre of Bucharest was destroyed to make way for the misnamed "House of the People", a grotesque monument to Stalinist parasitism.

Hand in hand with this repulsive privilege went an astonishing degree of brutal oppression. The daily surveillance by the Securitate was barely imaginable. Paid informers on each street, the disappeared neighbour or fellow worker who spoke or acted out of line - these experiences were known to thousands of families.

The ruinous state of the economy had a profound effect on the consciousness and living standards of the the Romanian people. The RCP had carried out a programme of forced industrialisation which mimicked in kind and results Stalin's USSR in the 1930s. As the years went by this policy produced increasingly marginal returns. In the 1980s the country was brought to its knees by the Ceausescus' demented obsession with paying off the $8 billion debt to foreign banks and governments. Domestic consumption was forced down and down and exports for hard currency up and up in order to realise this ambition. Imported rubber was banned and as a result surgical gloves were unobtainable. The cheapest of blood products from abroad alone were allowed which resulted in the use of HIV infected blood; over 200 children have died of AIDS since 1989.

Food was rationed. The workers dubbed pigs trotters as "patriots", because "they stayed in the country while the rest of the animal went abroad". By 1989 retail sales were 49% of the 1980 level, dairy products 39%, rice consumption 46% and consumer durables anything between 40%-60% less at the end of the decade. Electricity was available for only half of each day.

The search for more and more labour led to a proscription on abortions. Securitate agents raided workplaces to ensure that women workers were not using homemade coils. In the words of one prominent gynaecologist quoted in the book "probably 250,000 women died from septic abortions or abortion complications in this period".

It was this economic and social situation that created the accumulated grievances of the Romanian people. Events in the rest of Eastern Europe provided encouragement; events in the Romanian town of Timisoara provided the detonator for the revolution of mid December.

Lighting the fuse

The Romanian revolution of 1989—like the Russian revolution of 1905—hinged around the activities of a priest. The Hungarian minority in Timisoara rallied around the pastor, Laszlo Tokes, who was harassed by the Securitate and then served with an expulsion order. On 15 December around forty people gathered outside Tokes' church to protest. Given that you needed Securitate permission to hold a birthday party with more than ten people present this was a brave step to take.

The protest snowballed. An eyewitness reports: "There were hundreds if not more than a thousand people in the street where the Tokes church was. My works colleague who was a party member, went white when he saw it . . . I remember thinking, 'My God, they are scared of what is happening!'"

By the night of the 16th the crowd had swelled to

several thousands. The authorities tried to do a deal and withdrew the expulsion order. Tokes, fearful of the rebellious masses, tried to get the crowd to disperse. But Romanians and the Hungarian minority alike no longer looked on the struggle as being limited to a provincial pastor's rights. The fate of Romania was at stake.

The army was called in to disperse the crowd. Despite their weaponry and weight of numbers they were greeted with cries of "Libertate" and "Jos Ceausescu" ("Down with Ceausescu"). The fuse had been lit.

Although the army were able to restore order, this was only temporary. On the 17th a crowd of only a few hundred stormed the Timisoara Communist Party HQ. Ceausescu, at the centre of the web of dictatorship, detected signs of weakness in his military commander. He instructed his general in Timisoara that "Everyone who does not submit to the soldiers, I've given the order to be shot".

At 5.30 pm the soldiers fired indiscriminately at the crowd. Galloway and Wylie describe the interaction of the different levels of the masses in these initial days. The main forces in the early demonstrations were the urban poor, the most wretched of Romanian society, soon joined by students and intellectuals. It was the poor who threw themselves at the militia and refused to retreat under fire, feeling, as one put it, that "we had no tomorrow". These are words that have been spoken in every revolution.

But it was the industrial working class that tipped the scales against the Stalinists. On 18 December there were sporadic strikes around Timisoara. Stalinist brutality soon evoked a more conscious and organised response:

"There had been a demonstration on a bridge leading into Timisoara near the factory, and a woman had been shot dead. When the factory workers heard about it, they downed tools in protest against the killings and sent messengers to the factories near by asking them to strike in protest too. From these beginnings a general strike call went out over all Timisoara for Wednesday 20 December at 10.30 am".

An eye witness describes the scene in Opera House Square:

". . . we could see it was packed full; all the workers had come from their industrial areas. It was the moment that transformed an uprising into a revolution. This is not to overlook the heroic role of the young people, but it was these workers who delivered the decisive blow."

It was at this time that the workers established their first organisation. Deputations to the factories not on strike were organised and a committee of twelve, chosen from delegates elected by the different factories, was put together to co-ordinate the general strike action.

Soon the movement spread to Bucharest. News of the events in Timisoara electrified the masses in the capital. The turning point came on 21 December when Ceausescu chose to speak to the masses gathered in Palace Square. The great "Conductator" tried to dispense his "Treasure of Wisdom and Charisma" to the crowd. But, starting from the back, the chant went up: "Jos Ceausescu!, Jos Ceausescu!" The TV images of a frightened and confused Ceausescu being hurried off the platform went round the world.

The next morning the crowds were back. Ceausescu ringed the square with tanks and had General Milea his defence Minister shot for refusing orders and *pour encourager les autres*. But it was all to no avail. The will of the rank and file soldiers was broken by the urgings of the masses. Elena and Nicolae fled Bucharest in a helicopter, only to be captured and then shot on Christmas Day after a summary military trial.

Made by the masses

Galloway and Wylie demonstrate through first hand accounts that the revolution was made by the masses. The uprising found a spontaneous leadership within the factories and the intellectuals sufficient to mobilise the strong and powerful industrial workers against the regime. But for the most part the masses were mobilised around important but narrow slogans of "democracy" and freedom from repression. This was enough to unseat a dictator and his immediate coterie but not enough to press ahead to destroy the whole of the bureaucracy as a caste. This was the tragic limit of the Romanian revolution. As always in a revolutionary situation, the question of leadership was decisive.

Those who only see the events of 1989 as a preplanned palace coup against Ceausescu are wrong. It was the masses and the core of the working class that broke the resolve of the dictatorship. Informal links undoubtedly existed between disaffected elements of the bureaucracy but they could neither overthrow the dictatorship themselves, nor foment the masses to do so. Once the dictatorship had been broken by the masses in the street, elements of the army, nomen*klatura* and lower levels of the administration stepped forward and filled the vacuum created by the departure of the Conductator and his wife.

Galloway and Wylie explain how this layer emerged to take up the reins of power. As the helicopter containing the Ceausescus left the Central Committee building on 21 December, the masses stormed it and threw out volumes and volumes of Ceausescu's collected works onto the square. At this moment the present Prime Minister, Petre Roman, recounts that "I said to my colleagues we had to do something." He made his way to the Central Committee building and met up with General Voinea, the army commander for Bucharest.

After briefly addressing the people from the building Romana and Voinea agreed to go to the TV station. On the way Voinea said to Roman: "It is perhaps better for you to make the proclamation. If I make it, it may be seen as a *coup d'état*." Indeed! Although Roman and Voinea claimed only to have met for the first time that day, they instinctively knew that their task was to carry through a double political expropriation. The Ceausescu clique had to be routed and the masses had to be dispossessed of their revolution.

Both Roman and the future President Iliescu had been victims of the Ceausescu regime. Iliescu was trained in

Moscow in the 1950s and became a key dissident buster himself in the 1960s, cracking down on student protest. He was rewarded by a place on the Political Executive Committee in 1969 and was appointed Head of the Propaganda Department and finally Central Committee Secretary in charge of ideology.

In the early 1970s Iliescu fell from grace. He could not bend his spine sufficiently to participate with enough enthusiasm in the new Bucharest cult of the personality. Charged with "intellectualism" he was demoted; by 1983 he was firmly put out to grass as Director of the Technical Publishing House.

Because of the ever decreasing size of the Ceausescu clique it was inevitable that there would be a whole layer of Iliescus waiting for their chance to come back to power. In the first National Salvation Front government declared on Christmas Day 1989, all 33 were former members of the RCP, in most cases one-time high officials like Iliescu. Bureaucrats closely associated with Ceausescu tried to climb on board the movement, or even form their own government once the Ceausescus had fled, but they were all too discredited to be of any use.

This situation guaranteed that the old conservative forces in the *nomenklatura* would take up arms to launch a counter-revolution. For four days, the Securitate launched a stubborn resistance before the armed workers and the army defeated them.

The euphoria ends

The national euphoria that united different layers of society in Romania only lasted twenty days. The first serious demonstrations against the new NSF government took place on 12 January 1990. It was followed by others. Serious disturbances took place at big protests at the end of January, mid-February and mid-March. These were merely overtures for the events of June 1990.

The protest movement began, like the revolution itself, in Timisoara, where a Declaration was drawn up, summing up popular grievances against the new government. As Article 7 stated:

"Timisoara initiated a revolution against the entire communist regime and its entire *nomenklatura* and by no means in order to give an opportunity to a group of anti-Ceausescu dissidents within the Romanian Communist Party to gain power."

The Declaration demanded that the electoral law ban all former RCP members and known Securitate officers from standing in elections. Many of the grievances were well-founded, despite the fact that the forces that coalesced around the declaration were heterogeneous: democratic liberals, ethnic minorities, as well as out and out reactionary landlordists from the old pre-war regime. But they were all unified around a basic mistrust of the NSF, which by the early spring had lost the few figures who had joined it in the early days who had not been members of the RCP.

Most of the opposition were also united around the demand for a quicker privatisation of the economy. This was motivated by the desire to break up the *nomenklatura's* grip on the economy and hence its privileges. But this was fatal to the opposition in that it alienated the bulk of the working class who feared that this would lead to mass unemployment. The NSF reassured those fears. They had also ensured working class loyalty by extensive wages rises and making sure that many goods that previously were only available for export now found their way onto the tables of the workers.

For the authors, the result of the May elections was as follows:

"The scale of the victory can only be interpreted as the Romanian people giving a vote of confidence to Iliescu and the Front as the custodians of the revolution, combined with the fact that the Front's programme, for a measured move towards capitalism, reflected accurately their outlook."

The NSF took 66% of the vote while the Liberals took a mere 6.4%.

This is an important point to remember if the violent incidents of June are to be understood. The chain of events began with a demonstration of 22 April that led to the occupation of Palace Square. The demonstrators demanded the postponement of the election; most were students and intellectuals. Many weeks later however, in mid-June, the remaining occupiers of the square were very different. According to Galloway, who was in Bucharest at the time and whose loyalties, it must be admitted, were clearly on the side of the government, the square was "the tent city . . . [it] became a gaggle of pimps, prostitutes, drunkards, petty thieves and money changing swindlers" as the more "respectable" demonstrators had left or were involved in negotiations with the NSF over their demands.

It was the refusal of the bulk of the occupants of "tent city" to accept the compromise worked out by their leaders that led to the rioting of 13 June, after the NSF decided to remove the remaining protesters from the square. Campeneau, President of the astonishingly misnamed National Peasants Party (the landlords party), claimed later that "The level of brutality was . . . totally unjustified." But a New Zealand journalist who was present said that "the clearing of the square was done very professionally. In fact I've seen much worse police action at home".

In response to the clearing of the square a big mass of students and urban lumpen elements stormed the square and later routed the police and torched the buses, lorries and vans the police had used. When the police refused to intervene any further the mob was encouraged to storm the key offices of the government, police headquarters and Ministry of the Interior. The TV centre was also attacked. Small arms were seized and buildings ransacked. What had begun as a demonstration turned into an opportunist proto-*putsch*. Even Campeneau, after the event, stigmatised it as a "movement that had lost its way, it was practically without support at large".

In these circumstances, given the degree of violence and the targeted buildings, given the evident support shown for the NSF in the elections only weeks earlier and given the passivity of the police, it was entirely understandable that the NSF called on the workers to

support it against the protesters. The first to respond to the appeal of Iliescu were a group of women textile workers who surrounded the government's headquarters. Iordach describes the scene:

"Their arrival was heralded by the noise of pro-Iliescu slogans being shouted. They stood in line with the soldiers. Their numbers doubled the line."

Print workers in Bucharest took action against the pro-Liberal Party paper (*Romania Libre*) which they suspected of fomenting the disturbance; its paper did not appear for several days. The Jiu Valley miners came to Bucharest and put down the proto-*putsch*, beat up those on the streets and checked the papers of others.

Many have complained of their brutality and have seen the hand of the Securitate in these deeds. No doubt there were such elements trying to take advantage of these events to sow counter-revolutionary discord; no doubt too that the miners engaged on occasion in unnecessary violence. But the essence of the matter was that they came to protect their government which they had elected, which had implemented reforms and which was being subject to an unrepresentative armed and violent attack. All socialists would have given this critical support while not for one minute giving any political support to the actions of the NSF pro-capitalist government.

Consequences of pro-market policies

The enthusiasm for the NSF government was not to last. As the first reserves of the NSF government were used up so the consequences of the pro-market policies were more clearly felt in terms of price rises, closures of factories and so on. But this did not emerge all at once nor is it yet complete. The reason for this lies in the heterogeneous nature of the NSF.

When the NSF first published its economic programme in the spring of 1990 it was a classic example of the kind of programmes that were common in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, formulated by the market reform regimes in Hungary and elsewhere. Given the super centralised command planning system in operation in Romania it is not surprising that large parts of the new government saw their future as lying in a recapitulation of these decentralising projects. This plan more or less corresponded to the politics of President Iliescu and his supporters: a market socialist project within the context of a degenerate workers' state.

But history had already given its verdict on this road, as was shown in the failures of Hungary. Moreover, imperialism was impatient and if Romania wanted to be considered at all favourably then a faster approach to the market was needed and a more open espousal of capitalism demanded.

Over the course of 1990 and 1991 the fortunes of Prime Minister Roman rose; he represented a more social democratic (Mitterrandist) vision of a social welfare capitalism. At the level of day to day policies the two wings could agree on a lot but in fact there is a class divide between the two insofar as a different set of property relations is involved. This does not mean, of course, that Iliescu in any way represents the interests of the working class.

Roman's hand has since been strengthened. But the unity within the NSF will not last forever. Harsh choices over wages, welfare, closures, aid and privatisation will be made with drastic consequences. This will split the NSF asunder. Iliescu has links with more conservative elements in the army and even the relaunched RCP, who will not want to see the Roman road go straight ahead. On the other hand, Roman is active in building bridges to the non-NSF opposition parties and coalitions with whom he may choose to construct a governmental alliance in a situation where his policies of capitalist restoration cannot be accommodated within the structures of an NSF government.

The final chapter of Galloway and Wylie's book, therefore, remains to be written. The Romanian working class has not yet had its final say. It is powerful and organised in trade unions; it has learned that it can fight and bring down dictators; it has defended governments by direct action and can remove others. At present it sees no alternative to the market but hopes that it will not pay the price for such illusions. But Romania is backward. Its industrial plant and equipment are obsolete. Its only hope is proletarian political revolution and the spreading of that revolution to the more developed states of Yugoslavia and Central Europe. If it refuses to be the cat's paw of the reactionary landlordist parties, if it takes up a spirited defence of the legitimate democratic fears of the middle class then it can still rally the social forces around it to complete the revolution it so heroically began in the winter of 1989.

Opportunism and oppression:

A critique of the International Trotskyist Committee and "special oppression"

by Mark Harrison

In 1938, Leon Trotsky wrote the founding programmatic document of the Fourth International, the Transitional Programme. It contained a short but important section on "opening the road" to women workers and to youth. Over fifty years later, social oppression—the oppression of women, youth, lesbians and gay men, and the racially oppressed—has become a question capable of mobilising millions. The untold misery created by social oppression cries out for a revolutionary response.

The fundamental elements of the theoretical understanding of social oppression can be found in the key works of the founders of Marxism—Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. The programmatic method we need to use in meeting the felt needs of the oppressed is embodied in the revolutionary programmes of the Third and Fourth Internationals. Nevertheless, a radical restatement of the revolutionary programme on social oppression is necessary. The problems begin when re-elaboration turns into revision.

One organisation which concentrates particularly on social oppression (or as they call it, "special oppression"), is a small international tendency called the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC), founded in July 1984. For the ITC the question of the "specially oppressed" became—and to this day remains—the acid test for Trotskyists, a defining feature of what they term "orthodox Trotskyism".[1]

The method of the ITC is that of its leading organisation, the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) of the USA. It is a method based on elevating the struggles of the "specially oppressed" to a level of over-riding importance above other spheres of the class struggle. It is a method of capitulation to the bourgeois and petit bourgeois ideology and practice of the movements of the "specially oppressed".

The ITC claim that their commitment to work among women and lesbians and gay men:

"... underlines the practical relationship between the ITC's struggle for the regeneration of the Fourth International and its orientation to the politically advanced workers, who can to a great extent be defined by their willingness to fight against *all* forms of oppression and their opposition to all forms of bigotry—and many of whose most militant fighters necessarily come from specially oppressed backgrounds."[2]

The RWL and ITC's work amongst the "specially oppressed" does indeed serve as a test of their claim to the mantle of revolutionary Marxism. Unfortunately for their pretensions, they fail this test badly.

The Theory

Despite their promise over seven years ago to undertake systematic theoretical work on the question of oppression the ITC has done little. In 1983 the RWL claimed that Engels "remains one of the most extensive and useful analyses of the cause of women's oppression".[3] Yet all their material shows how little they have understood Engels' theoretical insight. The RWL argue that:

"Throughout the development of class society, the nuclear family was strengthened as an economic unit ... The nuclear family is essential to class society in general and to capitalism in particular."[4]

This is an ahistorical and unscientific approach to the development of the family. Capitalism has not strengthened the family as an economic unit. The economic function of the family under both slavery and feudalism was directly related to production. It existed on the basis of monogamy for women (a feature of their historic oppression) but not as a nuclear unit. It existed primarily in the form of a household unit, structured to fulfil the productive tasks peculiar to the agrarian economies of slavery and feudalism.

Capitalism liquidated the household as a unit of production. In the early nineteenth century British capitalism undermined the family as a unit altogether, drawing women and children out of the home and into social production. Compelled by the class struggle of the labour aristocracy and by their own long term needs, sectors of the capitalist class drew back from the destruction of the proletarian family and restructured it as the nuclear family we know today.

This family was no longer a direct economic unit of production but the key social structure providing capitalism with the means of reproducing labour power, and training the future generations of workers—children—in the norms, sense of discipline and morals required by generalised commodity production on the basis of private property.

Thus, while it is true that women's oppression predates capitalism, while it is undeniably the case that the roots of women's oppression can be located in the family, the key question for Marxists is to understand the

1 *International Trotskyist Review* 1, January 1985, p3

2 Ibid, p5, emphasis in original

3 *The Special Oppression of Women*, p7

4 Ibid, p3

family in relation to the specific mode of production within which it exists. It is that mode of production that shapes the family, that determines its role and function and that underlies the oppression of women, youth, lesbians and gay men.[5]

This understanding was at the root of the Communist International's position that "there is no 'specific woman question' and no 'specific women's movement'",[6] i.e. the "woman question" cannot be separated from the general struggle against capitalism. The oppression of women exists because of class society. The site of that oppression is the family, and under capitalism that oppression takes a specific form, as does the family itself, which is directly related to the needs of capitalism. Therefore, the key to the struggle against women's oppression is the class struggle against capitalism.

For the RWL the struggle against oppression is, precisely, a "special" (specific) struggle, parallel and related to the class struggle against capitalism, but not inextricably bound up with it. In 1987 the RWL made it clear that the woman question and the family are distinct from the general class struggle:

"In general, Marxism has recognised the special oppression of women as one of a small number of *absolutely fundamental* social problems of class society and has understood that this oppression has roots which extend beyond the strictly economic processes and structures of human society to specifically sexual and familial relations."[7]

In general, Marxism has said no such thing. It recognises the role of the family in the oppression of women as pivotal, it recognises sexual oppression as an integral feature of the general oppression of women, but it understands that the real roots of these aspects and manifestations of oppression lie precisely in the economic processes that govern society.

If Marxism did not proceed from this materialist premise then it would be left with an idealist understanding of oppression. It would be left with a purely moral case for arguing that the oppressed should join in the general class struggle against capitalism as a means of overcoming their oppression.

It would not understand that oppression of particular layers within class society is not special, that is distinct, but social, rooted in the social structures that arise to meet the economic needs of the prevailing mode of production. It would have the ITC/RWL's idealism and petit bourgeois moral exhortations as the sole means of linking the struggle against oppression to the class struggle.

The Practice

Mistakes in theory always take their revenge on would-be Marxists. The ITC/RWL are no exception. Starting from the theoretical position that social oppression is "special", the ITC/RWL finish by advocating a cross-class strategy for eliminating it.

Running through every aspect of the ITC/RWL's politics is the demand for a strategic alliance of the specially oppressed and the working class:

"One of the central tasks of the revolutionary organisation is to link the struggles of the specially oppressed with the struggle of the working class for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. The strategic alliance of the workers and oppressed is essential for the victory of the proletarian revolution."[8]

The struggle is a "joint struggle culminating in joint emancipation".[9]

The problem with this approach is that it blurs class distinctions. It assumes that because social oppression is faced by people of different classes then all those who are socially oppressed have an interest in overthrowing capitalism.

It is true that social oppression affects classes other than those that are directly exploited by capitalism. But in no sense does this mean that all of the oppressed have a shared objective interest that propels them in an anti-capitalist direction. For one thing it is working class women, blacks, youth and lesbians and gay men who face the most intense social oppression.

The oppressed from the bourgeoisie or petit bourgeoisie can, and quite obviously do, offset whole aspects of the oppression they face. They can resolve the contradictions that they face because they have the economic ability to do so. The development of a "pink capitalist" economy, the role of bourgeois women, the role of Jesse Jackson are all examples of this. Despite social oppression sections of the socially oppressed have a significant stake in capitalist society, which negates the interest they have in fighting their social oppression.

The ITC/RWL ignore this decisive aspect of social reality. They ignore the material factors that make unity of all the oppressed, regardless of their class, a utopian dream. The ITC/RWL invest this dream with a reactionary content by posing it in terms of an alliance with the working class. In practice such an alliance would mean an alliance between workers and the sections of the class enemy. It would mean a popular front. The ITC/RWL call for proletarian leadership of such a popular front does not absolve them from their betrayal of Marxism.

An alliance between different classes inevitably involves a compromise. In certain circumstances that compromise can be justified. The alliance of workers and poor peasants in the Russian Revolution and the compromise on the agrarian question that it entailed was justified because the class position of the poor peasants placed them objectively on the side of the revolution, and the existence of soviets and the Bolshevik Party standing at the head of the revolution guaranteed proletarian leadership.

But the position of the bourgeois, and even of some sections of the petit bourgeoisie, who face social oppression is in no sense analogous with the economic and class position of poor peasants in Russia in 1917, or with the position of poor peasants in today's semi-colonial world. An alliance of all of the socially oppressed with the working class could only mean a compromise between the interests of the working class and the interests of the proletariat's direct class enemies.

Marxists recognise the need to practically engage the oppressed in order to integrate the best elements into

5 See the "MRCI Theses on Women's Oppression", *Trotskyist International* 3

6 "Comintern Theses on Women", reproduced in *Workers Power* Journal 4, pp22-23

7 *The Specially Oppressed and the Proletarian Vanguard*, p20, emphasis in original

8 *The Specially Oppressed and the Proletarian Vanguard*, p1

9 Ibid, p1

the working class movement. This can involve special agitation, special organisations of the revolutionary party and of the labour movement, and special propaganda. But it must involve a fight to defeat the class enemies who misdirect working class lesbians, gay men, black people, youth or women, and to win such oppressed workers to the banner of the working class, revolutionary communist struggle against capitalism.

This work will inevitably develop according to the laws of the class struggle, i.e. against bourgeois leadership and for proletarian politics. The petit bourgeois layers will either rally behind the working class or behind the bourgeoisie. The kind of amorphous "autonomous" petit bourgeois dominated movement beloved of the ITC is a temporary phenomenon.

The reality of social oppression is rooted in the class character of capitalism and will be defeated by the only revolutionary class, the proletariat. Social oppression is a class question. This is something that the ITC/RWL seek to deny, not only in theory, but in practice.

The RWL declare themselves "feminists"[10] and roundly attack the Comintern for what they allege was:

". . . its complete dismissal of work with and within organisations of the feminist movement. Some of these organisations were quite radical and contained potential revolutionaries."[11]

The Comintern were absolutely correct not to confuse the banner of proletarian communism with the banner of bourgeois or reformist feminism. The two movements were at war with one another for good class reasons. The bourgeois feminist movement may have contained radicals, but the Comintern embraced the world's proletarian vanguard, rallied behind the Russian Revolution. The feminist leaders and their movements were the enemies of that vanguard and that revolution.

Today the weakness of communism obliges us to build a united front working class women's movement, within which we will fight for communist leadership. But, as and when circumstances permit, we will turn once again, as the Theses proposed, to the building of communist women's organisations in direct competition with the enemy sisters grouped under the banner of feminism.

Of course this does not mean that communists do not intervene into the movements of the oppressed where they are led by petit bourgeois or bourgeois elements. But it does mean we intervene with the clearly stated perspective of rallying the best elements of such a movement to an alternative, proletarian movement. The ITC/RWL run away from this perspective and pose the class tasks as ones for the movement of the oppressed as a whole.

The direct consequence of identifying themselves as feminists and criticising the Comintern is that the ITC/RWL reject the slogan of a working class women's movement. They berate the white middle class leaders of the existing women's movement and argue for a working class orientation, but their perspective is not to build a working class women's movement as an alternative to it.

This position is carried over into their practice on the black question and the lesbian and gay question. They explicitly refuse to call for proletarian movements of the oppressed in favour of fighting within the existing petit bourgeois led movements. The RWL recently presented the following statement on the creation of a new lesbian organisation in the USA:

"It is time to change the policies of the lesbian liberation movement to policies that will build a broad, militant, anti-racist, working class fightback to defend our lives and liberate our future."[12]

It is not a question of changing the policies of an existing lesbian, or women's or black liberation movement. It is a question of building proletarian alternatives. Through interventions—yes. Through the blurring of the central issue of class character—no.

The Programme

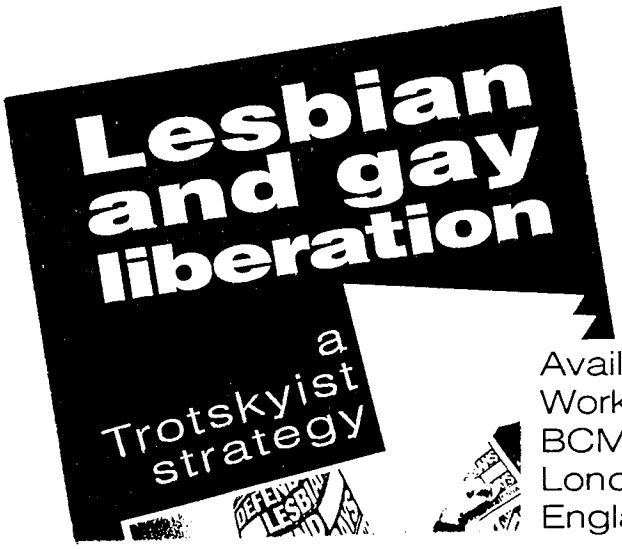
The organisation and mobilisation of the oppressed is necessary as part of the fight to build an integrated class

10 *Fighting Worker*, October 1980

11 *The Special Oppression of Women*, p17

12 RWL statement, April 1991, p1

Lesbian and gay liberation
a Trotskyist strategy



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a workers power pamphlet

struggle against capitalism. The fundamental question for revolutionaries is how to link the two. For the ITC/RWL, with their cross-class strategy, this is a non-issue. Throughout the various presentations of their positions one key idea comes across: the working class are backward and the movements of the "specially oppressed" are the new vanguard. This opportunism towards thoroughly petit bourgeois movements makes a mockery of their lightweight claims to "orthodoxy".

At its crudest level (manifested by the ITC's British section, the RIL), this position expresses itself in ultimatism. The working class—which contains vast numbers of the socially oppressed within its ranks—is seen as an enemy to be fought, not as the exclusive agent of the liberation of all of humanity:

". . . in order to find unity with the rest of the working class we will have to fight them. We will have to go to them, join their struggle and demand they join ours, we must demand of them that they give us their support and fight alongside us as we do for them, we must liberate them from their reactionary anti-lesbian and gay bigotry."[13]

This is the haughty language of the petit bourgeois, convinced of their duty to "enlighten" the backward workers. It has nothing in common with Marxism.

The RIL talk of the working class in terms of "them and us". They treat the question of solidarity against the enemy as a bargaining process. They pit lesbians and gay men against the working class, despite the calls for unity, because they treat lesbians and gay workers as separate from the working class and as having a separate interest. The struggle to win the working class movement to the fight against social oppression is posed as a fight with the working class, not with its treacherous leaders and the backward ideas they propagate in the class.

This position is a confession of political bankruptcy. The ITC/RWL have no other politics than those of the movements which already exist. They have no programme for the working class on social oppression. They treat the working class as objectively inferior to the "specially oppressed", suffering from "spontaneous backwardness",[14] while the "specially oppressed" are a spontaneous vanguard:

"Lesbians and gay men are potentially among the most militant and committed revolutionary fighters, because capitalism's anti-lesbian/gay bigotry means they have less to lose and more to gain by capitalism's overthrow."[15]

This is utter rubbish. If by "spontaneous backwardness" the ITC/RWL mean that the workers suffer as a result of a situation in which the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas in society then they should say so. But they should also recognise that this dictum applies equally to the "specially oppressed". Far from being automatically amongst the most militant, large numbers of those who face social oppression can carry with them terrible and debilitating prejudices that undermine their fighting unity.

Misogyny exists on an intolerable scale in sections of the male gay community. Sexism frequently manifests itself in a sharp form within the black communities. Women, as a result of socialisation, are frequently backward and hostile to the class struggle that "their" men are engaged in. These are all manifestation of the way in which the ruling ideas can weaken the fight against the ruling class. They are all demonstrations that there is no automatic connection between the levels of oppression, or exploitation for that matter, that individual workers suffer and their militancy and potential for becoming revolutionaries.

The vanguard will be built from all sorts of sections of the working class. The most militant fighters will come from all sorts of backgrounds within it. Elevating sections above each other is a divisive, hierarchical and self-defeating method of building the vanguard. Nevertheless, the revolutionary organisation can and must take special measures to recruit and build the fighting confidence of those workers who face social oppression.

This is not the ITC's position. They claim that the vanguard *will be* the oppressed. The question has to be asked of these fine "orthodox Trotskyists": how did the Bolsheviks win in 1917 with only one woman on the Central Committee and with no "out" homosexuals? The question of class politics is always determinant for Trotskyists. Not so for the petit bourgeois opportunists of the ITC.

This laughable version of Leninism is revealed as a complete fraud when it comes to the question of programme. The ITC's cross-class analysis not only leads them to adapt to existing petit bourgeois movements, it also leads them to advance the most minor reforms—the only ones acceptable to their cross-class allies—and to proclaim this as a "revolutionary" answer.

Thus the RIL's *Action Programme for Lesbian and Gay Liberation* is nothing other than a simple charter for mobilising self-organised lesbians and gays for democratic and civil rights. They daringly proclaim that "our struggle is a struggle against the capitalist class and the state which serves it" but they identify "the demands for lesbian and gay liberation" as "civil rights".

No, comrades. Civil rights do not equal liberation. At least, not for Marxists. For petit bourgeois "movementists", perhaps.

For the ITC the revolutionary workers' government, the smashing of the state and the socialisation of domestic labour are all raised as abstract demands. Very "orthodox", no doubt. But the programme makes no connection between the fight for these things and the fight for lesbian and gay liberation. This is the hallmark of opportunism, not of Trotskyism.

Unlike the ITC, we believe that an action programme which links the struggle for democratic rights and civil liberties, the struggle for sexual liberation and the struggle for socialism, is needed. Lesbians and gay men must organise around such a programme on a class basis, with the clear objective of winning the working class as a whole to their cause.[16]

The ITC appear to recognise the uselessness of their approach. For they combine this opportunist adaptation to the existing petit bourgeois consciousness of the movements of the oppressed with caustic—and equally impotent—attacks on the family. Thus the RIL, fired up

13 RIL pamphlet, *Lesbians and Gay Men Demand Liberation Now!*

14 *The Specially Oppressed and the Proletarian Vanguard*, p2

15 *International Trotskyist Review* 1, p38

16 See *Lesbian and gay liberation, a Trotskyist strategy*, Workers Power 1991

on verbal radicalism and a failure to understand one word of *The Communist Manifesto* have boldly declared:

"The family is simply the social organisation of the oppression of women, youth, and lesbians and gay men. We are for the smashing of the family as we are for the liberation of women and youth, along with lesbian and gay men."[17]

With nonsense of this kind, it is hard to know where to start. The first mistake is to portray the family as simply a social organisation for oppression. It is, in addition, a means of reproducing labour power and, as Marxists have long recognised, a partial from the miseries generated by life outside of the family. No worker can take seriously an organisation that calls for the "smashing of the family". It has to be transcended by a higher and non-oppressive form of personal and sexual relations in the transition to socialism. This in turn can only begin to take place under a revolutionary workers' government that has overthrown capitalism.

Secondly, by what means do the RIL propose we "smash the family"? We know that in order to smash the state we require an insurrection and soviets. What equivalent methods are the RIL proposing for this novel demand? Perhaps they are in favour of obliging working families to break up? Moreover, if "smashing the family" is an immediate demand what do the RIL propose to replace it with now?

The only possible answer that springs to mind is that they are in favour enforcing some kind of "alternative lifestyle" on the masses. This may comfort the RIL's petit bourgeois friends, but it will do little to build a working class answer to social oppression. But that is the least of the ITC's concerns.

17 *Revolutionary Internationalist* 10, pp12-13

Conclusion

The ITC's anti-Marxist understanding of "special oppression" opens the door to a whole plethora of petit bourgeois special interest demands, which are at best stupid and at worst divisive. Their cross-class programme for mobilising the oppressed is self-defeating, for it deprives the socially oppressed of the one ally which can guarantee their victory: the working class organised around a revolutionary programme.

This disdain for the only revolutionary force on the face of the planet reveals the ITC as poor "Trotskyists" and fine petit bourgeois opportunists. Their attempt to "re-elaborate" the revolutionary programme on the question of the oppressed in fact involved junking both the theory and practice of Marxism. Nothing "new" was added, except a catalogue of petit bourgeois anti-working class prejudices. Plenty "old" was abandoned, principally the centrality of the working class and the need for proletarian organisation of the oppressed.

This is a sorry version of "Trotskyism" which shows that the ITC, far from "regenerating the Fourth International" have done nothing else than reproduce the opportunist errors of their predecessors in the morass of the centrist "Fourth International" over the last forty years. They represent no way forward for the oppressed or for the working class.

Lessons of the Gulf War

by Juan Poncé

On 2 August 1990 Iraq launched a lightning attack on Kuwait. In a few hours the Emir's vastly outnumbered armed forces had surrendered. Less than four weeks later, Saddam Hussein re-baptised Kuwait "Saddamiyat" and annexed it as the 19th Iraqi province.

On 15 January 1991, after months of diplomacy and war preparations, the USA led a coalition of forces to remove Hussein in a bloody and reactionary war. In the first 100 hours the Allies captured or destroyed 42 Iraqi divisions (12,000 troops each) and took 175,000 prisoners. 3,009 Iraqi tanks and 2,140 pieces of artillery—55% and 61% respectively of Saddam's arsenal—were captured or destroyed.

A month later Iraq suffered a crushing defeat. Between 85,000 and 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded. Iraqi reports suggest that 20,000 Iraqi civilians were killed and 60,000 wounded. Iraq's urban infrastructure was virtually destroyed. For over a month Baghdad was without water and electricity. Cholera and other lethal epidemics stalk the country.

And all for what? For what noble cause did Hussein subject his people and his country to this slaughter? Some on the left have suggested that Hussein stood in the tradition of courageous Arab nationalists prepared to take on imperialism and its Zionist agents in order to free the Middle East from the grip of multi-national domination, military threats and national oppression.

This is a reactionary fantasy, a cruel deception played upon the 100 million Arabs of the region who suffer under the odious burden of imperialism. Saddam was never a consistent anti-imperialist. For years he was imperialism's trusted ally. He never had any legitimate claim to Kuwait. He conducted his war in a way that was guaranteed to bring defeat. He off-loaded the consequences of the war onto his poor suffering people and launched barbarous attacks upon them when they rose up in opposition.

Despite our support for Iraq faced with imperialism's offensive, we must be clear about the limits and nature of Saddam Hussein's policies. Iraq has become the first victim of US imperialism's "new world order"; if it is to be the last then the exploited and oppressed of the "third world" must learn the lessons of the Gulf War.

A reactionary invasion

Hussein's annexation was not an anti-imperialist action. It was a reactionary manoeuvre designed to prevent the impending bankruptcy of his dictatorship and the revolutionary situation that this would create. The eight year war with Iran left Iraq with a foreign debt of $85 billion. Half of this debt was owed to the Gulf states. In addition Iraq needed $60 billion for post-war reconstruction This is equal to Iraq's gross domestic product over a five year period.[1]

Some 97% of Iraq's export earnings came from oil and refined petroleum products. At the end of the 1980s the price of oil began to plummet; by June 1990 it was only $13.6 per barrel. The main reason for this slump was the massive over-production by the Gulf petro-monarchies, especially by Saudi Arabia, the world's principal oil exporter, which increased its oil production to seven million barrels a day.[2]

The interests of the ruling classes of the petro-monarchies are now centred, not so much in oil production itself, as in the industrial production that uses oil as its major energy source and in finance investments. Their interests are no longer identical with those of the OPEC oil producers' cartel.

In the first part of the 1980s the petro-monarchies gave around $40 billion dollars to Baghdad to support and arm it as a bulwark against Iranian shi'ite fundamentalist expansionism. After the war with Iran, Iraq claimed more money from its partners in order to finance reconstruction. In order to pay its massive accumulated war debt, Iraq needed higher oil prices. But the petro-monarchies, with their complex interests, were not willing to decrease their production and thus increase prices. Iraq was locked into a vicious circle of increasing debt and decreasing revenues. Hussein's solution was to invade Kuwait and thus at a stroke enhance its revenues and liquidate its debt or part of it.

Hussein alone decided to invade Kuwait, annex it and give its capital his own name. He never consulted the wishes of the people who lived and worked in Kuwait. Yet Iraq could have won the support of the Arab, Kuwaiti and even the western masses if the invading forces had merely abolished the Emirate and called on the inhabitants of Kuwait to decide their own destiny.

Kuwait was a reactionary monarchy in which only 60,000 (3%) inhabitants out of more than two million could vote. Women, immigrant workers (60% of the population and 80% of the labour force) were excluded from full citizenship. Only those men who could claim to be from families which had lived in Kuwait for over seven decades could claim full citizenship. To have given them democratic rights, to have given them for the first time the ability to decide their own future, would in turn have given Iraq a huge authority amongst the Kuwaiti population and indeed all over the world. It would have demonstrated how utterly hollow were the

1 *El anuario del mundo*, Akal (1991) p289

2 Ibid, p291

"democratic" claims of the USA and the United Nations (UN) that they sought to restore the "legitimate Kuwaiti government" in a free and democratic way.

But Hussein did not want to do any of this. He did not want to give any kind of democracy, consultation or autonomy to his own people and the minorities like the Kurds. If he did that in Kuwait it would undermine his autocracy inside Iraq.

Saddam's purpose was not liberation. It was larceny. The Iraqis stole everything they could, from machinery and buses to jewels and museum pieces. Captured Kuwait was not even administered by some Kuwaiti Quisling: Saddam put one of his most bloody henchmen in power. Repression, torture, rape and robbery became commonplace.

The initial Kuwaiti resistance was very weak. Some of the Kuwaiti inhabitants (like the Palestinians who made up 20% of the population) saw the overthrow of the Al Sabah parasites as something progressive. But the looting and pillage quickly alienated potential supporters.

The war between Iraq and Kuwait lasted only a few hours. To the extent that it is possible in such a *blitzkrieg*, the proletariat should have taken a revolutionary defeatist attitude on both sides. The working class should have promoted revolutionary fraternisation between the Iraqi soldiers and the Kuwaiti people and troops, with the the aim of transforming the war between two bourgeois states into an international class war, uniting the workers of Iraq and Kuwait against their respective ruling classes.

Once Iraq had won the war and began to annex Kuwait, the revolutionary position was to fight for democratic consultation and free self-determination for all the inhabitants of Kuwait over 16 years of age, for the withdrawal of the occupying army and for the arming of the working masses.

But revolutionary tactics have to be modified when circumstances change. When the coalition of imperialist powers started to threaten Iraq and prepare for war, the international working class had to defend the oppressed semi-colonial country against imperialist aggressors and exploiters. Furthermore, had Iraq struck first to prevent the build up and invaded Saudi Arabia we would have supported Iraq.

The border disputes

Saddam Hussein's claim that he was simply restoring a part of his own country stolen by imperialism was pure demagogy. Kuwait, Iraq and all the Middle East countries, were created artificially by the colonial powers. Kuwait was part of the Turkish province of Basra until it became independent from the Sultan in the last century. In 1899 Kuwait was declared a state under British protection, surrounded by the Ottoman Empire. It was never part of Iraq.

Iraq was only founded in 1922, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, on part of the territory of the British Mandate. During the war the British made a secret agreement with France—the notorious Sykes-Picot Treaty. Paris and London agreed to divide "Greater Syria" and put the south and the east (present-day Israel, Jordan and Iraq) under British administration and the north (present-day Syria and Lebanon) under French rule.

All this was unknown to Feisal, a pro-British Arab leader. Feisal took Damascus from the Turks. He then tried to hold power in what had already been designated a French colony. The British would have none of this and he was unceremoniously ejected from Syria. To assuage his outraged feelings the British offered him a new kingdom. Churchill suggested the creation of Iraq by fusing the hitherto unconnected Ottoman provinces of Mosul (majority Kurdish), Baghdad (majority sunni Arab) and Basra (majority shi'ite Arab). All the successor states of the Ottoman Empire share a lack of validity as "national" states, i.e. as states that come into existence as the expression of a pre-existing peoples wish for self-determination. All are the product of the imperialist powers' Balkanisation of the region.

Saddam Hussein: a fake anti-imperialist

During the war both Hussein's most bitter enemies and his closest supporters tried to present him as a sincere and fervent anti-imperialist. Nothing could be further from the truth. Hussein was a reactionary Bonapartist dictator who had repeatedly capitulated to imperialism both on the internal economic front and in regional and world politics.

The Ba'ath is a bourgeois nationalist party. Like many nationalist forces throughout the "third world" it was created under an anti-imperialist banner, but it was doomed to become a tool and servant of imperialism, This process has been seen repeatedly from Latin America (APRA, MNR, PRI, Peronism, etc) to China (Guomindang) and also in Africa with Nasser's "socialist" Egypt, Nyerere's "African socialism"etc.

Ba'athism sought to create an "anti-imperialist", multi-class, pan-Arab state. It never challenged private property or the capitalism system. Quite the opposite: its aim was to create a national bourgeoisie. For this reason the powers of the imperialists, the archaic landowners and the reactionary religious hierarchy had to be limited. State capitalist measures aimed at protecting industrial development in the Arab countries were promoted in the hope of creating a modern national capitalist class.

Such nationalists are always willing to use the workers and peasants as an instrument of mass pressure against foreign enemies. They attempt to organise and mobilise the masses with anti-imperialist slogans. In a tight corner they may even give them weapons, but always on a regimented and strictly controlled basis. If and when the proletariat starts to act on its own behalf the nationalists will rush to block it, either by incorporating a privileged stratum of labour bureaucrats or by using other forces—the petit bourgeoisie or the peasantry—to crush workers' struggles and independent class organisations The same bourgeois nationalist movement may use a combination or succession of these methods. But always and everywhere they seek a Bo-

napartist regime which can control and subordinate the proletariat to the interests of the "national bourgeoisie".

They have no intention of making a decisive or fundamental break with the imperialists. They are simply trying to find a better place for their own capitalist economy within the framework of the imperialist world system. However radical these parties were in their youth, hurling down the most fiery and radical challenges to imperialism, their rise to power "matures" them with astonishing speed. Once they have to direct a modern state and economy they need the imperialists' loans and investments to prop up both. The bourgeois nationalists also find that they need support from imperialism to discipline their own workers when the masses, perhaps taking the "socialist" slogans seriously, menace private property. Despite all the anti-imperialist and socialist rhetoric the nationalists always ends up with a reactionary, anti-communist and pro-imperialist programme in government.

Reality and the myth of Arab nationalism

In the 1950s and 1960s, pan-Arabism was a dominant feature of mass hostility to imperialism's division and domination of the Middle East. Its power mobilised millions. Fearing for their interests, British and French imperialism launched their reactionary attack on Egypt following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. These times are long gone. Nowadays pan-Arabist slogans are mainly used as a transparently cynical accompaniment to annexationist or interventionist adventures by military regimes, such as the Libyan incursion into Chad, the Yemeni and Lebanese civil wars, or Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. The pan-Arabism of a Hussein or a Gaddaffi are a terribly degenerate reflection of the speeches of Nasser that electrified the whole Arab world in the days of the wars against Israel and Anglo-French imperialism. The current weakness of Arab nationalism is also show by the rise of "regional" nationalisms (Algerian, Egyptian, Palestinian, Syrian etc) and various sorts of Islamic "anti-imperialism", all of which were used by Hussein during the war.

The big problem for the Arab nationalists is that we are no longer in the revolutionary epoch of capitalism, but in its final and reactionary epoch. The unification of the Arab world could only be accomplished in opposition to the entire imperialist system. The imperialists will not tolerate for one moment the challenge that a unification of these dispersed semi-colonies would pose. With a bourgeois or petit bourgeois leadership it is impossible to unify the Middle East against imperialism. These classes are incapable of challenging the huge multi-national capitalist corporations and the states that serve them, the real owners of the world.

The project of an Arab national unification has proved and will continue to prove a utopia. Only the proletariat could unify the region, on the basis of a socialist programme. And the proletariat has no particular reason to limit this to merely Arab unity. The proletariat cannot become a nation builder without violating its international programme and at the same time its duty

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In the Middle East the fighting unity needed now must include Kurds, Turks and Iranians as well as the numerous smaller communities. The struggle will be shortened if it includes the Israeli Jewish proletariat, The slogan of Arab national unity holds no special appeal for any of these peoples. Indeed, it can create genuine fears, which, as the behaviour of Arab nationalists have demonstrated, are not groundless. The unity that the peoples of the Middle East, Arab and non-Arab, need can only be safeguarded in a socialist united states of the Middle East.

Towards the new world order

Although Hussein was an important prop for imperialism, the imperialists did have some reservations about him. He was never prepared to recognise the Israeli state and support the imperialists' "peace" plans for the region. This prevented him from enjoying the complete confidence of the imperialists. But the qualitative break came when he violated the imperialist-drawn borders and invaded one of the most pro-western of all the Arab states. He had clearly become a rogue elephant that had to be shot.

Bush could almost certainly have avoided the war and obtained the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and the restoration of the Emir if he had permitted the Gulf states to make monetary or territorial concessions to Hussein, as they were ready and willing to do. At the end of October the Saudi Defense Minister, Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Azis, declared, "We see no harm in any Arab country giving its Arab sister land, a site, or a position on the sea".

But Bush rejected any concessions out of hand. His only offer was that some months after a withdrawal it might be possible to convene an international Middle East peace conference and that negotiations over the border disputes and other questions could then take place with the Emir. For Hussein to withdraw under these conditions would have been the height of humiliation.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the US satellites and intelligence knew before 2 August that Hussein would invade Kuwait. The US ambassador in Iraq (April Gilespie) said to Hussein some days before the invasion that Washington was neutral in the border disputes with Kuwait.

The Kuwait invasion was an excellent pretext for the US administration to use to obtain some important political goals. For the first time in its history Washington led a coalition of all the great powers against a single nation. They tried to use the war to overcome domestic recession and they insured themselves against the cost of the war by soliciting contributions to cover a large part of the war expenditure.

For the first time the Soviet Union could be expected to veer between support and neutrality. The whole semi-colonial world would be more closely aligned with the USA and a few "rogues" such as Cuba, plunged into even deeper isolation. Last but not least the USA could demonstrate that economic strength alone, like that of its "allies" Japan or Germany, is not enough to direct the world economy in the interests of the imperialists and guarantee peace and cheap raw material prices; for that a world military superpower is necessary.

Bush wants to indicate that the days of "third world" anti-imperialist nationalism are over. Hussein tried to avoid paying his debts. He even mugged one of his moneylenders. And he paid the price. Be warned! Uncle Sam, the world policeman, will "kick ass" at the first sign of refusal to pay up.

The stabilisation of the Middle East is central to imperialism's new world order. It was indispensable for the USA to end the conflicts inside Lebanon and Palestine. Diplomatic agreements between Israel and Egypt cut out the most important Arab base of support for the anti-Zionist fight. Imperialism wants to come down even harder on Palestinian radicalism and the *intifada*. With the crushing of Iraq the USA has smashed the mightiest Arab army that could have challenged Israel, and in doing so struck the Palestinians a mighty blow.

They also tried to break the radical muslim bloc. Lybia, Iran and Syria had a pro-imperialist, neutral or enemy position in this conflict. Syria participated in the military bloc against Iraq. The imperialists supported Syria when it repressed the Lebanese Christian leaders and now as the stabilising factor in Lebanon. Now they are trying to gradually force Syria (and with it all the Arab states) to recognise Israel. They are trying to show Iran and Syria that world politics are now changing, that the USSR will not defend "anti-imperialist" dictators and that the best way to develop is to make more concessions to imperialism.

US morale, US hypocrisy

For the White House there was also one piece of unfinished business that could be addressed by an attack on Iraq: to restore the "morale" on their home front and the authority and prestige of the ruling class within its own country; in short to put an end to the "Vietnam syndrome". Since the Second World War USA had not won a really big war. In Korea they failed to win an outright victory. In Vietnam they were actually defeated and humiliated. The rescue operation for the American hostages in Iran turned into a ludicrous fiasco. They were forced to withdraw ignominiously from Lebanon, after more than 200 US marines were killed by a suicide bomber.

The only wars the USA had won in 45 years were pathetically small scale and in defense of their domination in the Caribbean. Even here they "lost" Cuba and were made fools of at the Bay of Pigs. Its ideologists have justified genocidal actions (Vietnam and the Gulf) whilst maintaining an injured tone of having acted in the purest self-defence. Reagan played on the "defeat psychosis" to win the 1980 election under the slogan "let's make America great again". He set out, step by step, to wipe out the Vietnam syndrome.

The invasion of Panama on 20 December 1989 and

the handling of Noriega show important parallels to the strategy in the Gulf. Once the evil dictator rebels against his boss, he is suddenly unmasked. All the crimes (drugs, human rights, etc) that were overlooked or hidden so long as he was "our son-of-a-bitch" are suddenly revealed in all their horror. Targeting an anti-communist and discredited dictator is much easier that fighting against "communist" guerrillas rooted in the people with high morale and with the support of the USSR. Most liberals and also some socialists, Marxists and even Trotskyists can be persuaded to join the imperialist propaganda machine on this basis. It worked on a small scale with Noriega. With Saddam the US ruling class tried it again and this time hit the jackpot.



With friends like these . . .

The USA's ability to smash Iraq was a direct result of the fact that the "socialist bloc" permitted it to do so. The USSR, China and Cuba's attitude was criminal. After the invasion of Kuwait all of them voted in favour of economic sanctions against their former ally, Iraq. These "communists" transformed themselves into champions of the restoration of one of the most reactionary monarchies on the planet. They hypocritically supported a "self-determination" for this tiny emirate whilst perpetrating the oppression and massacre of nations in Tibet, the Caucasus, the Baltic states etc. Although the Stalinist parties throughout the world participated in peace demonstrations they all called for an imperialist peace; this inevitably meant Iraq's surrender and the re-establishment of the emirate.

The USSR supported the USA's military attack because it desperately needs loans and economic support as well as a guarantee that the imperialists will turn a blind eye when they crush their own nationalities. China voted for, or abstained on, the various UN resolutions in return for promises of economic aid and the elimination of sanctions imposed when they smashed the student occupation of Tiananmen square. Moscow, Yugoslavia and Beijing took advantage of the opening of hostilities to settle a few scores with their domestic enemies (the Baltic governments, the Kossovo Albanians and the Tiananmen activists).

Cuba condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, initially voted in favour of the economic boycott and thereafter failed to vote against the use of military force to enforce the Iraqi withdrawal. The Castroites sent Daniel Ortega and 200 medical personnel—they sought to simultaneously present themselves as friends of Baghdad and as endorsing the UN demands for Iraq to withdraw.

The US alliance was made up of thirty countries and actively supported by another 18 (including the USSR). Despite the risible nature of some of this "support" (a few hundred soldiers or less), the USA could thus appear as the champion of the whole world, supported by different types of regime—from absolutist kingdoms to "socialist states"—from the all five continents.

Iraq received no military support. All the "third world" nationalists showed how utterly hollow their "anti-imperialism" really was. Some of the most pro-imperialist regimes from the imperialised countries entered the alliance to flatter the US and beg for economic assistance.

Why was Iraq defeated?

Saddam Hussein knew that it was absolutely impossible to gain a military victory against the combined US-UN forces. He knew that he would have to leave Kuwait, but he was determined that the imperialists would pay dearly for this by transforming inevitable military defeat into a political victory.

Hussein wanted to come out of the war as an historic anti-imperialist, pan-Islamicist and pan-Arab leader. He wanted to be able to negotiate with Bush and the allies on an equal footing. The cost of defeat would be dealt with later, paid for out of the profits reaped from transforming Iraq into a regional power which had challenged the super-powers. Hussein was prepared to accept hundreds of thousands of casualties and massive destruction to achieve this.

However, the historical analogy with Nasser's Egypt deceived Saddam. There was a world of difference between Egypt's war against two declining imperialist powers and Iraq's confrontation with the world imperialist super-power.

During the various wars between Egypt and Israel, Egypt had the backing of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc while the imperialist camp was divided. During the 1956 Suez war the USA opposed the Anglo-French intervention, hoping to supplant them as the most influential force in the region. In the current phase of world history we are passing from a period where two major forces confront each other on the global stage to

one where there is only military power with a world wide intervention capability.

Instead of supporting Iraq, the USSR and China supported the blockade and the imperialist attack. When Egypt challenged Israel it had the support of the whole Arab world. Iraq was able to win the support of millions of muslims, but the majority of Arab states—and a large part of the Arab masses—was on the other side of the barricades.

It was said that Iraq was a "third world" country with a first world arsenal. The truth, however, is that Iraq sought to fight with the methods of the First World War in the time of the Third World War.

Some leftists argued that Iraq would become another Vietnam. This was a ridiculous expectation The Ba'ath party is a bourgeois nationalist formation with a 25 year old dictatorship. It played a brazenly pro-imperialist role against the revolutionary Iranian masses, and was pleading for a deal with the imperialists. Its origins do not lie in the labour movement, nor is it supported by a Stalinist superpower. It has no history of popularly supported guerilla warfare, nor has it led a civil war against an imperialist puppet regime. Such a regime and such a leader stood no chance of generating a powerful worldwide anti-imperialist upsurge such as the Viet Cong did in the 1960s. Only wilful self deluders could have believed this was possible.

Hussein's military strategy

Iraqi strategy was based on a series of factors.

- A war of attrition which would lead to high Allied casualties and consequent political difficulties for the imperialists. As Saddam said to the US ambassador to Iraq: "Yours is a society which cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle. "
- Economic chaos would be created by the destruction of the Gulf oil fields, leading to soaring oil prices and stock market crashes.
- Allied forces would be divided. The aim was to transform a war between "the rest of the world and Iraq" into a war between the Arabs and Israel and its godfathers.
- Morale in the imperialist heartlands would be shaken by a wave of terrorist attacks.

None of these aims was fulfilled. The Allies were able to replace a war of attrition by a war of position. Allied casualties amounted less than 200 dead. Only 45 Allied planes were lost and a handful of land vehicles. The great mass of casualties was on Iraq's side. The Al Hussein ("Scud") missiles inflicted no significant damage on any oil field or refinery. The allies had massive air superiority.

The war did not produce economic chaos, except in Baghdad. At the beginning of the blockade, world oil prices passed $26 per barrel, rising to $32 on the eve of the expiry of the US deadline. If the imperialist invasion had been delayed any longer, prices might have soared higher. When the attack began, prices slumped by $11, and on the following day decreased by another $2. The allies produced more oil or sold off their reserves to make up for the shortfall and reduce prices. At the beginning of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait all the major stock exchanges took a dive. But the imperialist demonstration of power, followed by the invasion, did much to restore confidence and prices.

Iraq's attempt to provoke Israel by Scud attacks, however newsworthy, came to nothing. For showing "patience" the imperialists rewarded the Israelis with more economic and military aid. The Zionists also increased their international prestige and laid the basis for a future understanding with the moderate Arab regimes. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria all declared that their position in the war would not change even if Israel were to retaliate and attack Iraq. Syria went so far as to allow Israeli planes to overfly Syrian territory on their way to attack Iraq, so long as they returned by another route!

Because of massive repression, the Palestinians proved unable to open a second front inside Israel and the Occupied Territories. Jordan and Iran did not join the war on Iraq's side. King Hussein was obliged to play on the pro-Iraqi sentiments of his population (most of whom are Palestinians), whilst maintaining a position of non-intervention in the war. Iran gained a series of major concessions from Iraq by appearing to search for peace and reconciliation. Saddam Hussein's relations with Syria were very changeable. He pushed for Syria to fight Israel, claiming that he sought to reconquer the Golan Heights. He did not directly attack Syria, nor did he launch an offensive in Lebanon against the Syrian-backed forces.

Terrorist attacks did take place in various places throughout the world. Most of them were local initiatives, without any co-ordination from Baghdad. Many of them did not even raise solidarity with Iraq. None had any significant consequences. Far more important than these isolated actions were the millions in the streets opposing the war. But Saddam Hussein played little heed to this.

As for denting the morale of the US armed forces, this was never likely. The US Army had learned the lessons of its defeat in Vietnam. Professional volunteers, not conscripts, went to the Gulf; the possibility of demoralisation and desertion was reduced even though many were "obliged" to enlist for economic reasons. A significant proportion of the US army in the Gulf was composed of blacks and latinos. Afro-Americians—13% of the total US population—made up 25% of the troops in the Gulf. These sectors of US society face the highest levels of unemployment and the lowest living standards. Wages for soldiers in the Gulf were 300% higher than those for soldiers in Vietnam. US soldiers were highly qualified—most of them with a high school diploma—and they were well trained in military theory and strategy.

Saddam Hussein's defensive tactics

Iraq could not hope to compete with the west in sophisticated war weaponry. The Allies were easily able to impose their domination over the sea and, decisively,

in the air. Iraq had virtually no logistical support for its troops. Iraq's best arms were to be found in its ground arsenal: the modified Soviet-made Scud ground-to-ground missiles (although these lacked both precision and a substantial payload capacity), artillery, tanks and biochemical weapons.

Iraq was in a defensive position. It had more soldiers at the front than all the Allied armies put together. Troops, aircraft and weapons were dug into the sand or concealed in specially constructed bunkers. From the very first day of the conflict the Allies gained air superiority. Iraq was subject to weeks of punishing bombardments and air raids. After the first 24 hours of combat, all the imperialist media claimed an easy victory. They said that 50%, 70% or even 80% of Iraqi military installations and aircraft had been destroyed. In fact, what the Allies had been destroying were lures—paper or plastic life-size mock-ups. Iraq only lost 20% of its aircraft in the war.

But there was a major flaw at the heart of Saddam's strategy. It required a massive and bloody land war, but the logistical infrastructure necessary for sustaining a drawn-out conflict was entirely absent: Iraq could not wage a prolonged war. Spare parts were virtually completely lacking and allied aircraft were slowly but surely destroying Iraqi cities and military installations. The lines of communication with the Kuwait theatre of war were being cut.

Saddam badly needed to draw the allies into a precipitate land war. He could not compete in an air war, which would only lead to more bombings, death and destruction. For this reason he undertook a series of provocative manoeuvres—the Scud attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia, the poisoning of the Gulf waters with a massive oil slick and the lightning occupation of Khafji, a Saudi Gulf city near Kuwait.

None of these tactics was successful. The occupation of Khafji had only a limited propaganda value. The repeated Scud attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia showed that the Iraqi war machine was intact, despite the massive allied bombing, but did not succeed in provoking the imperialist or Israeli forces. The continual threat of a chemical attack created a certain psychosis in the heart of the enemy—both in the population and in the regimes, but the allied commanders were not forced to change their strategy and attack before they were ready.

In an anti-imperialist war we have to evaluate military tactics from the point of view of our overall strategy of winning mass support for the progressive side or at least undermining support for the reactionaries. The Scud attacks tended to alienate the Israeli Jewish working class from the anti-imperialist camp rather than winning them to an anti-war position. At the same time they were totally ineffective as a means of destabilising the imperialist led alliance. In Israel the targets of the Scud missiles were civilian Jewish suburbs. Hussein wanted to provoke the Israeli people into pressing the Zionist government to launch an attack against Iraq, thus breaking the anti-Hussein coalition.

A revolutionary strategy would have started from a different standpoint. Instead of trying to provoke a massive Israeli attack on Jordan and Iraq, such a strategy would have concentrated on arming the Palestinian and Jordanian workers against the treacherous King Hussein, overthrowing his government and aiding the *intifada*. The Iraqi army could have played a crucial role in aiding this revolution. Israel would undoubtedly have attacked if Jordan had collapsed.

But the chance of a regional revolutionary upsurge would have been much greater. Revolutionaries within Israel and the occupied territories would take up the fight to split the Israeli population along class lines and to pit the workers against the capitalists. Of course to do this would have meant making it clear that liberation from oppression for the Palestinians would not mean annihilation for the Israeli workers but their coming to power alongside their Arab sisters and brothers. Saddam Hussein, a bourgeois nationalist dictator, had not the slightest interest in seeing the unity of the Israeli and Palestinian workers. His aim was to unite all Arabs under the sway of the Iraqi ruling class.

Why did the Allies not march on Baghdad?

Nearly four weeks after the beginning of the war Saddam offered the imperialists a deal: he would withdraw from Kuwait if the war were to end. He had entered an endgame. The Ba'athist regime's resistance was finished. The imperialists argued:

"If he pulls out now, he can probably stay in power, save a good part of his army and even emerge an Arab hero for having held out so long against the battering of a superpower and its allies. If he can negotiate some terms to soften the sting—a Middle East Peace Conference, for example, that would enable him to claim he had forced the west to do something about the Palestinian problem—so much the better. If he tries to hold out even another month, however, he might well lose everything." [3]

For this reason the USA would not go along with Hussein's game. Every time Saddam promised more concessions, the imperialists upped the stakes. When Iraq finally accepted the Soviet plan which involved unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait, the USA put forward new objections.

They wanted a total capitulation and they did not want the USSR to be able to appear as a responsible major world power. Furthermore, having initiated the peace process, the USSR would have been able to demand a say in post-war negotiations. The Allies took full advantage of Hussein's vacillations. At the very moment the Ba'ath regime was accepting the Soviet peace plan, the ground war was launched.

The Iraqi soldiers were unable to resist the imperialist offensive. Their morale was shattered due to lack of food and daily bombardments. Why should they fight to defend Kuwait when the government was on the point of unconditionally withdrawing? The courageous Iraqi soldiers no longer had any reason to fight; they felt abandoned, used and betrayed by their leaders. More than 100,000 soldiers surrendered in a matter of days. The Iraqi high command army defeated itself, through

3 *Time*, 25.2.91

a chaotic policy which Napoleon described as "order, countermand, counter-countermand, disorder".

There was another factor which led to the collapse of the Iraqi defences. Although a type of "Maginot line" was constructed between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, hundreds of kilometres of the frontier between Iraq and Saudi Arabia were completely unfortified and poorly defended. The allies made an initial feint in the form of an attack on the south of Kuwait. Undetected, they rapidly transferred thousands of French and US troops to the west, outflanking the main Iraqi defences, penetrating into Iraq and surrounding the bulk of Saddam's forces

Saddam wanted a bloody war of position. The Allies gave him a war of movement. It was bloody enough, but only on the Iraqi side. With a combination of warplanes and troop-carrying helicopters, the Allies protected the tank advances and drove massive corridors through the desert, sweeping them clean of Iraqi troops. These Allied forces rapidly captured 20% of Iraq's territory and decisively engaged and defeated Iraq's army.

General Schwartzkopf was lying when he said the Allied troops could easily have gone on to take Baghdad. If the USA had been so rash as to try, allied casualty figures would have soared and the Arab world would have erupted in flames. The USA would not have been able to present itself as the force which had destroyed the world's fourth largest army and "liberated" Kuwait with virtually no casualties. Furthermore, it would have been apparent to all that the USA's real aim was to reassert its domination over Iraq.

The USA accepted the ceasefire from a position of strength. Kuwait had been "liberated" and a military wedge had been established inside Iraq, near Basra. Most of Iraq's military machine and infrastructure had been destroyed; around one third of Iraq's frontline troops had been captured. Allied forces were effectively untouched.

A continuation of the war would have implied marching on Basra, Baghdad and the other major cities of Iraq. There would have been direct street confrontations with the population, as well as fierce battles with the elite sections of the armed forces. The soldiers who surrendered to the Allies were conscripts; they were not the core of the Iraqi army, the 100,000 strong Republican Guard. Well paid, well trained, experienced in tank and poison gas warfare, the Guard is utterly loyal to Saddam Hussein and is considered to contain some of "the most formidable fighting men in the 'third world'".[4] Hussein kept them away from the front line, deploying them in the area between Kuwait and Basra to act as a barrier against any attempts by the Allies to cross into the Mesopotamian valley. Throughout the war, no significant battle took place between the Allied troops and the cream of Saddam's army. As such a conflict became more likely, the war ended.

Of course, one of the central objectives of US policy—the overthrow of Saddam Hussein—was not achieved. The imperialists wanted to encourage a coup from within the regime; they did not want to kill Saddam during the war. They did not want to create a martyr. They wanted Hussein personally to accept the humiliating ceasefire, thus destroying the possibility of him appearing later as the man who opposed the "betrayal" of concessions to imperialism.

4 *Time*, 4.2.91

Proletarian policy in the war

During the war the task of revolutionaries was to side with semi-colonial Iraq. But this did not mean giving the slightest political confidence to the Ba'athist regime. It did not mean ceasing the struggle to overthrow the dictatorship. Rather it meant approaching this objective from another direction, one which for the duration of the war recognised the imperialists as the main immediate enemy and Hussein as unable and unwilling to mount an effective and victorious struggle against them.

The task of working class revolutionaries was to outline a strategy that could utilise the situation to develop a mass anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle in the region. Subordinate and related to this, it was their duty to show how the war could be transformed into a really consistent anti-imperialist and revolutionary war.

Of course, Saddam's view was completely different. Despite he and his party's claim to be socialist, anti-imperialist, even secular and democratic, there was no question of waging war on a democratic, anti-imperialist or socialist platform. Instead this secularist and self-proclaimed liberator of women called for a muslim holy war.

With this strategy he embraced the most reactionary forces in Arab society: the anti-woman, anti-socialist, theocratic and anti-democratic fundamentalist mullahs. Hussein's pan-Islamic rhetoric rebuffed all the forces fighting for progressive goals in the region and blocked any possibility of winning mass support for Iraq inside the labour movement in the west, in Israel or in the world as a whole. Worse still, it gave the priests and the rabbis the opportunity to reinforce their influence amongst the masses in the countries fighting against Iraq.

The war could have had a completely different outcome if it had been waged under a consistently revolutionary programme. The starting point of the most basic democratic and anti-imperialist struggle would have been: overthrow the oil kings, sultans, and sheikhs!

The raising of democratic slogans against these reactionary monarchies would have exposed and ideologically disarmed the "democratic" imperialist camp and won mass support for Iraq throughout the world. The neo-liberal propaganda offensive was denouncing the Stalinist dictatorships as "dinosaurs"; for the champions of freedom and democracy to wage war to defend semi-feudal dinosaurs would have put them into an explosive contradiction.

But Saddam Hussein dared not call for the overthrow of the Arab monarchies. On the contrary he tried to reinforce his alliance with King Hussein of Jordan. He even went so far as to use ludicrous propaganda claiming that he was descended from the Jordanian royal house and thus from the Prophet!

Had Iraq supported and indeed introduced democratic rights and freedom in Kuwait at the time of the

invasion, there would have been the real possibility of winning the support of the great majority of the population. A central slogan would have been the call for a constituent assembly elected by all who lived and worked in Kuwait. Giving the vote to women and to the workers of Kuwait would at a stroke have converted the population into enthusiastic opponents of the Emir and the imperialists. The imperialists' talk of "liberating" Kuwait would have deceived no one.

In a democratic sovereign constituent assembly, based on the armed masses, the representatives of the Kuwaiti masses could have exposed the full facts about the royal family's $100 billion overseas assets. They would have fought for the return of these stolen riches to the people, to improve social conditions and to develop the region. Whilst the Arab working masses live in poverty and backwardness, a minuscule stratum of parasitic *rentiers* wallow in billions derived from their multinational financial affairs. Together with the development of large scale plans of public works, education, health provision etc, this would have laid the basis for links between the Kuwaiti workers and workers throughout the multinationals in which the Al Sabah have huge shareholdings (Daimler-Benz, BP, Midland Bank, Hoescht, etc).

With such an approach, many of the Kuwaitis who celebrated their "liberation" from the Iraqi "Attila" would have been marching to oppose US invasion threats. They would have been burning the Stars and Stripes, not waving it.

Kuwait is only one of six petro-monarchies. All of them are the private fiefs of feudal families turned capitalist *rentiers*. Six families own nearly half OPEC's oil production. In each country it is the same story: a large part or a clear majority of the working class are not allowed to be citizens. No democratic rights of any kind exist. Women and minorities are third class citizens.

In Saudi Arabia there is not a single elected official, not one legal political party and religious minorities (Christians and shi'ites) are persecuted, are unable to worship freely and have been the victims of brutal massacres. In Qatar slavery still exists: "In 1986 the slave market in the Baraimi oasis was still selling 70,000 slaves every year. Anyone can buy a slave for $800-900." [5]

All these regimes are politically extremely weak. By focussing on the call for their destruction, Iraq would have gained a weapon of extraordinary mobilising power. The key slogans would have been: for the overthrow of the monarchic regimes; democratic rights for citizens and workers; equal status for women and national and religious minorities; eradication of all traces of slavery or feudal remnants.

Such a programme would have enabled the Iraqi masses to win the support of the oppressed and exploited throughout the world and show that the imperialist "freedom fighters" were in fact fighting to preserve the privileges of the decadent petro-monarchies.

In all the oil monarchies the christians and other non-sunni are repressed. Christmas and churches are forbidden in Saudi Arabia. Hussein did not want to fight for the defence of those minorities trying to win the support of other christians in the world. He also repressed Jews and christian-Assyrians inside his own country.

But Hussein would not and could not follow such a policy. In Iraq, he oppressed the Kurds and discriminated against the Shi'ites and other religious and national minorities. He could not fight for democratic rights elsewhere when he held Iraq in a brutal autocratic grip. He could not gain the support of the workers of the Middle East and beyond whilst he murdered and imprisoned the leaders of the Iraqi workers.

For Iraq to win the support of the masses of the imperialised world it would have been necessary to refuse to pay the external debt and to call for the cancellation of all debts to imperialism, for the expropriation without compensation and under workers' control of all the imperialist multinationals, and for a worldwide struggle to expel imperialist occupying forces from Panama, the Malvinas etc. But Hussein made not the slightest move to expropriate the imperialist holdings in Iraq or Kuwait. Instead he allowed Iraq's foreign assets to be seized without reply.

Proletarian politics in Iraq after the war

As soon as the imperialist war was over Iraq was convulsed by civil war. All the principle cities saw uprisings against Hussein and the Ba'athist regime. The shi'ites (55% of the population) took control of Basra and Karbala, two important cities in the south. The Kurds (20-30% of the population) took control of Irbil, Suleymaniyah and other cities in the north. There were also clashes in Mosul and Kirkuk, two major oil towns in the north of Iraq, and in Baghdad itself.

These two movements challenged the rule of Hussein and his Sunni elite. The sunni Arabs are at most 20% of the Iraqi population, but have dominated most Iraqi governments since the 1958 republican revolution. The rebels benefitted from the fact that Hussein had armed sections of the civilian population, and because many officials and troops deserted in order to support them. The shi'ites received arms from Iran, the Kurds from their already-existing guerilla armies.

Yet this revolutionary situation was the last thing that the US administration had really been seeking. Instead of a palace coup to oust Hussein, it looked as though defeat would lead to disintegration, with Iraq splitting into three different states: a Kurdish state in the north, a shi'ite Arab state in the south, and a sunni Arab state in the centre. Despite their crocodile tears for the Kurds, the imperialists clearly decided that they preferred Iraq intact with Hussein at its head to seeing the armed masses decide their own future. Knowing full well the consequences of their action, the US high command allowed Hussein's murderous Republican Guard to pass through its ranks in order to drown the uprisings in blood.

For the moment "order reigns in Baghdad". Business is as usual in the secret police headquarters and the torture chambers. Iraqi industry may have been brought to its knees, but Hussein's portrait still stares out from a thousand walls, dressed in a hundred absurd uniforms.

5 *Tres Continentes*, La Habana, p164



American soliders inspect burnt out Iraqi tank

The imperialists have won a double victory: they have crushed Iraq's military might and political pretensions and they have temporarily cowed the insurgent masses. Hussein's head rests far from easy on his shoulders, however.

The national, religious and class tensions which produced the civil war remain. Revolutionaries must take advantage of the crisis in order to increase the strength, independence and material conditions of the proletariat and to fight for workers' power and a workers' state. As always, the key question is that of leadership.

The rebellious masses must be warned that the religious and nationalist leaders are also their enemies. The Islamic fundamentalists want to replace Hussein with a theocratic dictatorship that would attack women's rights and those of national and religious minorities, Islamicise and then destroy all workers' organisations and would introduce an anti-working class autocratic regime.

The Kurdish nationalist leaders do not want to destroy capitalism or defeat imperialism. Their aim is to establish a Kurdish autonomous region or state ruled by big landowners and capitalists. In the past the Kurdish tribal and nationalist leaders have organised pogroms against the Armenians, Assyrians, Turcomans and other minorities. Some of the "socialists" involved in the civil war sought to establish a new kind of Ba'athist dictatorship without Saddam Hussein, linked with Syria, Libya or another Arab state. The Stalinists want to create a bourgeois democratic or "national unity" government.

The proletariat should have no trust in any of the leaderships that are opposed to Hussein. Workers must regain their class independence and create autonomous militias and councils. Military united fronts against Saddam Hussein are permissible. But if the USA intervened militarily on the side of one of the anti-Hussein factions, we would be obliged to make an anti-imperialist military united front with the Ba'athists once again.

The proletariat should oppose any kind of bourgeois government, be it Ba'athist, "national unity", Islamic or democratic bourgeois. The only government we fight for is a workers' and peasants' government, that is, for the proletarian dictatorship, allied to the poor peasants. The key task is the creation of a revolutionary workers' party committed to the fight for workers' power in Iraq.

In order to destroy the Ba'athist dictatorship and to arm the masses against illusions in the imperialists or the nationalist or religious leaders, the workers and poor peasants will have to be mobilised around a set of interlinked transitional demands:

- Withdrawal of the coalition forces from Iraq and for the expulsion of the imperialist armies from the region
- The immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and for full democratic freedoms. of speech the press assembly, etc
- The trial of all the torturers and secret police including Saddam and his clique by popular tribunals made up of workers and peasants
- Full rights and social equality for women
- The recognition of the right to self-determination up to and including complete separation for the Kurds, Turcomans, Assyrians and other nationalities
- Support for the Kurdish struggle in all the states which partition Kurdistan. Support for its unification if the Kurdish people so desire it
- For a revolutionary democratic and sovereign constituent assembly elected by all adults over the age of 16, based on the armed organisations of the masses
- Complete separation of the state, education and all aspects of private life from the jurisdiction of the mosque or the church
- For the creation of workers' and peasants' militias and councils. All power to the workers' and peasants' councils
- For the cancellation of the whole of Iraq's $85 billion foreign debt
- Nationalisation without compensation of all imperialist and large scale Iraqi capitalist companies
- Land to the those who work on it. Expropriate the remaining large landowners. For the creation of agricultural co-operatives to manage the land
- Workers' control in every enterprise
- For a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government
- For a workers' Iraq in a socialist federation of the Middle East

Voce Operaia: flawed politics and failed manoeuvres

by Keith Harvey

On 15-16 June 1991 a new international grouping was launched: the Liaison Committee of Communists. Its constituent parts are the Italian group Voce Operaia (VO), the Revolutionary Communist League (RKL), of Austria, Maulwurf of Germany and the Sri Lankan group, the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP).

In fact, this tendency is not so much a new initiative as an attempt to relaunch an old one that failed. The original Liaison Committee (LC) also included the British Workers International League (WIL) who, since the formation of their own international tendency (the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency) in May 1991, have gradually withdrawn from the LC.

From the outset the LCC, like its predecessor, proclaims itself a "co-ordinating committee", a bridge to the building of an internationalist centralist tendency. This, in itself, did not constitute an unprincipled initiative and the LRCI was keen to participate in it. For us the purpose of its discussions would have been to clarify agreements and differences, to seek to resolve the latter, to move towards closer programmatic agreement and indeed to fusion if this was possible. The fact that the LRCI is a democratic centralist international tendency and that we have a programmatic manifesto does not at all mean that we are unwilling to go through this process. It is only through self-delusion or outright disloyalty that our opponents can claim we regard ourselves as a finished international or that we present our programme as an ultimatum.

None of the participants in the LC were asked to renounce their established positions and the known and published differences of the constituent groups within the original and (and re-launched) LC were considerable.

But the LRCI's approaches to the LC to be allowed to participate in its discussions and observe its meetings were rebuffed on more than one occasion. Despite this we continued to search for principled and practical agreements wherever possible. During the Gulf War the LRCI felt that the urgency of international solidarity dictated that we should seek to produce a public statement on the issues raised by that war with as large a number of avowedly Trotskyist groups as possible. We proposed a joint statement with the LC and other groups and tendencies. We did indeed succeed in gaining some level of agreement.[1] We tried to build on this progress by seeking to attend future LC meetings and schools with a view to carrying on the discussions. Again we were kept at arms length with quite ridiculous arguments. One group after another blamed the others for excluding us.

With the relaunch of the LCC it is time to speak publicly and frankly. It is clear that the groups within the original LC had little more in mind than establishing an anti-LRCI centre, but one that had no principled character, since on several specific issues on or other of the groups had more in common with the LRCI than with their collaborators! They tried to cover the importance of this fact by defending their initiative on the grounds that it represented a genuine and principled attempt at international regroupment entirely in accord with the method of Trotsky in the 1930s. As we shall see this piece of self-justification is as threadbare as all the other excuses.

From GOR to Voce Operaia

The central axis of the LC and LCC lies between the RKL and the VO group. Of these, the Italian organisation provides the main propulsion for the international regroupment drive. Any consideration of the LC, therefore, has to begin with a characterisation of this organisation. Relations between the LRCI (and before that the MRCI) and VO (then the Gruppe Operaia Revolusionaria) go back to a series of bi-lateral discussions and public exchanges[2] first undertaken in 1982. Many issues were debated through though little agreement was reached by 1987, at the time these exchanges were suspended.

In political life the conflict of great social forces poses questions for revolutionaries which test their existing positions. Honest revolutionaries must then draw appropriate conclusions. Were we right or wrong? The crisis of Stalinism and the dramatic war against Iraq are such events, events which between them can shape the political landscape for years to come. On both of these issues the comrades of GOR/VO displayed a false method, came to the wrong programmatic and tactical conclusions and are being forced by the march of events to to deepen their errors.

The character of the movements in Eastern Europe

According to VO the events in East Europe since 1989 and, above all, the USSR today:

". . . represents the most important element characterising the world situation and heavily conditioning the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat on an international scale."

Here at least we can agree. But beyond this a meth-

1 See *Trotskyist International* 6

2 See *Permanent Revolution* 3, "The Anti-Imperialist United Front" (GOR) and "In defence of the revolutionary Comintern: a reply" (WP)

odological gulf opens up. VO operate with fixed, rigid, and therefore dead, categories quite incapable of grasping the complexity of the sudden turns of events since 1989. In their analysis the Stalinist bureaucrats were not overthrown by proletarian political revolutions led by revolutionary communists, "but by means of democratic reactionary and openly pro-capitalist mass movements supported and fostered by imperialism". Therefore, they were counter-revolutions from the start

If it is obvious that the leaders of the bourgeois democratic counter-revolution triumphed after February 1990 is it correct to argue, as VO do, that "openly pro-capitalist mass movements" put them there? No, we reject this. By and large, judging by the slogans raised, the masses were not brought out onto the streets or mobilised in strike action around openly pro-capitalist objectives; their first concerns were the freedom of the media and the right to demonstrate. As the Stalinist police apparatus crumbled they called for its destruction and an end to political tyranny. They wanted the right to form free trade unions, to associate freely in political clubs without the heavy hand of the security apparatus at every turn. These were some of the main slogans which galvanised millions on the streets in the latter months of 1989.

As the evidence of the top bureaucrats' plunder and mismanagement of the planned economy came to light, and as images of the "consumer paradise" of the west flooded the media many workers were indeed won to pro-market slogans. But at first even these were not simply synonymous with the restoration of private ownership of the means of production etc. For several months and even longer the "spontaneous" demands were to preserve full employment and other social gains. What this whole first stage of the struggle represented was the opening of a political revolutionary situation. Did it also contain the enormous danger of social counter-revolution? Yes indeed, but this was not its sole, principal or pre-ordained character.

Trotsky was always aware that hatred of the Stalinist dictatorship was so intense that its disintegration would enormously increase the dangers of counter-revolution. But only a pathetic bookworm could imagine one can wait to make a revolution until there is no danger of counter-revolution. Only political revolution was and is a rampart against restoration. Unfortunately the GOR/VO have obviously reverted to a lesson learnt from their early Spartacist mentors that it was the "dual natured" Stalinist bureaucrats who would defend the planned property until a Trotskyist party was ready to take over the job. The real live Polish, Romanian, Czech and Russian proletariats were an irrelevance or, worse, a big danger. The logic of this position, if followed through to its end, is to support the crack-down in Lithuania or even to support a Yanayev coup if it had been successful. We would predict that such Stalinophile moods will grow in VO as the danger of counter-revolution mounts, tempered only by despair at the impotence of the bureaucratic conservatives.

To write off the masses as simply pro-capitalist is to suggest that they consciously embraced unemployment, lower wages and an end to social welfare services. This is not true. They wanted the consumer goods that are part of the daily life of the proletariat in the imperialist democracies. After forty years of "socialism" this does not seem too much to ask for, nor, except to haughty petit bourgeois idealists, does it make one a grovelling slave to capitalism.

The real and fundamental reason for the defeats in Eastern Europe lie in the discrediting of the planned economy by Stalinist mismanagement and parasitism. In the 1970s they promised to improve the living standards and conditions of the masses but of course without the masses having the slightest say in the matter, without mobilising the creative capacities of the working class itself. Instead the bureaucrats turned to the IMF and the World Bank. They maintained, and in Poland brutally reimposed, their dictatorship. No wonder that by the end of the 1980s the masses had no faith in the entire system of "really existing socialism". In the same period the oppositional intelligentsia turned from the ideas of "socialist humanism" to social or even liberal market ideology. Of course, except to a limited extent, they were unable to win the masses to such ideas.

But their sufferings at the hands of their Stalinist gaolers gave them prestige in the eyes of the masses once the dictatorship crumbled. The opposition established itself in power via free elections. Bourgeois parliamentarism triumphed because the organisations of struggle of the working class did not develop into soviet-type bodies, such as were created several times in the crises between 1956 and 1981. The attainment by the working class of trade union and political rights was turned against its historic gains and strategic interests. This outcome was made possible by the complete and absolute absence of revolutionary leadership.

We in the LRCI insist that 1989 opened up a political revolutionary crisis—as Trotsky predicted would happen. The conflicting dynamics of proletarian political revolution, bourgeois democratic counter-revolution and Stalinist bureaucratic reaction were all present. But as Trotsky also predicted, without revolutionary leadership the forces of capitalism would triumph. If there was no objective political revolutionary dynamic at all in the events of 1989-90 then it was utopian of any one to put forward a programme that was designed to render that dynamic conscious for the working class. This applies to VO too. Do VO retrospectively renounce their own programme for political revolution advanced in the winter of 1989? Was this just a knee-jerk reaction based on dogmatism or did they not see then, as we did and do, the objective possibilities for, and the vital necessity of, political revolution?

Iraq: an acid test

The Gulf War re-raised another issue which has long divided the LRCI from VO—the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front (AIUF). Yet we were able to come to a high degree of tactical agreement, as shown by our published resolution of 17 January 1991. But it is clear that this agreement concealed more fundamental disagreements. In particular the statement "The reasons of

a defeat",[3] displays all the previous errors the GOR made over the AIUF.

The political adaptation VO made to Ba'athism in the war is a product of this. It is ironic that in the past they have accused the LRCI of failing to "make any difference between retrograde anti-imperialist movements and democratic revolutionary ones".[4] used this criteria as a sectarian excuse to refuse support for Argentina against Britain, the Iranian mass movement against the Shah or Iran against Iraq. In the case of Iran the GOR refused to consider a united front tactic with Khomeini supporters against the Shah. They pointed to his reactionary clericalism, to the "medievalism" of the mullahs, to their reactionary stance on women. The GOR concluded that, "Their struggle against imperialism was a reactionary one and not a progressive one".[5] This allowed them to justify abstaining on the armed conflicts between Iran and the imperialists, the Zionists and the Gulf oil monarchies.

For the GOR/VO there are two kinds of anti-imperialist struggle. One, like that of Khomeini in Iran in 1978-89 or Galtieri in Argentina in 1982, is utterly reactionary. Consequently they will not defend them in a fight against imperialism. To these forces they adopt a totally sectarian stance. The other type of anti-imperialists are secular, democratic, nationalist bourgeois and petit bourgeois regimes such as Peronism, Aquino and now Ba'athism. These are considered (falsely) petit bourgeois, and as such VO claim they must be critically supported. Worse, VO are grossly opportunistic towards them, believing these forces could (like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua they would like to think) go in the direction of breaking with the bourgeoisie and forming a non-capitalist (but also non-workers') state.

For years the GOR/VO have abused an analogy with the French Jacobins in order to sustain their opportunism towards these "progressive" anti-imperialists. VO see in the imperialist epoch a number of political parties in the semi-colonies who retain the same radicalism as the Jacobins in the French Revolution and can steer a line independent of the proletariat and the bourgeois nationalist parties. These forces possess:

"... qualities hitherto either reserved to fundamental classes in general or to the proletariat, that is the potential for having its own state, to be a ruling class, and then to go on to overthrow capitalist property relations and create a workers' state."[6]

This gross misuse of the concept of Jacobinism was undertaken in order to try and make sense of the ability of forces such as Castro in Cuba and Tito in Yugoslavia to break with capitalism and create a workers' state. It was employed in their perspectives at different times towards AZAPO in South Africa and the FSLN in Nicaragua. In each case VO posited the possibility that they could break with capitalism.

It was not necessary to re-invent the term Jacobinism to understand the overthrow of capitalism in Cuba. It was only necessary to grasp that petit bourgeois nationalism did not do it. Rather, these forces were fused with, and metamorphosed into, Stalinism in order to carry through this break in exceptional and temporary circumstances which no longer exist. But the implications of this analysis for other nationalist forces, and the VO attitude to them, is clear. Where a regime or political force is baptised as Jacobin, or even "enlightened Bonapartism", the road is open to gross adaptation towards it. But for genuine Leninists, Jacobinism does not mean petit bourgeois revolutionism in general but the revolutionary vanguard of the bourgeois revolution in the epoch of its final struggle with feudalism. In the imperialist epoch no petit bourgeois force has the capacity to carry out the bourgeois democratic revolution to the end, let alone carry out the proletarian revolution on behalf of the working class.

The only force in the twentieth century worthy of the analogy with Jacobinism was, as Lenin said, the proletarian vanguard party. Of course, petit bourgeois oppositional forces can act for long periods relatively independently of the fundamental classes. Of course, they can seize power, using very "revolutionary" methods (guerilla warfare, insurrection, general strike etc). Proletarian revolutionaries can't take out a patent on these tactics—bourgeois and reactionary forces can use them too. What is borne out by repeated experience, as well as being predicted by the basic Marxist position on the nature of classes, is that the petit bourgeoisie cannot rule for itself. Its regimes must serve one or other of the fundamental classes. They become, in short, executives for the fundamental classes, perhaps in a Bonapartist relation to them. This Bonapartism, as with a Hitler, a Stalin or a Cardenas, tends to hide the real role they are playing. Trotsky, however, was able to see beyond these appearances. Alas VO cannot.

To their opportunism in relation to the so-called Jacobins or progressive Bonapartes they add sectarianism in casting out from the revolutionary arsenal one of the weapons forged by the fourth congress of the Comintern—the anti-imperialist united front. They stigmatise it as a popular front because it might mean a temporary and tactical bloc with semi-colonial bourgeois forces to resist imperialism. Trotsky's strictures against the popular front were related to its use as an alliance to attain or defend a government of class collaboration against the masses, whereby the proletariat would renounce the struggle for power. Never for one moment do we, or did the revolutionary Comintern, set this as our goal. The condition for the use of the AIUF is simply whether the movement, or for that matter regime (bourgeois nationalist or petit bourgeois forces), is actually fighting imperialism, even if by non-proletarian methods. If so then we give it critical backing but no political support irrespective of its ideological self-justifications, whether they be openly reactionary or demagogically "progressive". As we said in 1987:

"The proletarian vanguard must seek unity in action with petit bourgeois or even bourgeois forces whenever or wherever they are in actual combat against imperialism's military, political or economic oppression and exploitation of the semi-colonial and colonial countries."[7]

But the fight against imperialism requires:

". . . the absolute indispensability of the revolutionary party and of it maintaining complete organisational and political independence from all forms of bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalism even, indeed especially

3 Provisional translation, 3 March 1991 in *International Trotskyist Correspondence* 7 (ITC)

4 ITC 7, p29

5 ITC 2, p10

6 "Guidelines to the restoration of the Trotskyist programme", ITC4 (June 1987) p56

7 "The Twenty-Two Theses", MRCI (London 1987) p5

when it is involved in joint struggles against a common enemy."[8]

VO rejected this way of posing the AIUF and insisted on their arbitrary division of anti-imperialists into "progressive" and "reactionary" camps. On the other hand the GOR manifested a distinctly opportunist appetite to meet up with and politically support one or another of these "Jacobin" forces. They used to cite AZAPO as a likely candidate. What in essence was the difference between this and the impulses that led Hansen and the SWP into the arms of Castro and Guevara in 1959-60? The LRCI always predicted that the GOR/VO's sectarianism would flip over into its opposite. It is ironic that rather than a radical, photogenic "Che", this occurred with the less attractive Saddam Hussein.

Ba'athism, Bonapartism and Jacobinism

VO describe the Ba'athist regime as "an enlightened" form of Bonapartism and, despite a nine point list of essentially technical criticisms, insist on applauding it for "the audacity and determination" of its struggle against imperialism. In what way does this "enlightenment" manifest itself? The repression of the Iraqi Communist Party? The murder of thousands of Kurds? The political repression and exploitation of the Iraqi proletariat?

Was the nature of Ba'athist Bonapartism not evident for all with eyes to see from the stabilisation of the regime in the early 1970s onward? For us, Ba'athism started as a form of petit bourgeois nationalism strategically wedded to the imperialist system. Its methods and rhetoric are similar to those of Nasserism, Peronism, Aprism etc. Trotsky analysed these regimes from the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai Shek to Lazaro Cardenas in Mexico. Once in power they will preside over a state which will, despite all their rhetoric and despite occasional sharp clashes with domestic reactionaries or imperialist exploiters, loyally defend capitalist exploitation at home and do nothing fundamental to challenge imperialism's rule world-wide.

The only exceptions to this are in very rare circumstances (e.g. Cuba) when the petit bourgeois nationalists embrace Stalinism (and a degenerate workers' state with all its economic resources embraces them). In these conditions they can find themselves obliged, in order to to survive, to overthrow capitalism in a bureaucratic and counter-revolutionary manner.

But in the world lexicon of semi-colonial Bonapartes Saddam Hussein hardly scores well either as a left progressive or in terms of enlightenment. To find the source of VO's remarkable assessment one must remember the GOR/VO's Islamophobia. For VO Ba'athism (a ferociously anti-communist force from its birth and soaked in the blood of the largest Stalinist workers' party in the Arab world) represented some form of progressive social force because of its apparent break with Islam (Hussein's supposed atheism, the high proportion of Christians in the Ba'athist apparatus, etc), and because of its avowed aim of uniting the Arab nation.

The reality of Ba'athism's "modernity" on the question of religion was shown during the build up to the war, with the espousal of a *jihad* and the unbridled use of Islamic rhetoric. VO pathetically seem to think that this represented the "sunset of Ba'athism", some sort of qualitative change in the nature of the beast.

Far from it. The populist element within Ba'athism always allowed for this kind of development. Its previous attempts to arch over religious divisions in the Arab world were not only aimed at unification, they also involved a demagogic orientation to the "modernists" in the armed forces, state apparatus and amongst the intelligentsia which made up the Ba'ath party. Needing to mobilise the masses and sensing the hollowness of their attachment to his person alone or to the bureaucratic "ruling party" the Ba'ath had become after its destruction of the Iraqi CP, Saddam chose to emphasise the question of Islam. He hoped also to strike a chord with the fundamentalist mobilised masses throughout the Middle East.

Some years ago VO wrote, thinking this was a decisive argument against the AIUF:

"If the nationalist forces don't allow communists to work freely (as happened in Iran between December 1978 and February 1979) it would be suicide for communists to offer their 'unconditional support'. Every tactical support for a non-proletarian force, potentially capable of liquidating the communist vanguard, is necessarily 'conditional', bound to the most elementary political warranty: the free right to organise the masses."[9]

Of course, we never talked of "unconditional support", meaning by this political support. The united front never requires the smallest scintilla of political support nor the abandonment for one minute of full freedom of criticism. But by making support against imperialism, by military means or by other methods of struggle, dependent on the granting to us of full freedom to conduct communist propaganda the GOR flung a boomerang that has returned to them with a vengeance!

Does this position not apply to Iraq before and during the war? VO most certainly would not have been able to organise the masses. Any tendency calling for revolution would undoubtedly have suffered the direst repression. Would VO nevertheless have supported the war against imperialism—a war, we would remind them, led by a distinctly "non-proletarian force" quite capable of liquidating the communist vanguard, and with the aim of imposing clearly capitalist goals (a united bourgeois Iraq)?

The "Arab national question" and the invasion of Kuwait

We have explained elsewhere why we do not believe that espousal of the goal of a united Arab state is either obligatory for revolutionaries or in itself a mark of progressiveness for Arab regimes. We are, of course, in favour of a socialist united states of the Middle East, but that it not at all the same thing. VO are in favour of a single Arab state, presumably extending from Moroc-

8 Ibid

9 ITC 5, p18

co to southern Iraq. Thus they are prepared to support any action taken which hastens this goal, even under capitalism, even by a Bonapartist butcher like Saddam Hussein. This is clear from the support they gave to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and their scornful rejection of any democratic rights for the population of Kuwait. For VO the invasion:

". . . had an objectively progressive character since, even though temporarily, it has overthrown a corrupted monarchy of an imperialist clique . . . the entering of Kuwait by the Iraqi troops was felt by the Arab popular masses as a step towards the unification and liberation of the Arab nation."[10]

This is nonsense, and dangerous nonsense at that. Firstly, there is no evidence that the Arab masses saw the invasion as a step to the unification of the Arab nation; some sections undoubtedly welcomed the overthrow of the corrupt Emirs and were pleased that someone was prepared to incur the displeasure of the imperialists, but that is not at all the same thing.

Secondly, although VO did not call for the occupation, they seem to defend it. It had an "objectively progressive character", they claim, and in none of the documents we have read do VO condemn the invasion, allude to any long term necessity for Iraq to withdraw its troops, or put forward any slogans relating to the democratic rights or social needs of those who live and work in Kuwait. One would imagine that Kuwait was populated entirely by "corrupt emirs". In the LC statement Kuwait is dismissed as not being a nation and, apart from the call for a socialist united states of the Middle East, the matter is left there. What to do in the meantime is not stated. Presumably this can be left to the Arab Bismark to settle.

Kuwait is not a nation, true enough. But VO went further and tried to prove that Kuwait was historically part of Iraq:

"Kuwait was historically an Iraqi province and was founded artificially as a 'state' in 1961 by British troops that had separated from Iraq at the same time that Iraq was liberated from the control of a pro-British monarchy."[11]

But, as we explain elsewhere in this issue, Iraq itself was an equally false creation of the imperialists, as were all the ex-colonies of the region.

VO uses Hussein's propaganda claims on Kuwait to deny that it is a nation, and goes on to abandon the elementary defense of the fundamental democratic rights of the people living in Kuwait. Unlike VO and the LC, we did not simply write off the democratic rights of hundreds of thousands of workers—mainly immigrants—who lived there. It appears that whilst they had no love for the Al Sabah's they did not necessarily want to become the "Saddamiyat" province of Ba'athist Iraq. Are we to blame them? Should we say: "Be silent, this is a step towards the future united Arab nation. When Saddam or somebody else has conquered the other Arab states then you will have democracy and, who knows, socialism too"? But of course this view of the motives, or even the unconscious logic, of the Iraqi dictator are utterly fantastic. As we pointed out from August 1990 onwards, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq was reaction-

10 *Voce Operaia* 8/9, Sept-Oct 1990

11 Ibid



Saddam Hussein—Jacobin revolutionary or cynical tyrant?

ary, motivated by purely bourgeois nationalist desires of regional aggrandisement.

Such indulgence to Saddam is very strange coming from the group which refused to solidarise militarily with Argentina during its attempt to reclaim the Malvinas!

The Kurds' "reactionary uprising"

Worse still, indeed criminal, is the position that VO adopted on the uprising of the Kurds and the Shi'ites at the end of the war. They condemned it as a reactionary pro-imperialist upheaval. Here the full depth of VO's opportunistic logic on anti-imperialism is revealed. Hussein is an "enlightened Bonapartist" and therefore he must be supported no matter what the cost against his own workers, peasants and oppressed minorities. To present Saddam's struggle against them as part of an anti-imperialist one is truly monstrous. Despite all their holier-than-thou revulsion against the AIUF, in practice VO have got themselves into an unconditional united front with Saddam Hussein against the Kurds and against the majority of the Iraqi people

VO has blundered onto the wrong side of the barricades in the Iraqi civil war. Doubtless they will try to reverse out of this dilemma but we shall not let them forget how they got into it. However, for the moment the Gulf War and its aftermath proved the parting of the ways for the Liaison Committee Mark One. The Gulf War revealed as many differences as agreements within the LC. All were agreed that the Kuwait working population should not be given any rights to determine their own future. However, the RKL and the WIL found themselves completely opposed to VO on the crucial question of the Kurds. The RKL criticised the LRCI for not giving enough emphasis to the demand for Kurdish self-determination and the WIL felt that this was important enough for them not to sign the joint declaration on the Gulf (despite the fact that this demand is included in it!).

Yet while the Italian "section" deemed the Kurdish uprising against Hussein "objectively reactionary and functional to imperialism" the WIL announced that "it is the duty of revolutionaries in Britain and throughout the world to unconditionally support the Kurdish uprising"! No common declaration with the LRCI because of lack of emphasis over Kurdish self-determination, but a common discussion bloc with VO who are happy to see the Kurds drowned in blood in the name of anti-imperialism! The WIL have drifted silently out of this bloc but have yet to make a public balance sheet of their discussions.

A record of unprincipled blocs

We have insisted that major tactical and methodological agreement is fundamental to building a revolutionary tendency. The LC groups have always stigmatised this as sectarian and ultimatist. They had another method. How has it stood the test of time? The LC contained those , like the WIL, who support the slogan "Solidarnosc to power" for the 1981 period in Poland, and those like VO who not only refused to raise this slogan but condemned Solidarnosc as a reactionary movement. It contains those, like the RKL, who refuse to vote for reformist parties under almost any circumstances and those, such as the LTT, who were for years embedded in the bourgeois Green Party, calling for a vote for them against a bourgeois workers' party. These are no trivial matters. They are class line questions.

The groups that are or have been in the LC or LCC defend themselves from the charge of building a rotten anti-LRCI bloc by insisting that despite these disagreements there is a bond that goes much deeper than mere programme. VO expressed it thus:

"It is a methodological agreement on the fundamental question of how to build a new international tendency to refound the Fourth International."[12]

What is the nature of this method of building an international tendency and what are its results?

Since 1980 the GOR/VO have been guided in their work by a belief that it was necessary first to create a bloc of the left wing of the movement, fighting for the rebuilding of the Fourth International (FI). In one such proposal from 1986 the GOR suggested:

". . . a structure of international co-operation, a co-ordinating committee within which it is possible to discuss, to confront, to start and work together. Without claiming to be an international centre, we could start preparing moments of political confrontation, such as regular meetings, seminars, as well as a common theoretical bulletin."[13]

Of course, forums for international discussion are important and the LRCI has sought to be part of them when any significant groupings were willing to become involved. But every time we found barriers in the way. First, there was the condition that the LRCI had to accept the slogan of rebuilding the FI, which we rejected. We answered, why did the number of the international have to be solved first? Surely political and programmatic agreement, the assessment of the history of the FI since its degeneration,the summing up of these lessons in a programmatic manifesto, would be a more fruitful starting point. Does agreeing to refound the FI really separate the sheep from the goats? On the contrary we thought and still think that those who fetishise the number would end up making unprincipled concessions to the politics and programme of their fellow fetishists. This is in fact exactly what happened.

At an international conference in Italy in December 1986 representatives of a number of organisations gathered to discuss the regroupment of the left in the wake of the implosion of Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party. They included the MRCI, the GOR, the RWP, the Italian LSR, the WRP (*Workers Press*) and the Varga grouping (GORQI). All the organisations present, with the exception of the LSR, supported the idea of an international conference of "Trotskyist" forces. The GOR and MRCI insisted that it be an open one, one where there would be no political exclusions. Indeed, in the GOR's written statement to the conference it singled out the MRCI, among others, as "giving serious, indis-

12 Letter to the LRCI, 30 June 1991

13 "Declaration for the building of an International Trotskyist tendency", ITC4 (June 1987) p24

pensable contributions to the cause of the rebuilding of the international".

The MRCI left Italy under the illusion that the GOR were serious about their fight for programmatic discussion in an open forum which would involve at the very least all those who participated in Italy. Yet once the MRCI left the WRP/GOR/RWP/GOCQI "decided to constitute ourselves as a Preparatory Committee for the calling of an International Conference"[14] in a secret meeting without inviting the MRCI, and despite our delegate having expressed support for the idea. At a subsequent meeting in Paris a common declaration was signed between the GOR, WRP and GOCQI, dated 1 February. In point three it declares:

"Despite its crisis and its dislocation as a centralised international organisation by Pabloism, the FI is not dead, because its continuity was maintained by the fight organised by the International Committee (IC), even though with weaknesses and contradictions, against Pabloism, up to the point of its abandonment by Healy in 1971 and its dissolution by Lambert in 1972. This continuity was maintained by various groups, organisations, centres and fractions which fought Pabloism. Contributing to the maintenance of this continuity were: the GOCQI, the GOR, the RWP of Sri Lanka, members and fractions [*sic*] of the WRP and Healy's IC who fought against and expelled Healy, Banda etc, etc. It is on the basis of the totality of this struggle that it is possible and necessary to reorganise the FI."[15]

Yet the GOR position adopted with the RWP in December 1986 in the "Declaration for the building of an international Trotskyist tendency" makes no claim that this continuity existed. Quite the opposite. In that document it is said that the anti-Pabloite oppositionists in 1953 "were not able to oppose revisionism with a consistent revolutionary platform and a plan for the building of the international". Moreover, the IC "failed in what should have been its central task—the reconstruction of a centralised revolutionary International".

Nevertheless, the really instructive fact about this episode is that despite the GOR surrendering its positions, the WRP Central Committee renounced their signature to the agreement! Why? Because the majority faction within the leadership of the WRP around Slaughter, Pilling and Hunter were at that very moment after much bigger fish than the GOR. They were trying to steer the WRP towards closer and closer collaboration with the Morenoite LIT. When the LIT realised that they were not included in the "continuity" of the FI as outlined in the Paris declaration they no doubt created a "diplomatic incident" which obliged the WRP leaders to choose between the GOR/RWP and the LIT.

The GOR should have learned a lesson from this. Crafty manoeuvres involving an abandonment of elementary loyalty and honesty have a way of backfiring especially if you try it on with the *apparatchiks* from Healy or Moreno's stables.

Even when they have not fetishised the question of the "Fourth International" above programmatic agreement the GOR/VO have advanced other, equally erroneous, arguments on the question of building an international tendency. They insist:

"It is not possible to draw up a programme without being present and involved in the class struggle of the masses." [16]

They continue:

"Only an organisation systematically participating in the class struggle—not as a patrol of propagandists but as a vanguard inside the class—only an organisation taking its roots in an organic link with the working class; only an organisation carrying out its activity around the axis of the centrality of the industrial proletariat; only an organisation unifying theory and praxis, can think to grasp reality, to draw up a programme, to build a communist party."[17]

Let us leave aside the fact that this salvo would have sunk poor old Marx and Engels in 1847 and Trotsky in Coyoacan in 1938. This is intended as a direct rebuff to the efforts of the LRCI to re-elaborate the *Transitional Programme*, codified to date in our Tro*tskyist Manifesto*. VO believe that such efforts amount to no more than:

". . . clarifying and adding the largest number of positions and principles derived from the professorial study of reality and around which to gather bright intellectuals who will go among the masses to make their propaganda."[18]

Misrepresentations

In the first place this is a sheer misrepresentation of the LRCI's practice. The LRCI specifically rejects the method of party building in which intellectuals are gathered first and then "go among the masses". The LRCI's sections in practice are committed to fighting for and developing the programme in the actual class struggle. Any examination of our record of exemplary intervention into the class struggle would falsify the charge of being "professorial intellectuals".

In Britain we have played a part in building rank and file oppositions to the trade union bureaucracy in the health service, the coal mines, railways and in the London Underground. During the anti-Poll Tax struggle our comrades were to be found carrying out patient revolutionary agitation amongst the poorest and most disorganised sections of the class. Our German comrades responded to the crisis of leadership in the former DDR with a bold tactical intervention into the ranks of the PDS, a party containing hundreds of thousands of disoriented workers, while the rest of the left contented themselves with the world of petit bourgeois "alternative" politics. In Peru, despite repression and the small size of our group, our anti-imperialist propaganda penetrated into the very heart of the organised workers' movement during the Gulf War.

These are only a few examples. The assertion that the LRCI develops its programme in isolation from the living class struggle is a shabby attempt to inoculate serious militants in the ranks of the LCC groups, many of whom have no first hand knowledge of our practical work, from the influence of our politics.

It flows from VO's understanding of "theory and praxis" that an international programme will only be elaborated when a number of national groups with roots

14 WRP/GOR/GORQI "Aborted common declaration", ibid, p36

15 Ibid

16 Letter to the LRCI, op cit

17 Ibid

18 Ibid

in their working class struggles come together and through discussions forge a:

"... multi-national leadership which is up the task: a really world leadership which will have the task of enriching the *Transitional Programme* and start to give a solution to the crisis of proletarian leadership."[19]

According to what criteria and at what precise moment will these national groups decide the time is ripe to collect these leaders into an international leadership which at last has the authority to draw up a new programme? This we are not told. But in fact we do not need to be told. The answer is never. This whole method is alien to Trotsky's method for building and founding the FI.

This in its turn was based on Lenin and Trotsky's conclusions about the inadequate political basis of the Second International, at least for the imperialist epoch. Not "strong national parties first and then the international" but an international programme on which to build strong national sections within the framework of an international leadership elected by an international congress.

Trotsky was not daunted from starting this work by the small size or even by the weak roots of the FI's sections. Of course, he sought to strengthen them as soon as possible. But he did not see this as a national task alone. The GOR/VO formulations as on other issues owe far more to the fathers of the IC, to the later Cannon, to Lambert and Healy, who by the early 1950s had all become thoroughly "national Trotskyists", unwilling to subordinate themselves to international leaderships.

It was at this time also that the IC gained its other specific feature—workerism. Its sections emphasised their, sometimes real sometimes imagined, superior proletarian class composition and made a speciality of denigrating the petit bourgeois character of their opponents. Nor is it accidental that this method was picked up wholesale from the degeneration phase of the Comintern, which loved to counterpose the intellectuals Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev *et al*, to the great Stalin and the little Stalins (Thaelman, Thorez, Pollitt and co) who were all workers. VO and their Austrian bloc partners like to carry on this tradition too, usually only in the form of innuendos. But like a bad smell from a drain its origin and its unhealthiness is unmistakeable.

It is in fact the old federalism of 1953, or perhaps in the case of the Austrian RKL a national centredness of an older vintage, that finds its present expression in the LCC, and genuinely unites its members (wherever political strategy and tactics do not). It is wrong from beginning to end. It is rooted in an incorrect understanding of the nature of the programme. It amounts to seeing an international programme as no more than a simple aggregation of the nationally derived programmes from each country. It is a plea for each group and its leadership to be left alone as they know best their own national terrain and class struggle situation. Since no one else can "know" the class struggle of each country as intimately as the national sections, with their organic links to it, such a national centred view of the development of programme necessarily arises.

Necessarily, an international programme is not plucked from thin air. But neither does it emerge organically from immersion in the struggles of each and every national class. It was long ago understood that the spontaneous unevenness of the class struggle and the political terrain of any one country results in national-centred deviations and pressures which can only be transcended by international discussion and collaboration, criticism and discipline.

This is not the method of VO and the LCC. They have inadequately analysed and appreciated the depth of the degeneration of post-1948-53 "Trotskyism" (symbolised by their clinging to the fetish of refounding the FI). Consequently they have not broken with many features of the politics of the epigones. These return repeatedly to haunt them and condemn them to be part of the world-wide crisis of revolutionary leadership rather than part of its solution.

19 Ibid

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