

Socialist **Action**

October/November 1995
Vol II Issue 2 £1

Review



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Yugoslavia — NATO moves east

On 30 August NATO launched the most systematic bombing campaign on the European continent since the Second World War. The bombing of the Bosnian Serbs clarified precisely the goal of the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia — the military defeat of the Serbs and the creation of states which will be totally subordinate to imperialism. That is why, far from being even-handed, NATO's intervention was linked to Croatian and Bosnian Muslim ground offensives. Once that strategy was put in motion, with the Croatian army's expulsion of virtually the entire Serb population of Krajina in August, NATO and UN claims of neutrality were quietly shelved. President Clinton, whose administration had armed and trained the Croatian army, welcomed the Krajina blitzkrieg.

It was followed by NATO's bombardment of the Serbs. This had nothing to do with protecting Sarajevo. It was designed to tip the military balance of forces throughout Bosnia. As the *Economist* put it: 'This week's onslaught is probably big enough to shift the strategic balance of the war in the Bosnian government's favour. It has pushed the UN beyond any pretence of neutrality.' (2 September)

The combined Croatian and Bosnian Muslim offensive in central and northern Bosnia was facilitated by NATO's destruction of bridges and communications links in the area. The final phase, according to the US script, will be the long term occupation of Yugoslavia by tens of thousands of NATO troops.

These events only make sense in the context of the overall development of imperialist intervention into eastern Europe. It is impossible to understand the situation on the basis of the media's phantasmagoria of the Serbs, when the real driving forces are the most powerful imperialist powers — the United States and Germany.

The break-up of Yugoslavia, precipitated by German recognition of Croatia, is just one part of the 'balkanisation' of the whole of eastern Europe. Following the installation of capitalist governments in 1989, German imperialism promoted the creation of small, weak states, because they would be more easily incorporated into imperialist spheres of influence — Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic,

Ukraine, the Baltic states, and so forth.

German policy towards the two states which traditionally blocked its hegemony in eastern Europe and the Balkans — the Soviet Union, of which Russia was the backbone, and the Yugoslav Federation, whose strongest member was Serbia — was equally clear. Germany aimed at breaking up these states and isolating Russia and Serbia. This meant building up Ukraine as a buffer between Russia and Germany and defeating those Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina who wished to remain part of Yugoslavia.

However, while Germany has already displaced the USSR as the main trading partner of eastern Europe, it does not have the military strength necessary to back its economic dominance.

This has allowed the United States to use its military superiority to re-assert its leadership over Germany in eastern Europe — starting in Yugoslavia. That is to be followed by the rapid expansion of NATO up to the borders of the former USSR. This will give the US the political edge over Germany, and sharply increase NATO's military threat to Russia.

This strategy assumes that imperialism may lose control of the situation in Russia. The bombing in Yugoslavia was therefore also a warning to Russia against trying to put the USSR back together again, or intervening to support the 25 million Russians left outside Russia's borders. The US has made clear that NATO expansion is not negotiable and that nuclear weapons will be deployed in eastern Europe.

NATO's march east naturally meets virtually unanimous opposition among the population of Russia, who are physically threatened by it. That is why, while rejecting any Russian veto, the US has delayed saying which east European states will join NATO until after Russia's presidential election next year — so as not to further prejudice Boris Yeltsin's diminishing chances.

Just as the Gulf war opened a new period of imperialist military intervention against the third world, the NATO bombing in Yugoslavia marks the launch of NATO's new order in eastern Europe. NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia and expansion into eastern Europe must be totally opposed.

Opposing imperialist intervention in Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia today the western imperialist powers, led by the United States and Germany, are engaged in their biggest foreign intervention since the Gulf war. Unlike the Gulf war, however, NATO has been able to boast that this intervention has met little opposition from the left and the peace movement.

As always, the imperialists' military offensive was preceded by demonisation of those about to be attacked. Just as Nasser, Castro, Saddam Hussein, Noriega and General Aideed had all been likened to Hitler, so too were Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs.

The task of the left was to cut through the propaganda blitz to show the class forces operating in the situation and to create the broadest possible campaign against imperialist military intervention. This meant uniting two different currents — *socialists* opposed to imperialist expansion into eastern Europe and *pacifists* opposed to the use of force.

A coalition along those lines was rapidly established. It brought together Labour MPs, sections of the peace movement and smaller socialist currents. It was supported by the *Morning Star*. It organised the only significant public protests against the NATO bombing.

But a large section of the left actively opposed any campaign against imperialist intervention. Instead they put their energies into campaigning for more arms to be supplied to the Bosnian government — which is already backed by NATO and armed by the US and Germany.

This reflected an inability to grasp the most fundamental aspect of the conflict in Yugoslavia — the intervention of the United States and German imperialisms. But this is the only way to make sense

of events since 1990.

The secession of Slovenia and Croatia was never motivated on the basis of national oppression, but rather to stop subsidising the poorer parts of the federation, and to join the German prosperity zone to their north. These moves were facilitated, but not caused by, Milosevic's backing for chauvinistic campaigns against the Albanian population in Kosovo.

German imperialism intervened to pressure the European Union to unilaterally recognise Croatian independence. That made civil war inevitable, because, it was also made clear that there would be no right of self-determination for the huge Serb minorities in Croatia and

Bosnia if they so wished. Croatia's revival of symbols of its war-time fascist state and its discrimination against its Serb minority simply confirmed their fears.

The same approach was taken to Bosnia-Herzegovina — encouraging its secession, but recognising no right of its 35 per cent Serb minority, living on 64 per cent of the land, to remain in Yugoslavia if they wished to do so.

The denial of any right of self-determination to the Serbs was justified on the basis of the fight to retain a 'multi-ethnic society' — but the hypocrisy of these claims became brutally clear this summer with the ethnic cleansing of Krajina, northern and central Bosnia.

Thus Germany's intervention, had nothing to do with self-determination. Its goal was to extend its own sphere of influence into the Balkans by breaking up Yugoslavia and leaving the weakest possible rump around Serbia.

Nonetheless, at the begin-

ning of the conflict, backed by the federal army, the Serbs *appeared* to be the stronger side. This was the basis of the campaigns which so effectively paved the way for NATO bombing by enlisting public support for the Croatian, and later, the Bosnian muslim governments. Journals like the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman*, the Labour Party leadership, Michael Foot's Labour Friends of Bosnia, together with *Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook* contributed to these campaigns to the measure of their different resources.

Worker's *Liberty* wrote: 'The main engine of war in ex-Yugoslavia has been Serb sub-imperialism. Neither Germany, nor America, nor France, nor NATO, nor the UN nor all of them, mentally amalgamated as a mystical super-power, is the decisive imperialism in ex-Yugoslavia. They have not controlled events. They backed plans to keep Yugoslavia together as a loose confederation. They have



backed innumerable peace plans thwarted by Serbia. Their crime is not any intention to seize colonies or semi-colonies in ex-Yugoslavia, but their desire to let Serbia win the war as quickly and tidily as possible so that profitable trade and investment can re-start.'

In the same vein, *Socialist Outlook* claimed: 'In order now to re-stabilise the Balkans for imperialism, the west regards Greater Serbia, and the regime in Belgrade, as the cornerstone of future order and stability.' (30 January 1993)

The problem with these 'analyses' is they simply cannot explain why it is *the Serbs* who have been subjected to crippling economic sanctions and massive NATO bombing, while *Croatia and the Bosnian Muslims* have received arms and aid from US and German imperialisms. In reality, of course, far more powerful imperialist forces were already in play — and far from backing the Serbs they were preparing to attack them.

NATO deployed massive air power into the region and began the process which culminated in the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force this summer. At the same time, the United States and Germany armed and trained the Croatian and Bosnian Muslim armies. The US brokered a Croat-Muslim federation in Bosnia which acknowledges no Serbian rights.

The US and Germany, for different reasons, always favoured NATO military action in tandem with Croatian and Muslim ground troops. This met the German goal of crushing the Serbs and the US goal of imposing its over-all leadership. By the summer the US view had prevailed over Britain and France.

The Croatian invasion of the Serb enclave of Krajina followed the deployment of the Anglo-French Rapid Reaction Force into Bosnia. The Serb population of Krajina was expelled en bloc. UN observers reported the systematic razing of Serb villages, looting and murder of civilians for weeks after the original at-

tack. UN troops in Krajina did absolutely nothing.

The *Financial Times* reported: 'The United Nations insisted yesterday that in spite of Zagreb's denials, Croatian troops were still rampaging through the Krajina region looting and burning Serb villages more than a fortnight after tens of thousands of Serbs had fled the region. Western governments have taken a relatively soft line over the follow-up to Croatia's 4 August assault across UN lines to take the Serb-held Krajina region. That offensive triggered the biggest single exodus of civilians since the war began in 1991. Mr Christopher Gunnes UN spokesman said yesterday: "Krajina is literally ablaze. There are villages which were turned into a living hell by the Croatian army. We have lists of villages where as many as 80 per cent of the homes were torched." Mr William Hayden of the International Helsinki Federation said on Sunday that four fifths of buildings that he and other federation members had seen in the Knin area, the stronghold of fallen Krajina had been damaged "by organised burning and looting" after Croatian army and civilian police units moved into the area. (22 August)

Robert Fisk reported in the *Independent on Sunday*: 'Croatia is unleashing a reign of terror against hundreds of elderly Serbs left behind in the formerly Serb Krajina region of the country more than a month after its "liberation". UN and human rights officials are reporting each day the murder or "disappearance" of at least 10 Serb civilians, some of them — in their eighties and nineties — burned alive in their own homes, while the torching of whole villages is being systematically carried out by Croatian troops... Although the American and British embassies in Zagreb have received detailed reports of the anarchy in Krajina neither has offered a whisper of reproach to the Croatian authorities.' (10 September)

As a result of such activities the non-Croat, mostly Serb, population of



Croatian army soldier

Croatia has fallen from 22 per cent in 1991 to about 3 per cent today.

Yet Michael Foot described this operation as an exercise in 'human rights protection'. *Socialist Outlook* also fully supported it: 'We therefore recognise the right of the Croatian government to reintegrate the Krajina region into Croatia.'

Phase two, of the game plan, following the seizure of Krajina, was the NATO Cruise missile, air and artillery bombardment. By destroying Serb communications, this made possible Croatian and Moslem ground offensive into central and northern Bosnia.

The bombing produced some remarkable contortions, *Socialist Outlook*, for example, claimed: 'NATO's bombs have been dropped on people living in areas controlled by Karadzic. Many Bosnian Serb civilians have been killed. However, the main objective of the military action has been to repress and intimidate those

muslims, Serbs and Croats committed to fighting for an independent multi-ethnic Bosnia.'

But what in fact was taking place was NATO pressure for a final settlement based on a massive NATO presence in the region and, in all probability, a drive to completely pacify, or even expel a significant proportion of, the Bosnian Serbs. Whatever Bosnian state emerges from that will, as at present, depend totally on US imperialism.

This whole sequence of events marked the beginning of the military phase of the penetration of capital into eastern Europe. It was also a NATO dress rehearsal for possible conflict with Russia if it tries to pull parts of the former Soviet Union back together again. That too would be accompanied by a media blitz about defending the values of the Enlightenment from Russia's 'red/brown hordes'.

By Hilda Thomas

The new racist offensive

Michael Howard and the Home Office have announced their intention to introduce immigration legislation that will mark 'a clear break' from existing laws. This clear break is to be the introduction of internal 'immigration' controls into every workplace, hospital, doctor's surgery, council office, school, college and benefit agency. At a blow black people will be officially designated second class citizens who have to prove their entitlement to the rights assumed by other British citizens, and who can be subjected to legalised spying, harassment and intrusion into their private lives.

The deaths of Shiji Lapite and Brian Douglas in police custody and the announcement by Paul Condon of a special police operation aimed at black youth, stigmatised as 'potential muggers' has underlined the high level of racism that pervades the police. Howard's new measures will give this fresh encouragement.

The cynical motives behind this course are self-evident. Howard announced the new legislation on the eve of the local election campaign earlier this year. For the government it is chiefly a matter of seeking to overcome its declining electoral fortunes by playing the 'race card'. As Conservative Central Office put it 'immigration, an issue which we raised successfully in 1992 and again in the 1994 Euro-elections campaign, played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt [Labour].'

This legislation constitutes the first serious attempt to roll-back the position of black people in this country — as opposed to restricting rights of new entry which also exacerbated existing racism — since the passing of the Race Relations Act.

These measures are likely to have a real economic effect on many black and immigrant workers. The proposal to introduce a statutory obligation upon employers to ensure that any applicant for a job has the right to live in this country

will particularly have this result.

The most determined effort to reduce the number of unauthorised immigrants through employer sanctions is to be seen in the United States passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. This law envisioned enforcement based on three simultaneous initiatives — firstly a large scale legalisation programme by extending a broad amnesty to existing illegal residents, secondly reinforced border controls with Mexico and finally the creation of a real 'risk' for employers and employees breaking the law. Research in 1991 on the effects of this measure indicated that while the law had complicated job searching for those without authorisation, employer sanctions had not significantly influenced the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States.

In other words, the effect of the law was to further marginalise and impoverish illegal immigrants, force them into yet more clandestine and therefore even less well-organised and more low-paid work without affecting their entry into the country or their capacity to avoid identification within it.

The research concluded that the state had to expend considerable resources on a 'policing' agency in order to implement the law effectively and, secondly, that there had to be an effective system in

place to identify and cross-reference potential employees. The question of identification raises significant civil rights issues, which have met strong opposition — as with the continuing discussion on the introduction of ID cards into Britain.

Howard's proposal to criminalise employers who take on illegal immigrants will create greater fear and force immigrant workers out of mainstream employment and deeper into the growing illegal economy on poverty wages. Its chief impact will be to create an increased downward pressure on the wages of one of the most underprivileged sections of society — and the impact of that will work through to wages as a whole.

This measure is to be accompanied by 'training' for council, benefit, education and health service workers on the identification of 'likely' illegal immigrants. It appears this is not yet to be a legal obligation, but again it will increase a climate of fear.

Both this surveillance and employer checks on workers' right to residence cannot but be overwhelmingly racist in their implementation. Thousands of black people will find themselves targetted by benefit workers for investigation or questioned by employers about their right to work in a way that white people will not.

This increased institutionalisation of the second-class

status of black people will be reflected in increased racism in the treatment of black people by all state agencies, especially the police.

In France the introduction of the Pasqua laws which entitle the police to ask anyone they suspect of being an illegal immigrant for proof of their right to be in the country has led to a massive escalation of police harassment and violence against black and immigrant people. In one recent incident a family of unarmed refugees were fired on by the police killing their eight year old son. In another a North African was brutally beaten up by three police.

These, and a continuing list of similar incidents over the last couple of years have outraged French liberal opinion, but it did not stop Chirac announcing his first big political measure since election to the French presidency — the wholesale deportation of illegal immigrants by charter aircraft as a matter of weekly routine, with a target of 15,000 in the first year, rising to 24,000.

Reports indicate that many potentially perfectly legal immigrants into France live in such fear of deportation that they are not taking the steps possible to legalise their status.

The deaths of Joy Gardner, Shiji Lapite, and Brian Douglas have been a grim foretaste of what such measures would mean in Britain.

The death in police custody of Brian Douglas this year and the failure of the prosecution of the police involved in the death of Joy Gardner brought to a head the accumulating anger in the black communities at the violent and racist treatment by

police. Meetings held up and down the country brought together communities that had suffered similar deaths and unjustified police surveillance and harassment.

The experience of this racist policing also provoked angry reactions among Asian youth. Despite attempts to present the uprising in Bradford by Asian youth as a reflection of their 'alienation' from 'traditional cultural values', the truth came out clearly — that the high and intrusive levels of policing of Asian youth had provoked the reaction.

The widespread condemnation of police action which followed Bradford, Brian Douglas, Shiji Lapite and the death of Joy Gardner did begin to put the police on the defensive, particularly coupled with their utter failure to mount prosecutions or secure convictions in the racist killing of Stephen Lawrence or in response to the string of racist attacks in Tower Hamlets around the time of the election of the BNP's Derek Beackon.

At the beginning of the summer Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon attempted to turn the tide by launching a new police initiative 'Operation Eagle-Eye' aimed at black youth, claiming that they are responsible for the majority of street crime.

The refusal of a wide cross-section of the black communities, including the CRE, black MPs and community groups to cooperate, the response of the Black press and organised protests forced Condon onto the defensive, but 'Operation Eagle-Eye', was not abandoned.

Moreover, this salvo from Sir Paul Condon is just the first round. Further heavy-handed police operations are to be expected in the wake of the government go-ahead indicated by Howard's prioritisation of the 'race card'.

This sharp escalation of government and state led racism constitutes a real threat to the position of the black communities which demand a determined response.

The elements needed for the scale of response required are, firstly, the black communities themselves which have to play the leading role in both ensuring there is a response and setting the agenda and pace and, secondly, this leadership has to construct an alliance with the trade union and labour movement. On the basis of this alliance other crucial elements can and must be drawn in: the churches, civil liberties groups and so on.

What then is the state of the response in the black communities and the labour movement?

The degeneration of the Black Section leadership of the Anti-Racist Alliance and the ARA's subsequent destruction by sectarianism and personal ambition has been underlined by the ARA's complete absence from the resistance to these racist attacks. The government's racist offensive, the escalation of police harassment and the continuing failure of the criminal justice system to deal with racist violence have demanded a stepping up of united anti-racist action. This needs to be powerful enough to exercise real pressure on all the mainstream political parties and, particularly, the Labour Party.

While producing a glossy newsletter at the beginning of the year proclaiming its continued existence for PR purposes at trade union conferences, the ARA has made no contribution to the fight against racism in the last year. Since the decision of the main officers to resign from its leadership, following the fact that the key decisions of the organisation's Annual General Meeting were ignored last October — itself held after a year of attempts to correct sectarian mistakes by leading ARA members — the ARA has continued to exist solely as a paralysed rump that makes no contribution to the real struggle against racism.

The ARA was absent, even as a token presence, from the mobilisations led by the black community around the death of Brian Douglas, the response to Paul Condon's policing measures,



Howard's immigration proposals or any other mobilisation or campaign.

In sharp contrast a new alliance to fight racism has taken shape around the National Assembly Against Racism, which brought together black communities, anti-racists, trade unionists and others on the broadest basis yet seen at a conference at its Assembly in Tower Hamlets in February this year.

The forces which have led the National Assembly Against Racism, the Asian community in Tower Hamlets, the National Black Caucus, the Indian Workers Association(GB) and the Society of Black Lawyers were at the centre of these mobilisations, either calling the events or helping the family campaigns organise. It is based on the same fundamental principle of black self-organisation and leadership that was the keystone of the ARA, but in a political framework of collective leadership and acting as an umbrella and coordinator for a variety of actions without attempting to impose a straitjacket on the movement.

A new black leadership is beginning to emerge and strengthen itself out of these struggles which is clearly committed to an alliance with the labour movement.

The founding of the National Black Alliance of African, Asian and Caribbean Organisations, which brings together these and other black organisations, is at the core of this. The NBA took a positive stand against the imperialist rooted divisions within

the black communities in Britain by stating at the outset that all communities must be reflected in black leadership for it to be meaningful, thus drawing a definitive line against the anti-Asian racism whipped up by the Black Section leadership in its attempt to maintain its stranglehold of the anti-racist movement.

In the labour movement, the struggles for black self-organisation and black representation have not been rolled back and continue to bear positive fruit in terms of the TUC's commitment to prioritise anti-racist campaigning and its calling of a second Unite Against Racism demonstration in Manchester in October.

The recreation of a national anti-racist organisation to embody this alliance is now overdue. The framework exists in the form of the National Assembly Against Racism.

Most importantly the Assembly has taken the initiative to bring together a single issue united front to fight against Howard's new measures — the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill — which has set the date for a national demonstration against the new law on 24 February next year and has an impressively broad-based group of founding supporters.

The fight against the most significant piece of racist legislation in this country for many years will be the anvil on which this new organisation will be forged.

By Anna Samuel

Blair clashes with youth and students

The defeat of the proposal by the right wing Labour leadership of the National Union of Students that students should give up grants in favour of loans was the second major clash between the line of Tony Blair and very large numbers of young people — the first being his refusal to vote against the Tories' Criminal Justice Bill. Both indicate how difficult it is going to be for the Labour right to maintain control of Young Labour, Labour Students and the NUS in the context of a Blair government. The issue, however, is what politics will be necessary to create an alternative. Recent events have started to clarify this.

The proposal that NUS ditch its commitment to free education and grants was an attempt to bring it into line with the views of the Labour right wing, who through the Commission on Social Justice have put forward proposals to abolish grants, introduce loans, graduate tax and the requirement for students to pay 20 per cent of tuition fees. The student movement rejected these.

The Labour right's proposals for youth are draconian. The Commission also proposes that the national minimum wage should not apply to younger workers: 'because of the costs to employers, they should be allowed to pay 16-17 year olds a Training Wage at a lower rate than our proposed national minimum wage'. This proposal to keep young people as a source of low wage labour has since been endorsed by Harriet Harman.

Shockingly reactionary statements have been made by Blair on juvenile crime, truancy and in relation to youth voluntary training schemes. He has called for a crackdown on truants and for voluntary citizens' services scheme aimed at youth. Shortly after the victory on Clause IV, Blair called for 'something really awful' to happen to first time offenders (Guardian 3.5.95).

He went on 'there will be no foreign holidays for offenders — absolutely not'.

The proposals to make students pay for their own education, first floated in the Labour Party by the Commission on Social Justice, was followed by NUS conference where Blair's fellow travellers in NUS were arguing for a policy 'review' to look at 'realistic' options for funding education. This proposal was carried by conference. The decision was welcomed by Tory Minister Tim Boswell. Within a week a questionnaire was circulated to colleges, containing proposals for funding. A second mailing outlined in detail various proposals, including forms of loans and graduate tax. The only proposal for grants was linked to a 5 per cent flat rate rise in income tax and counterposed state spending on post 16 education to nursery education and the NHS.

The *Guardian* reported the review as if the new proposals had already been carried and that the majority of students wanted to adopt this new 'realistic' approach.

The Special Conference to push this through was held on 30 May, in the middle of the exam period and following a hasty review which took place over the Easter holidays. Despite those ob-



stacles to democratic participation, the conference voted to retain the commitment to free education and reject the 'Maintenance Income Contingent Loan' proposed by the right wing in Labour Students. Instead a series of campaigning proposals including national demonstrations, lobbies, occupations and rent strikes was carried.

The vote was a significant defeat for the right wing. Imposing loans is so unpopular among students that even with an extremely undemocratic process, the right could not win the vote.

Similar problems are faced by the Labour leadership over its youth organisation. Young Labour, was established in 1993, to attract new young members. Its short history is simply the latest example of the contradictory relationship between the Labour right and young people.

Historically every Labour Party youth organisation has moved to the left. In order to prevent this the right has to keep an iron grip on the youth section, stifling democracy and political debate. However, this restrictive approach makes it very difficult to attract

the young members the party needs. Despite the crowing about the 18 per cent increase in Labour's Youth membership it is still very low at just 17,000. The Labour right compare this to the Young Conservative membership claims of 5,000 — hardly a fair comparison given the deep unpopularity of the government among young people. A fairer comparison would be with the tens of thousands of youth who have mobilised around civil liberties, environmental and anti-racist issues in recent years. These young people are active and political, but they are not joining the Labour Party.

At Young Labour's first conference in February the right wing won the key votes. A motion calling for 'support for those whose peaceful activities are now criminalised under the Criminal Justice Act' was defeated on the basis that breaking the law should not be supported. Instead of voting to repeal the Act, it was agreed to 'introduce a positive legal framework'. Support for initiatives such as the National Assembly Against Racism was agreed, but it was included in a motion which supported in-

creased powers for the police to deal with the immediate effects of crime.

On education the conference rejected a call for the restoration of grants and abolition of loans. Retention of Clause IV was also lost.

Young Labour groups can only be set up with the approval of a regional office or Walworth Rd. They have no right to elect delegates to GCs, cannot elect a national executive committee at conference and cannot submit amendments to a conference which only takes place biennially.

However, a significant left was in evidence at the conference. In the election of the youth place on the Labour Party NEC three left candidates polled a total of 33 per cent of the vote.

However, in NUS and Young Labour the development of the left is hampered by the politics of some of the currents within it. Socialist Organiser — which has gained some influence in the student movement, for instance — served to narrow down support for the left.

The politics of Socialist Organiser are too right wing to organise the wider left that is needed. This was clear at the Young Labour Conference, where their NEC candidate standing under the name of

'Socialist Campaign Group Network' polled just 9 per cent — the lowest of all the left candidates. Support for the politics of the Campaign Group is far more substantial than that, but it was narrowed down by Socialist Organisers' politics.

In NUS, Socialist Organiser oppose the right wing over defending grants, but advocate reactionary positions on social and international issues. On anti-racism they attacked the National Assembly Against Racism. They have previously opposed Black self-organisation and Black leadership of the anti-racist movement. At a 'Campaign Group Youth Network' meeting in Manchester they argued against the National Assembly because its supporters included the Asian Chamber of Commerce (ACC), caricaturing them as the 'Black bosses'. This reactionary rubbish ignores the fact that racism affects all Black people — in fact Asian shopkeepers, which the ACC represents, are often the target of racist attacks. They reduce the anti-racist struggle to a battle for full employment and obstruct the opportunity for the left to link up with the struggles of Black people.

Similarly on women, they waged a vigorous fight in the late-1980s against the creation of a women's officer po-

sition in NUS, writing it off as the demand of so-called 'femocrats'.

On international questions they consistently accommodate to British imperialism. They oppose all-party peace talks for Ireland. They welcomed the reintroduction of capitalism into eastern Europe, the banning of the Communist party in Russia and believe that 'Serb imperialism' is more 'decisive' than NATO. America or the western powers in relation to the former Yugoslavia. They support the European Union, which is leading to the destruction of the welfare state.

They endorse the introduction of proportional representation, which would mean an end to majority Labour governments.

It is impossible to construct a broad, internationalist progressive left around such policies.

Considerable scope exists for a broader left. This was shown by the vote at the special conference. This is necessary to oppose the shift to the right in the student movement and the policies of Blair.

It is not enough simply to be anti-Blair. The left's alternative has to be promoted, in particular an alternative economic policy to pay for free education and the welfare state. Cutting arms spending, reducing dividend payments and progressive taxation are all ways to do this, and the arguments can be won against the rights' 'we can't afford it' mantra.

More widely, what is needed is a left encompassing youth in the Labour left, the student movement and the communist left, capable of linking up with the youth active around civil liberties, green and anti-racist issues.

This was evident at the Left Forum '95 which debated the political and campaigning issues which both the left and young people need to take up. Left Forum, although not solely a 'youth' event, was organised by Socialist Forum Youth and provides a way to bring together young people from different traditions to

jointly campaign and develop the political discussion and common activity. Left Forum '96 which will take place next Spring, will be an important opportunity to draw together that alliance and discussion and further the political discussion.

An alliance between the working class and youth and students is potentially a very powerful one.

Today a much higher number of young people are students and so it is even more important that this alliance is constructed. This will have to be done against and in collision with the Labour leadership and the current leadership of NUS, because, as has been pointed out, Blair has some horrific plans in store for students and youth.

But to put such an alliance together requires entirely different political priorities than anything that exists in the main left currents in the student movement at present. That is, acting firstly on what is in the interests of the working class as whole — internationally as well as in Britain. At present that means building the biggest possible response to the rise of racism and linking up with the Black communities and the Labour movement. It means vigorously and consistently opposing imperialist aggression throughout the world.

Secondly, defending the interests of students themselves can only be done in an alliance with the left and the labour movement. In order to do that students also have to be part of the alliance to take up issues that affect everyone.

Finally, to construct such a genuinely left current among youth and students will require the highest possible level of discussion. The Left Forum is at the centre of this. This can help create a new left which is capable of both allying with the broader left, linking up with the international realignment of the left which is taking place and which can defend the interests of students.

Kim Wood



The betrayal of women

Women in western Europe are facing the first sustained attempt to reverse the advances in their position in society in the post-war period. The unfolding of this attack in Britain is involving an intensification of political divisions between women, with the attempt by a minority of right wing women to misuse feminist arguments to impose a defeat on the majority of women.

At the Social Justice for Women conference on 1 July the Labour Women's Action Committee explicitly rejected the 'hijacking of feminism' by right wing Labour women, assembled a coalition of women fighting to defend the welfare state and minimum wage on a variety of levels and linked these to an alternative left economic policy.

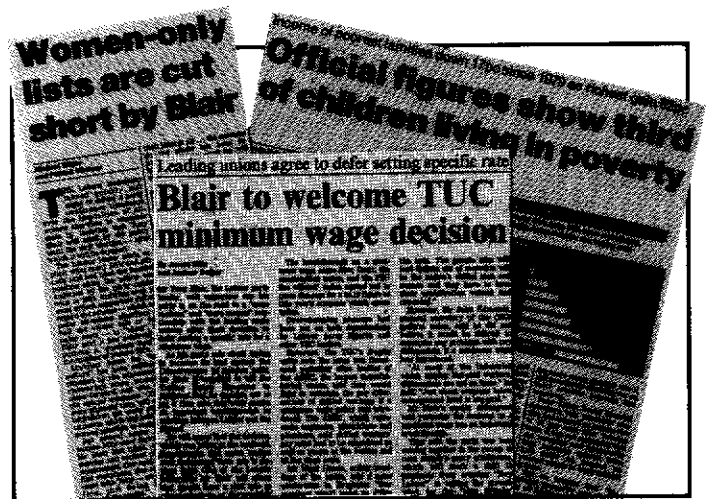
The conference attracted wide publicity on the left — particularly through an article by John Pilger published in the *New Statesman and Society* — and vilification from representatives of the Commission on Social Justice. The fundamental explanation for this was its reassertion of the link between the interests of women and those of the entire working class. The conference convincingly made the case that when women have fundamentally advanced, the whole of the working class has advanced. We examine the opposing arguments and policies being advocated by right wing women such as Patricia Hewitt and Harriet Harman.

At the core of the threat to women is the drive to dismantle the welfare state, the existence of which fundamentally altered the social position of women following the second world war. The welfare state reduced the burden of

unpaid domestic labour on women and eased the mass entry of women into paid employment. The erosion of the welfare state means transferring as much as possible of that burden of domestic labour from society back onto individual family units, and within them to women, and, since this will not have an equal impact on different social classes, consequently enormously deepening inequality between women.

Three other factors interact with this: the proportion of women in paid employment continues to grow and, within that, the proportion of women in part-time employment; the Labour leadership has increased its attack on the party's policy of a national minimum wage set initially at half male median earnings; the break of traditional family patterns, directly rooted in the greater economic choices acquired by women in the post war period, continues.

The attack women are facing is not aimed therefore at driving them out of work. On the contrary, by removing the welfare 'safety net' and forcing women to absorb a greater degree of unpaid domestic labour, women are to be coerced into low-paid, part-time and insecure employment. Together this is a massive attack on the living standards and choices



of millions of working class women. It promises to degrade the status of all women in society and to deliver far greater social dislocation than currently exists. It is, as *Socialist Action* has explained previously, the 'Americanisation' of women's position in society.

In order to weaken feminist and labour movement opposition, this attack, has been disguised by support from right wing women, and by the demonisation of certain groups of women — to create categories of underserving women, the 'underclass' women, the feckless and willful poor who supposedly abuse the welfare state for 'hand-outs'.

Single mothers have been especially demonised, with a string of pronouncements from Labour figures, such as that by Tony Blair days before Labour's women's conference in April, that it was 'a matter of common-sense to say that a child brought up in a stable and well balanced family is more likely to develop than one who is not'.

This rhetoric is not peculiar to Britain. In the United States, the push to cut the

country's meagre levels of welfare provision below that which existed in the 1930s depression, in the situation where the US black population is also disproportionately among the poorest, has prompted the re-emergence of racist ideas of inherited intelligence and ability.

The Commission on Social Justice has argued that the retirement pension should not be set as a proportion of average male wages but as an average of all wages because it is sex-discriminatory to do otherwise, since nearly half the workforce are women. As the public argument over the national minimum wage taking place in the lead up to this year's TUC and Labour Party conferences has shown, the same fallacious argument is being used in attempts to dilute Labour's commitment to a national minimum wage.

To endorse these types of proposals while claiming them as feminist could not be further from the truth. John Pilger rightly attacked this 'reactionary chic' and pointed out that the 'feminisation of parliament' by women who endorse such reaction has nothing to do

with women's rights and 'everything to do with the artificial promotion of middle-class women for electoral gain.' Harriet Harman has led the attack on Labour's minimum wage policy. Barbara Follett, who launched the US-styled 'Emily's List' to argue for more women's representation — of women hand-picked by the wealthy — and who has recently secured the Stevenage candidacy for herself, has now backed Tony Blair's declaration that women-only shortlists are to be dropped.

In her book *'About time — the revolution in work and family life'* Patricia Hewitt, former deputy director of the Institute for Public Policy Research and deputy chair of the Commission on Social Justice argues that part-time work is the new feminist model of work of the future: 'The old model of full-time, life-time employment was a male model' and 'we can see emerging from the old model of standardised working time a new model of "post-industrial" working time — a model much closer to female than to

derecognition and erosion of standard working hours. In Britain, flexible hours contracts and part-time work are replacing many full time jobs and fixed hours, particularly for women. In 1971 part-time employees represented 15.5 per cent of all employees. By 1991 this had risen to over 26 per cent. For women, in the UK, between 1984 and 1994 the numbers working part-time rose by 19 per cent. In spring 1994, 45 per cent of all women in employment worked part-time: more than 5 times as many women as men worked part-time. A comparison of overall employment figures for the last two quarters of 1994 show an increase in part time jobs of 173,941 and a fall in full time jobs of 74,120.

Employers can make huge cuts in wages by the device of replacing full-time jobs by part-time or flexible hours employment. At the sharp end of the flexibility curve is the emergence of 'zero hours' contracts and key time working. In her book Patricia Hewitt says she could

Stores made a third of its full-time workforce redundant, replacing them with employees on flexible hours contracts... Their hours, times and place of work can be varied unilaterally by the employer. Such contacts are now in use in Woolworths, Allied Maples, Kwik Save, Netto and B&Q.'

In 1994 the *New Earnings Survey (NES)* analysed the earnings of part-time workers for the first time, showing that 3.7 million part-time women and 800,000 part-time men fell below the Council of Europe's decency threshold, that is below 68 per cent of average earnings. Even this is an underestimate, since the *NES* does not analyse those workers whose wages fall below the threshold for income tax or national insurance, a prime motive for employers to switch to part-time workers.

Patricia Hewitt has portrayed this drive to greater exploitation embodied in labour flexibility as an unmissable potential for greater personal time. The 'defence of the old' — that is full-time jobs with fixed hours, wages and conditions — ignores the real opportunities and benefits offered by the new: benefits to enterprises and the economy in the form of higher productivity, benefits to individuals and families in the form of greater choice and a better fit between work and home.' She continues: 'The part-time employee who will only take a job if the hours are right and the self-employed professional who organises her own hours of work have in common some real control over their time.'

This has nothing to do with the reality of the growth of part-time work, which is insecure, low-waged, lacking in employment protection and with many workers working part-time hours not out of choice but two or even three part-time jobs amounting to equal or more hours than a standard full-time job, but lacking the associated employment rights or wage rates.

The promotion of part-time work is the flip side of the assault on the welfare state.

This is transparent in the Commission on Social Justice's report which is totally calculating in its proposals or how to cut back the welfare state. The report argues that single mothers should come under the 'availability for work' rules when their youngest child reaches five. But it simultaneously rules out the provision of free childcare as not 'feasible' and argues against a national minimum wage if it is more than £3.50 an hour. It proposes that pre-school care should be charged for 'people earning a reasonable wage' and concedes the principle of taxing child benefit by proposing taxation of high earners, a capitulation which could easily pave the way to wider taxation.

This combination of proposals would force single parents into part-time, and low-paid, work — if entitlement to means-tested benefit is to be removed from single mothers and they are to be forced into work, but childcare is not made available and social support is cut, that work will have to fit around children and other domestic commitments. In 1994 single parent families were 22 per cent of all families with children.

With many of the proposals of the Commission on Social Justice to be put to the vote at this year's Labour Party conference awareness of their impact, and opposition to them, is growing. Resolutions on the welfare state were the single biggest section of motions submitted to this year's conference.

Taken together, the Commission's proposals represent shifting back onto the working class, and particularly onto women, that proportion of the cost and burden of social and domestic labour which had been absorbed by the welfare state. These include taxing child benefit, raising the female pension age to 65, not index linking pensions to wages, replacing the state retirement pension with a minimum pension guarantee to be topped up by private provision, making elderly care primarily a matter of individual



male, patterns of the past.'

She encourages employers to 'accept the new challenge of radically reorganising working hours'. The report of the Commission on Social Justice also argues that it is 'possible to over-regulate a labour market'.

In reality there is an enormous push from capital for deregulation of labour markets through the removal of employment protection, driving down wage rates, union

not find any examples of zero hours contracts. They are, however, increasingly common, particularly in the retail and service sectors. Employees are obliged to be available at all times but are guaranteed absolutely no minimum hours or earnings. The shopworkers union USDAW argues that: 'The main reason for these changes is the need for increased productivity, flexibility and cost control... In February 1993, British Home

provision, financing higher education by student loans and a graduate tax, forcing single mothers into work without childcare provision and without a minimum wage.

Those feminists who have shown that the welfare state developed on the assumption of women's responsibility for domestic labour are correct. However, more fundamentally than this, the welfare state reduced the unpaid domestic labour of women, allowing women in the process to undertake paid employment. This alteration in the economic position of women in turn was a catalyst for the huge wave of political struggle by women and of social change since the 1960s.

The third and most immediate element of the attack on women is the attempt to empty the commitment to a national minimum wage of meaning. Tony Blair is openly hostile to the figure of £4.15 an hour and a formula based on half male median earnings. The Labour employment secretary Harriet Harman has said no figure should be set before the general election and has produced a policy paper arguing that any rate should be set by agreement with employers. The Confederation of British Industry responded by claim-

ing that even a £3 an hour minimum wage would have an adverse effect on employment, following this up in August by arguing against any minimum wage and for an extension of the benefits system instead.

This attack on the level of the minimum wage has been set in the context of the claim that a 'high' minimum wage would cost jobs and be inflationary. The Commission on Social Justice argument for a low minimum wage was justified by the statement that: 'Rather than risk highly publicised job losses or threats to small businesses, it would be better to start at a level which government can be confident will not have an adverse effect on employment.'

In support of a low minimum wage, Harriet Harman has pointed to the large numbers of workers, mainly women, being paid less than £2 an hour, implying any improvement at all should be thankfully received. These moves have naturally earned the warm support of employers. The *Guardian* advised trade unions to help Labour 'devise a mechanism to ensure that the figure ... doesn't become a springboard for all their members to preserve their differentials.'

Those advancing the argument that a minimum wage

set at a meaningful level would mean job cuts or higher prices are really arguing that it should be financed by the working class and that improvements in pay for the low paid should not require any fundamental change in economic policy. A *Socialist Economic Bulletin* paper, 'Women, work and the national minimum wage', July 1995, demonstrated that a falling share of wages in the economy has been accompanied by rising unemployment — the exact opposite of the Labour right's claims which imply that low wages are the key to low unemployment.

The attempt to insist that a high minimum wage would mean job losses or cuts in the living standards of other workers has nothing to do with the interests of women workers but merely the concern to ensure that any increase for those on the lowest wages is paid for not by, for instance, military spending cuts, restricting dividend payments or raising tax for the highest earners, but by cuts in higher paid workers wages or the threat of job losses.

Such policies are not feminist and they are not progressive. The undermining of the welfare state and removal of the social protection on which millions of women rely, labour market

flexibility and hostility to a national minimum wage will devastate women's lives. They are being accompanied by direct attempts to control the political voice of women, making the Labour women's conference biennial, promoting unaccountable groups like 'Emily's List' at the expense of the Labour women's organisation and now abandoning women-only shortlists.

They are opposed by the majority of women, in trade unions, women's sections, welfare rights organisations and in organisations like the Labour Women's Action Committee. A Labour government which implements them will destroy its support among women. At the Social Justice for Women conference, the Labour Women's Action Committee demonstrated the unity of interests between women and the most exploited sections of the working class, and the strength of women's opposition to the attack on the welfare state and their economic and social status.

The key issue now is for the majority opposed to these policies to ensure that they, and not the pseudo-feminist 'modernisers', are heard as the real voice of women.

Karen Hurst

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New Labour and the New Broad Left

British politics is heading towards a once in a century political crisis. The lynch-pin of the political party system throughout the twentieth century — Conservative Party hegemony — is coming to an end.

Capital's response is two-fold. To win Labour to the agenda of the City and employers' groups, including European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and to move towards an entirely new political party system which permanently excludes the possibility of Labour governing alone.

The outlines of the new party system are clear: coalition governments elected by proportional representation giving the Liberal Democrats, the smallest major party, a permanent place in government. They would act, as Paddy Ashdown's advisor, Lord Holme, put it at this year's Liberal conference, as 'a shield against the possibility of Labour backsliding into socialism.'

Tony Blair's overtures to the Liberal Democrats and his promise to hold a referendum on PR, show, not only his determination to insulate any government he leads from the influence of the labour movement, but also that he may become the midwife to a new political party system in Britain. That would become the basis for the greatest *political* attack on the working class in this country since Ramsay MacDonald.

The key to the coming reorganisation of British politics is the end of the hegemony of the Conservative Party. It is this crisis of the Tory Party which is propelling a Labour Party led even by Tony Blair towards victory at the next general election. But more fundamentally it poses the end of the political party system which has structured British politics for 100 years and the emergence of a new one.

The rise of the Liberals since the early 1960s, the support for PR by significant sections of capital and the increasing efforts of capital, including the City, to directly influence the Labour Party, must all be understood in this context. Furthermore, driving this political process is a fundamental shift in the mode of accumulation of capital in Britain, with its integration into the European Union. Thus the processes forcing into existence a new political party system dovetail with the key political choices regarding the relationship of British capitalism with the EU.

We will first examine the economic and historical driving forces of the reorganisation of British politics and then how these work themselves out in the labour movement today.

The modern Conservative Party

came into existence as the political representative of British imperialism, that is, of capital accumulation based on the British empire and overseas investment. By the second world war this mode of capital accumulation had exhausted itself. Whereas income from overseas investment was 8 per cent of GDP prior to world war one, by the end of the second world war it had fallen to 3 per cent and by the 1980s 1 per cent of GDP. This reality required a reorientation of British capital. The only possible capitalist alternative was to integrate into the emerging European capitalist bloc. The attempt to carry through this reorientation, beginning after the Suez debacle in 1956, rapidly threw the Tory Party — the party of the prior mode of capital accumulation — into crisis.

Because of the uniquely large role of overseas investment in the British economy, British capital did not require the strong manufacturing base, high levels of domestic investment and well educated workforce which German capital, for instance, was forced to develop from the beginning of the twentieth century. Britain's integration into the European capitalist bloc demands all of these. Not only this but the need for Europe to compete with the United States and, in

particular, Japan, requires Europe as an economic bloc to become more competitive, necessitating higher levels of investment and creating greater strain on the most uncompetitive economies within Europe, such as Britain. Within the EU, Germany, following unification, is now totally dominant. Policy decisions, for example moving forward on monetary union, are tailored to the needs of German capital. Far from the European Union levelling up British living standards to German levels, it in fact requires a more savage attack on the working class than anything yet tried by the Tory Party.

Thatcher obtained a temporary respite in the long-term decline of the Tory party, because she had the good fortune of the profits from North Sea Oil. The fall in oil prices put choices Thatcher had postponed firmly back on the agenda. By the end of the 1980s Britain had the biggest balance of payments deficits in its history. Thatcher's replacement by John Major, who made clear his commitment to the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System, was supposed to be the first step by Britain to economic and monetary union. It failed, destroying Major's economic strategy and bringing the crisis of the Tory Party to a head.

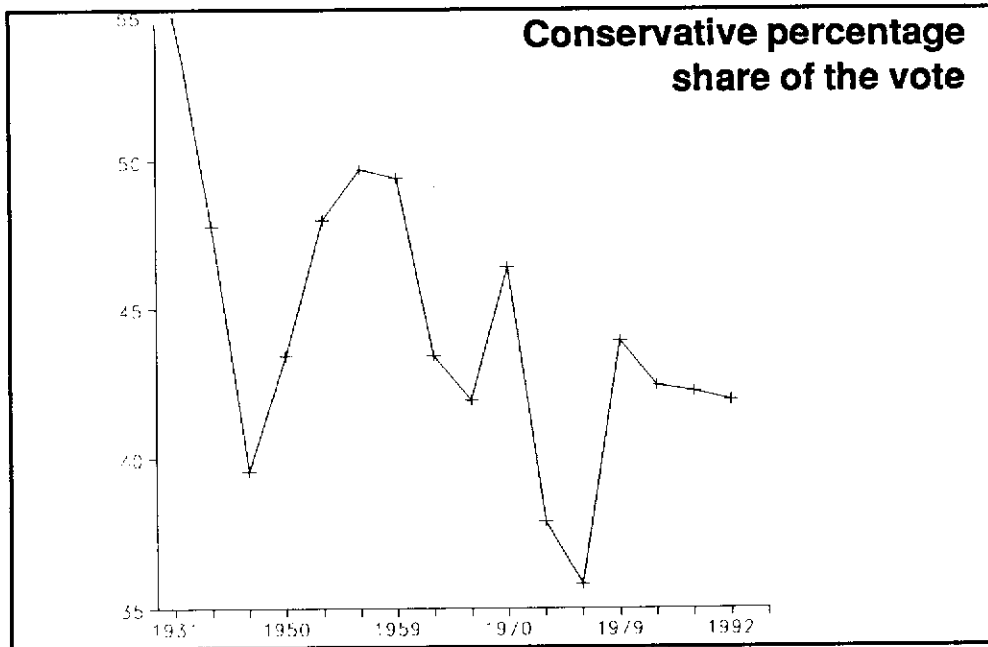
Each time the Conservative Party has moved towards European integration, it has paid an internal political price.

Following the turn to seek admission to the European Community at the beginning of the 1960s, the Conservative Party was out of office for most of the 15 years between 1964 and 1979. Ted Heath, the Tory Prime Minister who negotiated British entry to the EEC went down to a crushing political defeat at the hands of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1974.

The second main step in Britain's integration into the EC, entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism led the Tories to political disaster: Britain's forced exit from the ERM

'I see a proper dialogue of ideas with the Liberal Democrats. There will be increased cooperation'

Tony Blair



child benefit has been frozen or taxed — the British government has proposed the abolition of the single parents' benefit. In Britain 34 per cent of all benefit spending is means tested.

The Conservative Party, whose political hegemony rested on Britain's imperialism, is now in its greatest crisis since the turn of the century. It has shown itself to be incapable of carrying through the reorientation of British capital towards Europe as reflected in Howe's appeal for a recognition that an orientation of integration into Europe requires a new political bloc. This creates a divergence between the needs of British capital and the electoral interests of the Conservative Party.

The fact that Major won the leadership election simply reflects that for the Tory Party any other result would have been worse. Portillo or Redwood would probably have precipitated a crisis of confidence and a rapid general election and a Heseltine substitute for Major would have widened current party divisions even further.

Although the leadership election strengthened the pro-EU wing of the parliamentary Tory Party as it was based on a deal between Major and Heseltine, it did not do so sufficiently to make the Conservatives an adequate instrument to take Britain into the next stage of economic and monetary union. This was reflected in the approach of the most pro-EU sections of British capital.

The Confederation of British Industry declined to back any candidate for the Tory leadership, stressing instead its attitude to Europe: 'We very much want to be a part of the single market and we are in favour of a single currency'.

The *Financial Times* editorialised: 'The question that divides the Tories is a fundamental one...the circumstances that made the country the world's greatest power are long gone' and 'The UK always feared European unity but inclusion now offers its only opportunity to be more than an offshore Greater Switzerland' and ending by spelling out that 'The issue of Europe matters not because it divides the Conservatives but because it divides the country.'

In the *Financial Times* in July Phillip Stephens went further:

'This is a party on the brink of an historic split. Divisions on the left long promised, but never delivered, a fundamental realignment of

in September 1992 reflected the impossible strains arising from the attempt to sustain the high rate of exchange of the pound demanded by the City of London and simultaneously to compete within Europe, on the basis of an economy with the lowest level of investment as a proportion of GDP in the European Union.

Since then John Major's government has essentially been paralysed, under pressure from the dominant sections of British capital to take steps towards the European Union and on the other hand unable to control the political reaction created by this, most dramatically represented in the removal of the whip from the eight 'Euro-rebels' last year and the leadership contest in June.

Capitalist integration of Britain into the European Union provokes such a political crisis for the Tory Party because it requires the greatest assault on the living standards of the working class since the war. Unwilling and unable to change the imperial priorities of British capitalism, the Tory government can only try to raise the level of investment by driving down wages, cutting social spending and cheapening labour. These in turn require wave after wave of attack on the unions. North Sea Oil for a time softened these contradictions so that the majority of those in work had rising real wages while the inner cities, manufacturing and the unemployed were selected for attack.

Since the end of the 1980s the attack has been extended to wider sections of the working class. That is why Tory support has collapsed:

in the May local council elections the Conservatives took their lowest ever share of the vote in nationwide elections, losing control of 60 of the 68 councils they controlled before the election. Major's attempt to shore up his position by the leadership election has basically failed, with no significant closing of the opinion poll gap with Labour. These problems can only deepen because the economic recovery is going to be undermined by the failure to generate the resources necessary to increase investment — at its lowest level since 1955.

Further savage public spending cuts are necessary to meet the criteria for currency convergence as laid out under the Maastricht Treaty. In order to meet these — no more than a 3 per cent budget deficit and 60 per cent debt — European governments are radically cutting back on social spending. The scale of this has already shaken the fabric of the welfare state in Europe. As *The Economist* put it 'Reform has proceeded by stealth, with a means test here, a restriction there. Taken together, the piecemeal changes might yet transform the welfare state, because they alter the tacit bargain that it was based on...citizens agreed to high taxes and substantial government intervention; in return, they were able to claim an array of universal benefits easily and of right. No longer.' (26.8.95).

France has increased the number of years one must work to qualify for a state pension. Britain, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain have increased the retirement age or have agreed to. Across the EU

'whoever leads the Tories, the party's now-visceral Euro-scepticism means that Brussels is still waiting for Labour's leader, Tony Blair'.

The Economist.

British politics. The fault lines on the right may finally produce it. It is no longer fanciful to imagine, five years hence, Michael Portillo as leader of the Conservative and National party, and Kenneth Clarke heading the Tory Europeans...Were Tony Blair smart enough to introduce proportional representation as soon as he crossed the threshold of 10 Downing Street he could make it a certainty. The first-past-the-post electoral system is the last remaining thread which can hold together the party which has governed Britain for the past 16 years.'

This is the context in which some of the most influential sections of British capital have concluded Labour will win the next general election and have set about organising to influence what its policies will be.

It is also the background against which Tony Blair's agenda should be understood. The crisis of the Tory Party means that capital requires a new political party system based on British participation in European integration. The creation of such a new political bloc is the issue of the moment. We are witnessing the steps towards the creation in Britain of a specific variant of the European political party system.

European economic and monetary union means carrying through the goals of big European capital to compete with Japan and the United States. The scale of assault this requires on the working class and petty bourgeoisie means that it is impossible for the pure parties of big capital on the basis of such policies to retain sufficient political support to govern alone. Consequently capitalist hegemony in the European Union states is typically exercised by the pro-European parties of big capital in alliance with either the more national capitalist parties or with social democracy. In Britain, however, the first-past-the-post electoral system is an obstacle to coalition government.

The openness of the intervention by capital to shape Labour policy and the crass servility with which Blair responds to every such overture represents the development of policies and structures in the Labour Party which will allow the transmission of the key policy imperatives of capital. The key elements are to secure commitment to integration into the EU and the attack on working class living standards demanded by that; and the creation of a politi-

cal bloc strong enough to impose this policy in government, first through a Blair government, then a pact with the Liberal Democrats and finally by institutionalising this through proportional representation.

Throughout western Europe in the 1980s right wing social democracy — Euro-socialism — put itself forward as the most reliable ally of big European capital, as against the main nationally based bourgeois parties whose social bases in national capital and the petty-bourgeoisie have constrained their ability to carry through European capitalist integration. In line with this, Blair's message to big capital is that he will carry out the policies the Tories have proved incapable of.

It is because of this that sections of capital have now started funding the Labour Party in a minor way, with donations from the Pearson Group (owner of the *Financial Times*), Hanson, Marks and Spencer, National Westminster Bank and others. The financial contributions are small compared to what capital provides to the Tories but the political significance is clear. *The Guardian's* city page, for example, recently reported that leading City bankers were getting together 'to persuade senior opposition politicians of the benefits of financial markets'. Elsewhere in the EU it is links of this type between private capital and Euro-socialist parties which are at the basis of the corruption scandals that have all but destroyed the PSI and gravely damaged the French, Belgian and Spanish parties.

Blair followed the Clause 4 conference by calling for Labour to 'think the unthinkable' on policy. Since then the 'unthinkable' has included the promise in his Mais lecture to be 'tougher' than the Tories on inflation and to keep public spending within strict limits, the refusal to set any minimum wage figure before the election and announcement that employers will have a say in the setting of a minimum level, his backing for a brutal criminal justice policy, the announcement of support for testing of five year olds to allow some primary school children supposedly onto a 'fast track' for some subjects and dropping of opposition to grant maintained schools, and his wooing of Rupert Murdoch's media empire.

Key advisers to Blair, including Peter Mandelson, have urged New

Labour to model itself on the SDP, which means ending the influence of the trade unions and Labour Party rank and file on party policy.

Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw hit the headlines with his attack on 'winos and addicts whose aggressive begging affronts and sometimes threatens decent compassionate citizens'. The civil rights organisation Liberty had already said that Straw's proposals on anti-social neighbours 'could amount to a breach in the European Convention of Human Rights'.

Reasserting 'New Labour' in the wake of the Tory leadership election, Tony Blair promised a 'wholesale review' of the welfare state to include such things as matching benefits to a real responsibility to find work.

Blair has now picked a head on confrontation with Labour women by announcing that women only shortlists are to be ditched after the next election.

To impose such policies Blair faces obstacles in the structure of the labour movement and the political system itself. This policy agenda requires an assault on the democracy of the labour movement in order to wall off the Labour leadership and a future government from the protests which will inevitably result. The relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party, reflecting the trade union roots of the party (and in the past its relative political weakness), has now become an intolerable obstacle. As Blair told the TUC: 'We have an obligation to listen, as we do to employers. You have the right to persuade, as they do. But the decisions must rest with us.' This followed remarks made earlier in the year that: 'The next Labour government is going to face very hard decisions about spending, priorities and choices.' Steps had to be taken to prevent the NEC becoming the sort of 'focus for opposition' it had been under past right wing Labour governments.

This statement followed Blair's Clause 4 victory: contrary to Blair-apologist like Paul Anderson, deputy editor of the *New Statesman and Society*, who after the Clause 4 conference said that 'Blair will decide not to launch himself into forcing through significant modifications of the party constitution this side of a general election' Blair has pursued an all-out assault.

Media coverage of the conference was used to outline propos-

'The objective is a new political consensus of the left-of-centre, based upon the key values of democratic socialism and European social democracy'

Tony Blair

als to impose individual membership ballots in the trade unions on policy issues, to reduce the share of the union vote at Labour conferences from 70 to 50 per cent, to extend individual balloting in CLPs to policy issues, to restructure the National Executive Committee and its constituency section and to boost further the role of the National Policy Forums at the expense of the NEC. Candidates for elections to the National Executive Committee have been prevented from distributing election literature to constituency Labour Parties. Blair has placed ending union sponsorship of MPs on the agenda, and suggested that union money should go to a central fund, which would undoubtedly then be directed according to the priorities of the leadership. The TUC was told: 'There will be no repeal of all Tory trade union laws. No mass or flying pickets'.

Prompted by the wish to block attempts by black communities to secure greater representation, a rule change is to be proposed to the Labour conference which would give the general secretary the right to reject any application for Party membership 'for any reason which s/he sees fit'. This move will put Labour into sharp conflict with black communities, a fact which was commented on by *The Economist*: 'A lot of votes are at stake. The Commission for Racial Equality estimates that in 1992, 77 per cent of Asian voters supported Labour as did 85 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans' (9 Sept 1995).

The Labour Women's conference has been downgraded by making it biennial and encouraging non-decision making workshops. This has coincided with the attempt to empty the minimum wage policy of content and the promotion of non-accountable groups like Emily's List, modelled on the US Democratic Party where money calls the shots.

These attacks on democracy have resulted in a further polarisation of the 'soft left', already split over Clause 4.

The Labour Coordinating Committee is the vanguard of the right wing in the party. Its newsletter to the 29 April conference urged 'Change mustn't stop with Clause IV' and argued that 'The Party must embark on a review of its structures and organisation at all levels. The NEC must be entirely restructured ... there can be no justification for trade unions continuing to hold

more than two thirds of the votes at annual party conference... CLPs must as a first step get 50 per cent of the vote. And to ensure that CLPs delegates are representative of their constituency, they should be elected by OMOV.' In the run-up to Labour Party conference, the LCC has initiated a 'standing commission' — 'New Labour, New Party' — to 're-examine every aspect of party democracy'.

The Democratic Left is also orienting to participate in the party on the basis of building the hard right around Blair.

By contrast, *Tribune* newspaper came out for retention of Clause 4, publishes articles defending the trade union link and party democracy, supported broad left initiatives in defence of the welfare state and has even changed its masthead from 'Labour's independent weekly' to 'Voice of the Left'. Its NEC slate backs five of the seven Campaign Group candidates.

Tribune relies on trade union support for its survival. Its readership is left activists in the CLPs. This readership and financial support would disappear if *Tribune* supported Blair's assault on Labour democracy and on the welfare state and employment.

The *New Statesman* has veered in the opposite direction. Under Steve Platt's editorship the *New Statesman* took a decisive stand in opposing the war in the Gulf. But on the Labour Party it has consistently promoted a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The *New Statesman*, with the initial involvement of *Tribune*, gave a cover to the attack on Clause 4, circulating their own alternative. In an article headlined 'Lib-Labbery rules OK', the *Statesman* argued that 'the introduction of Lib Dems to a Labour government would these days give it a much-needed reforming boost', although in the same edition Nyta Mann pointed out that many on the left 'remember the last experience of Lib-Lab cooperation in government — the years of IMF imposed austerity and industrial relations crisis between 1977 and 1978 — with horror'. In July an editorial urged 'socialists to vote Lib Dem in Littleborough and Saddleworth'.

On the Nolan Committee the *New Statesman* editorialised 'The Conservative Party does not suffer financially because of a more arm's length relationship with business, so why should Labour suffer as a re-

sult of a looser association with the unions?...union members have not only not benefited from the link in recent years — they have probably suffered...' (19 May)

There has been considerable movement towards closer relations with the Liberals. Most important by far was Tony Blair's statement on the eve of the Liberal Democrats annual conference, offering a referendum on PR and a commitment to 'increased cooperation' between Labour and the Lib Dems. In May *The Sunday Times* announced 'Ashdown and Blair forge anti-Tory pact' and Ashdown explained in the *New Statesman* that the Liberals were preparing for a 'new, more cooperative relationship with Labour.' In the same week a pro-coalition group of MPs and councillors launched a new organisation 'Labour Initiative on Co-operation' (Linc) calling for coalitions in local government.

Despite Blair's crucial advantage — the desire for a Labour government after nearly twenty years of Tory administrations — considerable opposition has already surfaced in the labour movement. The critical matter is to bring this together into a coherent 'new broad left'.

This requires the left intelligently choosing the terrain on which to fight. Socialism is unfortunately not on the agenda in Britain. But majorities exist in the labour movement on a number of individual issues and this can be drawn together. The left needs to create a hegemonic alternative to Blair, that is to bring together the most thorough-going alternative economic programme with every social interest that stands to lose under Blair's policies.

The fundamental issue any broad left alternative to Blair must address is how a Labour government would radically increase investment in the British economy. In the absence of an alternative economic policy, Labour will be forced to fund investment and the cost of European integration by attacking working class living standards, dismantling the welfare state and maintaining a low paid workforce. The alternative to this is to force capital to fund investment by creating a reduction in the share of company dividends in the economy and compelling companies to direct their resources into investment, lowering the level of military spending to the average proportion of GDP in Europe, re-

'The Prime Minister, or any pro-European successor — must take a serious political gamble in the national interest. Simply stated, he must banish the illusion that unity on Europe is possible within the Conservative Party and seek to monopolise a cross party majority in the House of Commons and the country as a whole'.

Geoffrey Howe

The Recomposition of the International Workers' Movement

The re-introduction of capitalism into eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, unleashed a carnival of reaction throughout the world: the Gulf War, signalling a new era of military intervention by imperialism into the third world; the advance of NATO into eastern Europe, starting with the bombing of Yugoslavia; the collapse of living standards throughout eastern Europe and the former USSR; the greatest rise of racism since the 1930s and the first serious attempts to start dismantling the welfare states in western Europe.

This course of events was predictable and predicted. The overthrow of the planned economies in eastern Europe and the break-up of the USSR, changed the international relationship of class forces in favour of imperialism. The imperialist ruling classes consequently became, not more conciliatory, but vastly more aggressive — taking the offensive to secure their interests in the third world, in eastern Europe and against the working class within the imperialist states.

The critical issue today, is whether that imperialist offensive will be taken onto a new level by the restoration of capitalism in Russia. Four years after Yeltsin came to power that issue has still not been resolved.

The overthrow of the Russian revolution would be the greatest defeat of the international working class in history. It would open a period of capitalist barbarism which would make what has happened since 1989 look benign. That is why the entire international workers' movement is going to be recomposed around the events since 1989 and, above all, by the struggle in Russia.

Geoffrey Owen examines the driving forces of the greatest recomposition of the working class movement since 1917 and the point it has reached today.

1. The working class and 'universal human emancipation'

The dynamic unleashed by the events of 1989 and 1991 demonstrated one of the most basic propositions of Marxism — that, because the victory of the working class is the necessary and fundamental step in 'universal human emancipation' — each advance of the international working class benefits the whole of humanity, every major defeat of the working class will throw back not merely that class, but the whole of human civilisation and culture.

That relationship between the working class and the future of society was the basis of Marx's socialism. In Marx's conception, a class could only lead society if it represented not only *its own* interests but *wider* interests of society: 'The class making a revolution comes forward from the very start... not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society, as the whole mass of society confronting the ruling class... Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of other classes which are not winning a dominant position... Every new class, therefore, achieves domination only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously.'¹

But, having achieved the leadership of society, the ability of previous leading classes to represent wider interests of society — their universality in Marx's expression, or hegemony in Lenin's — was limited and ultimately negated by conflict between their *particular* interests and the further development of society.

Thus the great bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century, by striking down feudalism, advanced not only the bourgeoisie but also all other classes oppressed by feudal social relations. However, after 1848, the *particular* class interests of capital more and more conflicted with the *general* development of society — private ownership and the national state made social control of the productive forces created by capitalism impossible. The result was increasingly violent economic and political upheavals, cul-

minating in the world wars of the twentieth century.

From that point, far from representing the universal interests of human civilisation and culture, capital threatened to extinguish them. This posed the question of what class could prevent the progressive conquests of humanity, including those of the ascent of bourgeois society, being destroyed.

The answer was given in Russia's October 1917 revolution, taking that country out of the first world war and providing an objective base of support for every subsequent struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The Russian revolution demonstrated in practice the historical role of the working class which had been theorised by Marx 70 years earlier: 'All preceding classes that got the upper hand, sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and fortify... All previous historical movements were movements of minorities or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung in the air.'²

Thus, for Marx, the working class was the *most* universal class in history, because the accomplishment of its specific class goals necessitated not merely the liberation of itself with the continuation of the oppression or exploitation of other classes, but the liberation of the whole of humanity.

This emancipating role of the working class derived not from sentiment but from its objective posi-

tion in society: 'It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat, at the moment regards as its aims. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in consequence with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.'³

But, to accomplish its historic role the working class has to become organised and conscious of it. As Trotsky put it: 'The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity has nothing in common with fatalism. Socialism is not realisable 'by itself', but as a result of the struggle of living forces, classes and their parties. The proletariat's decisive advantage is the fact that it represents historical progress, while the bourgeoisie incarnates reaction and decline.'⁴

The relation of working class political organisation to the struggle for the leadership of society was developed by Lenin: 'The industrial workers cannot accomplish their epoch-making mission of emancipating mankind from the yoke of capital and from wars if they confine themselves to attaining an improvement in their own conditions, which may sometimes be tolerable in the petty bourgeois sense... The proletariat is a really revolutionary class and acts in a really socialist manner only when it comes out and acts as the vanguard of all the working and exploited people, as their leader in the struggle for the overthrow of the exploiters.'⁵

Antonio Gramsci elaborated this point: 'The proletariat, in order to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and encrustation. What does this mean? That, in addition to the need to overcome the distinctions which exist between one trade and another, it is necessary — in order to win the trust and consent of the peasants and of some of the semi-proletarian urban categories — to overcome certain prejudices and conquer certain forms of egoism which can and do subsist within the working class as such, even when class particularism

'Each victory of the international working class took forward the whole of human society, while each defeat threw back, not only that class, but the whole of human civilisation and culture'



Russia 1917

has disappeared. The metal-worker, joiner, building worker, etc, must not only think as proletarians, and no longer as metal-worker, joiner, building worker, etc, they must also take a further step. They must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a class which can win and build socialism only if it is aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata.'⁶

This relationship of the goals of the proletariat to the liberation of the whole of society, dictates the central place which must be occupied in the class struggle today of the struggles for the liberation of women, of black people against racism and colonialism, for lesbian and gay liberation and against every other manifestation of oppression and exploitation.

This Marxist *theory* of the role of the working class in society was confirmed in practice on an immense scale by the course of the twentieth century. Each victory of the international working class took forward the whole of human society and each defeat threw back not only that class, but the whole of society.

To take the most colossal events. The collapse of the Second International into chauvinism on the eve of the First World War was a catastrophe for the international workers' movement. But the first world war was far more than that — it was the reduction of society to a level of barbarism without historical precedent.

Twenty five million people died in European countries alone in the First World War and its aftermath. Beside this all previous wars paled into insignificance — for example, 174,000 soldiers had been killed in the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war.

The events of 1933-43 demonstrated this process on a still greater scale. The fact that Hitler was allowed to take power in Germany without effective resistance from the German Communist and Social Democrat parties, meant not simply the crushing of the German working class, but also the Second World War, the greatest blood-bath in history. More than 50 million people perished and, in the Holocaust, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden, capital surpassed all previous yardsticks of barbarism.

If 1914 and 1933 showed the consequences of such immense defeats of the international working class, the October revolution in Russia showed the potential unleashed by its victories. October did not just bring the Russian working class to power. It saved the country from dismemberment by Japan, Germany, Britain and the United States. Russia survived only because the working class placed itself at the head of society.

On a world scale, the Russian revolution halted the 400 year expansion of capitalist colonialism. The trajectory of the world up to 1917, was the enslavement of the majority of the human race by a handful of imperialist powers. The Russian revolution awakened the

political process in the east which ultimately destroyed colonialism.

For the first time, peoples fighting imperialist oppression had a material base of support at the level of a state power. As Trotsky, Stalin's most irreconcilable opponent from the left, stressed until the end of his life — the crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy never outweighed this progressive significance of the Russian revolution: 'The existence of the Soviet Union, despite the far-advanced degeneration of the workers' state, remains even now a fact of immeasurable revolutionary significance. The collapse of the Soviet Union would lead to terrible reaction in the whole world, perhaps for decades to come. The struggle for the preservation, rehabilitation, and strengthening of the first workers' state is indissolubly bound up with the struggle of the world proletariat for the socialist revolution.'⁷

This significance of the Russian revolution was confirmed in the course of the second world war and its aftermath. Against the war machine of German imperialism, socialist newspapers, trade unions and political parties were totally insufficient. The only two forces in the world capable of defeating German imperialism were the more powerful imperialist United States or the Soviet Union. The west European working class movement was swept aside by fascism and its allies, the Russian working class, having conquered state power, broke the back of the Germany army.

The fact that it was the Soviet Union which played the principal role in defeating German imperialism from 1943 changed the entire international relationship of class forces. Eastern Europe, the Balkans and by 1949, China, the most populous country in the world, were lost to capitalism. It opened the cycle of socialist and colonial revolutions in Asia which precipitated the end of European colonialism — the greatest blow against racism and oppression in human history.

The existence of a non-capitalist state capable of destroying the United States was the single most important constraint on US military force in the post-war period. Without it there is little doubt that the United States would have tried to break that post-war revolutionary dynamic with nuclear weapons against Korea or Vietnam.

Equally, after 1945 it was fear that the Russian revolution might:

'The
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spread into war-devastated Japan and western Europe which motivated both the creation of welfare states in western Europe and the US military occupation of Japan and Germany.

Thus the history of the twentieth century made clear long before 1989 what the consequences would be of the overturn of so 'colossal a conquest as planned economy' in eastern Europe. As Trotsky had put it: 'The collapse of the Soviet Union would lead to terrible reaction in the whole world, perhaps for decades to come.'⁸

The re-introduction of capitalism into eastern Europe in 1989 and the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991, had precisely the results foreseen — the reduction of hundreds of millions of people to a lifetime of poverty; the largest US military attack in the third world since Vietnam — the Gulf war; the greatest rise in racism in Europe since the second world war; the drive to dismantle the welfare state in western Europe; the break-up, war and NATO military intervention into the former Yugoslavia; the decision to expand NATO to the borders of the former USSR and the rapid increase in the military roles of German and Japanese imperialisms.

NATO, far from scaling down its operations, has seen its role dramatically expanded for 'out of area' activities. The Gulf war inaugurated a new period of north/south wars and the bombing of Yugoslavia signalled NATO's advance to the east.

The causal connection between these events is clearly understood by the leaders of the capitalist class throughout the world. Newt Gingrich, right wing Republican leader in the US congress, for example, bases the possibility of rolling back what little welfare state exists in the US on the relationship of forces created by 1989 and 1991. As the *Wall Street Journal* commented: 'Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich stood in front of reporters last week and announced that the progressive tax system was an artifact of the Cold War... We would widen the field further: The long, legislative run of Democratic liberalism was an artifact of the Cold War... When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, we all knew that the world had changed utterly, and indeed it has in the formerly vassal states of the old Soviet Union. Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, Tallinn are worlds

away from what they were a mere five years ago. It was not possible to imagine that these forces would fail to touch the political structure of an America whose policies and strategies had been tied so long to that stolid Cold War reality... The long era of public paternalism that emerged throughout the West during the years of the Cold War is being swept aside...'⁹

Having outlined the consequences of 1989 and 1991 to date, it must be understood that the results of the overthrow of the Russian revolution, were it to happen, would be still more momentous. China would be directly threatened by imperialism, which would be able to use force with impunity in the third world, eastern Europe and the former USSR. Moreover, as after 1914 and 1933, the imperialist powers would eventually be given the scope to take their own conflicts to the point of war, only with immensely more powerful destructive forces than have previously existed.

Before 1991, Germany, Japan and the United States were forced to subdue their own conflicts because they faced a more dangerous enemy — a major state, the USSR, representing different class interests. Capitalism lost Russia and China in the first and second world wars. With a third of the world's population in non-capitalist states after 1949, major inter-imperialist conflict would have meant still greater losses in Europe and Asia. In a nutshell since 1917 the most important obstacle to war has been fear of socialist revolution. The Japanese and German ruling classes, in the military front line of the Cold War, were acutely aware of this.

Japanese capitalism, facing the Soviet Union and China, depended utterly on US military support. West German capitalism, with hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops in east Germany, required an equivalent US military presence for survival.

The collapse of the USSR creates other options. Japan can develop nuclear weapons to counter China's advantage in numbers. Germany will expand its military potential, including acquiring nuclear weapons, to underpin a new German sphere of influence in eastern Europe and the Balkans.

But these are not developments which would meet with favour in Washington. A recent pamphlet, funded by the British foreign office,

points out with unusual candour: 'The United States government remains engaged in Europe for the simple reason that the US has fundamental interests in the region. It has traditionally opposed the emergence of a hegemonic power in Europe, has fought two 'hot' wars and one cold war to prevent this, and would undoubtedly do so again in the future...'¹⁰

Indeed, while the number one goal of US strategy after 1991 is to prevent any attempt to put the Soviet Union back together again, a second priority is to stop Japan or Germany emerging as military rivals to the US.

This was the conclusion of the Pentagon's policy re-appraisal following the end of the cold war. As the *International Herald Tribune* reported under the apt title 'Pentagon's New World Order: US to reign supreme, a policy to ward off future challenges': 'In a broad new policy statement the Defense Department asserts that the US political and military mission in the post-Cold War era will be to ensure that no rival superpower is allowed to emerge in Western Europe, Asia or the territory of the former Soviet Union... the paper foresees building a world security arrangement that pre-empts Germany and Japan from pursuing a course of substantial rearmament, especially nuclear armament, in the future... Nuclear proliferation, if unchecked by superpower action, could tempt Germany, Japan and other industrial powers to acquire nuclear weapons to deter attack from regional foes. This could start them down the road to global competition with the United States and, in a crisis over national interests, military competition.'¹²

Discussion which followed gave a flavour of US thinking. Charles Krauthammer, for example, commented in the *International Herald Tribune*: 'We Americans have had 40 years of competition with one heavily armed, nuclear superpower. Do we really want to devote the next 40 years to competition with two, three, many such countries — countries like Germany and Japan that have historically displayed far less prudence in their drive for hegemony than even Stalin's Russia.'¹²

These are the dynamics unleashed by 1989 and the stakes of the struggle unfolding today in Russia. They will totally re-make the international workers' movement.

'Before 1991 Germany, Japan and the United States were forced to subdue their own conflicts because they faced a more dangerous enemy — a major state, the USSR, representing different class interests'

2. 1914, 1933, 1989 — Remaking the international workers movement

While no analogy can be exact, the situation of the labour movement following 1989 and 1991, resembles that after the two comparable events in twentieth century history — the collapse of the Second International in 1914 and Hitler's assumption of power in 1933 in Germany.

Those standing against the First World War in 1914 were a tiny minority of the Second International. But the conclusions they drew were immediate and unambiguous. In Lenin's words: 'The aims of socialism at the present time cannot be fulfilled, and real international unity of the workers cannot be achieved, without a decisive break with opportunism.' He added: 'The gravest feature of the present crisis is that the majority of official representatives of European socialism have succumbed to bourgeois nationalism, to chauvinism... The Second International is dead, overcome by opportunism. Down with opportunism, and long live the Third International...' ¹³. Or, as Rosa Luxemburg put it, the Second International had become 'a stinking corpse'.

However, the persecuted minority which stood against war in 1914, had, by October 1917, led the Russian revolution. Two years later they founded the Communist International, which not merely *excluded* all those who had supported the imperialist slaughter, but *included* currents, originally outside the Second International, who came together on the basis of the Russian revolution and the revolutionary tide which followed the First World War.

At its first congress the Communist International outlined the material basis of the degeneration of the Second International: 'The general course of economic development had given the bourgeoisie of the wealthiest countries the opportunity to tempt and buy off the upper layers of the working class —

the labour aristocracy — with crumbs from its enormous profits... From the leaders of the peaceable parliamentary movement, the heads of the trade unions, the secretaries, editors and officials of social democracy there developed a caste — a labour bureaucracy with its own selfish group interests essentially hostile to socialism.' ¹⁴

In 1933, those explaining, with Trotsky, that Stalin's line of 'social fascism' would result in the victory of Hitler, were an even smaller minority than 1914. But the refusal of the Comintern to draw any lessons from Hitler's victory sealed its collapse as an instrument of socialist revolution. The Comintern claimed, absurdly, that Hitler was merely a step towards socialist revolution in Germany: 'The establishment of an open fascist dictatorship accelerates the tempo of development of the proletarian revolution in Germany by destroying all democratic illusions of the masses and by freeing them from the influence of Social Democracy.' ¹⁵

After Germany, Stalin's political line led to defeat in Spain and France, the execution of almost every leader of the Russian revolu-

tion and of the Red Army. By 1939: 'After five years of the crudest flattery upon the democracies, when the whole of 'communism' was reduced to the monotonous indictment of fascist aggressors, the Comintern suddenly discovered in the autumn of 1939 the criminal imperialism of the western democracies... From then on not a single word of condemnation about the destruction of Czechoslovakia and Poland, the seizure of Denmark and Norway, and the shocking bestialities inflicted by Hitler's gangs on the Polish and Jewish people! Hitler was made out to be a peace-loving vegetarian continually being provoked by the Western imperialists. The Anglo-French alliance was referred to in the Comintern press as the 'imperialist bloc against the German people.' Goebbels himself could have cooked up nothing better!' ¹⁶

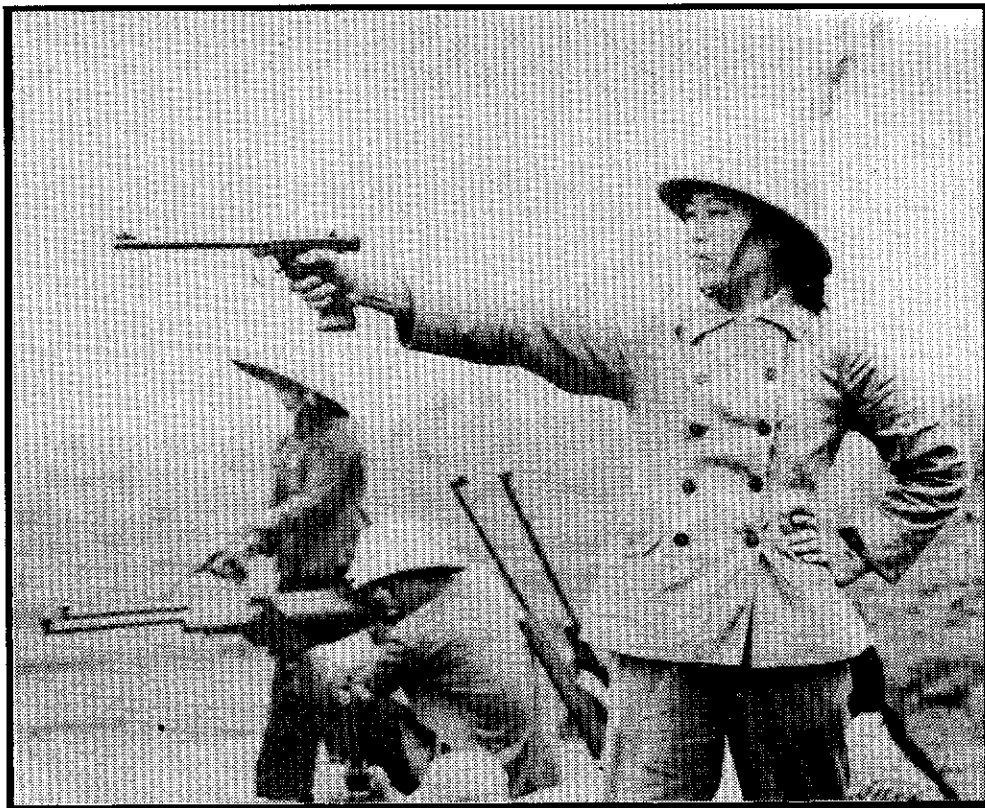
This whole series of zig-zags was capped, in 1943, by the disbanding of the Communist International by Stalin, followed by the dissolution of the Communist Party of the USA — as a gesture of goodwill to US imperialism.

The Communist Parties which led socialist revolutions after 1933 — in Yugoslavia, China and Viet-

'The persecuted minority which had stood against the war in 1914 had, by 1917, led Russia's socialist revolution'



1949 — Chinese Red Army marches into Nanking



Vietnam 1971

nam — had to break with the political line of the Soviet bureaucracy in order to do so.

On the basis of the rise of the colonial revolution following 1943 currents emerged, first within, then outside, the Communist Movement, outflanking the Soviet bureaucracy to the left. By the end of the 1950s, the Cuban revolution was led not by the Communist Party but by Castro's July 26th Movement which gave impetus to non-Stalinist revolutionary currents throughout Latin America. This historical process culminated in a second wave of revolutionary struggles in Central America following the US defeat in Vietnam, led non-Stalinists currents — the FSLN in Nicaragua, the FMLN in El Salvador and the New Jewel Movement in Grenada.

The development of revolutionary struggles and currents independent of the Soviet bureaucracy was the basis of the post-war growth of the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky, in the movements of international solidarity with the Algerian, Cuban and most massively the Vietnamese revolutions.

However, from a purely practical point of view nothing could compare with the material solidarity which the Soviet state could give — both in terms of restraining the scope of imperialist intervention and in economic and mili-

'The Communist Parties which led socialist revolutions after 1933 had to break with the political line of the Soviet bureaucracy in order to do so'

tary support. As a result, even following the dissolution of the Comintern, the Soviet bureaucracy benefitted from the prestige of the objective role of the non-capitalist Soviet state.

Trotsky had analysed this phenomenon at the time of the collapse of the Communist International in 1933: 'Nine-tenths of the strength of the Stalinist apparatus lies not in itself but in the social changes wrought by the victorious revolution... It shows us how and why the Stalinist apparatus could completely squander its meaning as the international revolutionary factor and yet preserve a part of its progressive meaning as the gatekeeper of the social conquests of the revolution.'¹⁷

This also explained the attitude of the Soviet working class towards the bureaucracy: 'Will the bureaucrat devour the workers' state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat? Thus stands the question upon whose decision hangs the fate of the Soviet Union. The vast majority of the Soviet workers are even now hostile to the bureaucracy... If in contrast to the peasants the workers have almost never come out on the road of open struggle... this is not only because of repressions. The workers fear lest, in throwing out the bureaucracy, they will open the way for a capitalist restoration. The mutual relations between state and class are much

more complicated than they are represented by the vulgar "democrats". Without a planned economy the Soviet Union would be thrown back for decades. In that sense the bureaucracy continues to fulfil a necessary function. But it fulfils it in such a way as to prepare an explosion of the whole system which may completely sweep out the results of the revolution. The workers are realists. Without deceiving themselves with regard to the ruling caste — at least with regard to its lower tiers which stand near to them — they see in it the watchman for the time being over a certain part of their own conquests. They will inevitably drive out the dishonest, impudent and unreliable watchman as soon as they see another possibility. For this it is necessary that in the West or the East another revolutionary dawn arise.'¹⁸

This practical attitude of the Soviet working class expressed the real choices. Stalinism was the product of a temporary stand-off between the Russian working class and imperialism. After both the First and Second World Wars, imperialism proved strong enough to stop the Russian working class from extending the revolution to the more advanced capitalist countries, but, on the other hand, was not sufficiently powerful to restore capitalism in the USSR. Stalinism arose from, and then perpetuated, that impasse.

Stalinism was the attempt by the bureaucracy, which Stalin came to lead, to freeze that status quo by administrative repression against the pressure of the working class on its left and the pressure of capital from the right. In the 1920s, the last time open debate took place, the Left Opposition led by Trotsky expressed the pressure of the working class, while the Right Opposition led by Bukharin expressed that of capital. Stalin, in a bonapartist fashion, represented the bureaucratic centre between those two basic class currents.

As Trotsky put it: 'If the Stalinist bureaucracy should be overthrown from the right, then its place will be taken by the most savage and unbridled fascism, alongside which even the regime of Hitler will look like a philanthropic institution. Such an overturn is possible only as a result of long convulsions, economic chaos, the destruction of the nationalised economy and the re-establishment of private ownership. If on the contrary Stalin will be overthrown from the left, i.e. by the working

class, then Soviet democracy will take the place of the bureaucracy. Nationalised economy will be preserved and reformed in the interests of the people. Development toward socialism will receive a new impetus.'¹⁹

The overall effect of the bureaucracy's regime was not however neutral, it was to atomise the most fundamental obstacle to capitalism in the USSR — the Russian working class. As Trotsky put it: 'The present CPSU is not a party but an apparatus of domination in the hands of an uncontrolled bureaucracy. Within the framework of the CPSU and outside of it, takes place the grouping of the scattered elements of the two basic parties: the proletarian and the Thermidorean-Bonapartist [i.e. those seeking the restoration of capitalism — *ed*]. Rising above both of them the centrist bureaucracy wages a war of annihilation against the Bolshevik-Leninists. While coming into sharp clashes from time to time with their Thermidorean half-allies, the Stalinists, nevertheless, clear the road for the latter by crushing, strangling and corrupting the Bolshevik Party.'²⁰

Under Brezhnev, the Soviet bureaucracy tried to circumvent these contradictions on the basis of building up the military strength of the Soviet state. But, while this gained time, it could not in the long run compensate for the demoralisation of the Soviet working class and the division of the international working class as a result of 'socialism in one country'. The Soviet economy was only a seventh of the size of the international capitalist economy. If its survival depended upon straight economic and military competition with imperialism, the Soviet state would, in the end, be overwhelmed. Its fundamental strength was, first, that the one force stronger than world capitalism is the international working class, and, second, that for most of this century the imperialist states were divided.

When US imperialism overcame that division by crushing its competitors in the Second World War, it then faced a 30 year battle with the revolutionary struggles of the Asian workers and peasants. It was the de-railing of the Asian class struggle by the Sino-Soviet split, a consequence of 'socialism in one country', which allowed Ronald Reagan to focus US resources on the arms race which cracked the

Soviet economy.

The inability to match Reagan's arms race brought Gorbachev to power on a programme of a radical shift to the right. Gorbachev's goal was to reduce the pressure on the Soviet Union by making concessions to the West, for example voting for the UN resolutions launching the Gulf War. Internally, Gorbachev brought the crisis to a head by moving to a de facto bloc with Yeltsin which, after the failure of the coup attempt in August 1991, led to the dissolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As a result the Soviet bureaucracy ceased to exist as a coherent force. But the Russian revolution continued to fight for its life.

Around that continuing struggle for the survival of the October revolution, all of the political positions which had been compressed within the Soviet bureaucracy were forced out into the open and polarised. As Trotsky had analysed: 'All shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F Butenko). The revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy, only a small minority, reflect, passively it is true, the socialist interests of the proletariat. The fascist counter-revolutionary elements, growing uninterruptedly, express with ever greater consistency the interests of world imperialism... Between these two poles, there are intermediate, diffuse-SR-liberal tendencies which gravitate towards bourgeois democracy.'²¹

Those political currents would naturally find themselves on opposite sides of the barricades: 'In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung to opposite sides of the barricade. The fate of the subsequent development would be determined, of course, by the outcome of the struggle.'²²

This analysis captured precisely the dynamics which followed 1991.

Every conceivable current emerged from the break up of the Soviet bureaucracy — fascists; right wing nationalists; advocates of capitalist dictatorship like Yeltsin; mouth pieces of the IMF like Gaidar; social democrats like Gorbachev; socialists like the majority of the re-founded Communist Party of the Russian Federation; attempts to re-create Stalinism, like Nina Andreyeva.

The crisis in the Soviet Union then gave impetus to the same polarisation of Communist Parties throughout the world.

To take first the rightward moving currents produced by this. Those standing for capitalism rapidly concluded that bourgeois democracy would have to be discarded because the economic collapse made bourgeois democracy unsustainable.

For the same reasons, although individual bureaucrats became social democrats, social democracy gained virtually no mass support. As Boris Kagarlitsky observed: 'It is not just that the conditions which gave rise to western social democracy do not exist in Russia. Rather more important the directly opposite conditions exist in Russia, which render such a policy impossible in principle... the mass movement in Russia can never be social democratic, even "with Russian specificities". And if the left in our country really tries to become an influential political force it is doomed to radicalism.'

Nearly every group sponsored by the Socialist International in eastern Europe failed. A clear pattern emerged: the successors to the Communist Parties were returned to government throughout eastern Europe and the former USSR in the second sets of elections following 1989. They are now the governing parties in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. In many cases, Poland and Hungary, for example, leading forces in these parties would like to become Social Democrats, and they carry out IMF-inspired austerity programmes, but, because this means dismantling the welfare states, the tensions between these forces and the parties as a whole are likely to explode. In Russia, the main trade union federation, together with Gorbachev and others, put significant resources into trying to launch a social democratic alternative to the communists, but this is unlikely to even get enough votes for representation in parliament.

In western Europe, on the other hand, where a strong bourgeoisie, most definitely *does* exist, the dissolution of the CPSU gave impetus to the transition of whole parties or major currents within them to social democracy. But, as Trotsky had observed 60 years earlier, this generally turned out to be just the final step on a road to complete dissolution: 'In the capitalist countries, where all types of reformism to the

'All shades of political thought are to be found within the Soviet bureaucracy, from genuine Bolshevism to complete fascism'

Trotsky

right of the Communist Parties can operate, the right wing has no field of activity. Insofar as the Right Opposition has mass organisations, it turns them over, directly or indirectly, to the Social Democracy...²³

Thus the Dutch Communist Party dissolved itself in 1991. Santiago Carillo, the Euro-communist former general secretary of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) joined Felipe Gonzales' Socialists in October 1991 stating: 'the Communist movement as such has completed its historical cycle and it makes no sense trying to prolong it.'

In Britain, the trajectory of the Democratic Left is into the Labour Party to help Tony Blair fight the left. In Italy, the particular circumstances of the wipe-out of Bettino Craxi's Socialist Party, allowed the majority of the Eurocommunist PDS to *become*, rather than *join*, Social Democracy.

The break up of the Soviet bureaucracy also, on the other hand, accelerated the differentiation of political forces moving to the left — the re-emergence of left communist forces. Many of these, particularly in the third world, had opposed Gorbachev's concessions to imperialism from the beginning.

The organisation which should have been in the best position to assist the political discussion with these currents was the Fourth International. Trotsky pointed out from the beginning that, faced with capitalist restoration, the Soviet bureaucracy would disintegrate, releasing not only pro-capitalist but also revolutionary socialist currents: 'Not only the centrist faction but also the right wing of the party would produce not a few revolutionaries who would defend the October Revolution with arms in hand. But for this they would need a painful internal demarcation, which cannot be carried out without a period of confusion, vacillation, and loss of time... The presence of a Leninist faction would double the chances of the proletariat in the struggle against the forces of the counterrevolutionary overthrow.'²⁴

What Trotsky did not anticipate was that the leadership of the Fourth International would abandon the fight for the Russian revolution at the very point it was mortally threatened. This began with a completely wrong analysis of Gorbachev and of the dynamic of events eastern Europe in 1989. Ernest Mandel, the Fourth International's leading spokesperson at the time, wrote:

'Hundreds of millions of people face a lifetime of poverty and thousands of millions in the third world face the greatest dangers since 1917 as a result of events in 1989 which the leadership of the Fourth International extolled'

'Contrary to what a superficial glance might indicate, the European bourgeoisie does not look favourably on this destabilisation. It has no hope of recovering Eastern Europe for capitalism.'²⁵

It was specifically denied that the restoration of capital was on the agenda: 'The main question in the political struggles underway is not the restoration of capitalism.'²⁶

This led to disastrous political conclusions. Instead of unmasking the demagogy of the most pro-capitalist elements, like Yeltsin, his platform was singled out for its particularly 'progressive' elements in *International Viewpoint*.

International Viewpoint described the upheavals of 1989 as non-class 'democratic revolutions'. This device permitted support for events which on a class analysis were leading to the restoration of capitalism. This logically led sections of the Fourth International to cross class lines by supporting the capitalist unification of Germany.

The majority leadership of the Fourth International did not do that. Three years after the event, it acknowledged what had been obvious to the rest of the world from the outset, that it had been unable to tell the difference between (capitalist) counter-revolution and socialist political revolution.

Socialist Action commented: 'This error is undoubtedly the greatest confession of bankruptcy since the establishment of the Fourth International. The line of the leadership of the Fourth International took that organisation to the brink of destruction as a revolutionary force and besmirched everything that Trotsky stood for. They supported processes which constituted the greatest defeats suffered by the working class since fascism and which may well culminate in the greatest defeats in its history. Hundreds of millions in Eastern Europe face a lifetime of poverty as a result of events which the leadership of the Fourth International extolled and thousands of millions in the third world face the greatest dangers since 1917 as a result of these events. The leadership of the Fourth International proved itself totally bankrupt when confronted with the greatest events in world politics since world war II.... What took place in the line of the leadership of the Fourth International since 1989 was no ordinary mistake. It represents a crossing of class lines as regards millions of workers and

oppressed people. If the Fourth International is to reorient itself all the conclusions have to be drawn regarding the theories that created such a line and the leadership responsible for that line.'²⁷

In fact no lessons were drawn. If 1989 really represented a turn in world history, *as indeed it did*, the conclusion would be obvious: to mobilise every possible resource to aid those fighting for the life of the Russian revolution and against the advance of capitalism into eastern Europe.

But the Fourth International did not do this. Instead, it abstained on the struggle in Russia. Catherine Samary wrote an editorial in *International Viewpoint* immediately after Yeltsin's first attempted coup in April 1993: 'Two different but equally reactionary plans both for domestic and international affairs are on offer in Russia: one, with a neo-liberal outlook, is striving to create a strong state to impose market discipline and is allied to the United States on international questions. The other, a coalition which embraces the 'patriotic' far right rejects foreign diktats both domestically and internationally.'²⁸

This was simply to re-cycle the line of western governments that the opposition to Yeltsin was a reactionary 'red-brown alliance'.

The 'theory' underpinning this was that, in addition to the basic class conflict between capital and the working class, in Russia, there was also a third camp, that of the bureaucracy, and therefore a 'three cornered struggle' between the working class, capital and the bureaucracy. The problem with this theory is that *the bureaucracy is not a class* and faced with capitalist restoration *it broke apart and polarised around the two, not three, basic class camps* — that of capital and that of the working class. The theory of the 'three cornered struggle' was used to justify abstention from the fundamental class struggle in Russia — against capitalist restoration.

What in reality was taking shape was a collision between Yeltsin's attempt to uproot the Russian revolution, and the confused, diverse, but real and massive, resistance to this. The fact that Constitutional Democrats, Christian Democrats, nationalists, social democrats and fascists fought alongside left wing Communists and democratic socialists, in conflicts culminating in the destruction of parliament by

Yeltsin's tanks, in no way altered the basic class character of the two sides. The Fourth International did not support the destruction of parliament — but it completely misunderstood the class character of the two camps which engaged in that battle.

Behind Yeltsin stood international imperialism and its supporters in Russia. On the side of the Russian parliament, stood a coalition of forces objectively blocking the process of capitalist restoration.

In such circumstances the purpose of Marxist analysis is to identify the *class* interests involved — not stand aside in a 'third camp'.

Lenin had harsh words for such politics: 'So one army lines up in one place and says "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be the social revolution!... Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is... The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot* be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and backward workers will participate in it — without such participation, *mass* struggle is *impossible*, without it *no* revolution is possible — and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power...'²⁹

Trotsky had discussed precisely the configuration of forces which would be posed by the attempt to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union. He specifically, and correctly, ruled out theories of *three*, rather than *two*, basic class camps: 'In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung onto different sides of the barricade.'³⁰

A clear practical conclusion flowed from this: 'In the struggle against the counterrevolution the Bolshevik-Leninists will obviously

be the left flank of the Soviet front. A fighting bloc in coalition with the Stalinists will result here from the whole situation. It should not, however, be thought that in this struggle the Stalinist bureaucracy will be unanimous. At the decisive moment, it will break up into fragments, and its component elements will meet again in two opposing camps.'³¹

Trotsky's analysis penned 50 years prior to 1989 laid bare precisely the dynamics of what actually took place. The Fourth International now rejects that class analysis.

The World Congress of the Fourth International, meeting earlier this year deepened its wrong positions. It argued: 'regardless of the main trend which appeared after it, the downfall of Stalinism is, first of all, the freeing of an immense class potential chained for many years by Stalinist bureaucracies in power or in opposition.'

This is quite false — the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy *by capital*, which is what happened in eastern Europe in 1989, is a *defeat* for the working class. As Trotsky always argued: 'Stalin overthrown by the workers — that's a great step forward toward socialism. Stalin crushed by the imperialists — that's the counter-revolution triumphant. That is the precise sense of our defense of the USSR.'³²

The refusal work out its line on the basis of the class character of the conflict has finally led the Fourth International to disaster in its line on the war in Yugoslavia.

The real situation in Yugoslavia is that German imperialism sponsored the break up of the federation to create new capitalist states in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. The Serb minorities fought to remain part of the Yugoslav Federation — a non-capitalist state. The United States and German imperialism built up Croatian and Bosnian armies. NATO was moved into the area. Imperialism conducted a propaganda campaign, swallowed by most of the west European 'left intelligensia' likening the Serbs to Hitler and then launched the massive aerial, missile and artillery bombardment of the Bosnian Serbs.

Instead of starting from a class position, and seeing the intervention of imperialism into Yugoslavia, the Fourth International refused to oppose the capitalist break up of Yugoslavia and then called for support and arming of the Bosnian



The last time open debate took place was in the 1920s, led by Trotsky

'In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung onto opposite sides of the barricade'

Trotsky

capitalist state in its war on the Bosnian Serbs who wish to remain part of the Yugoslav federation. For the first time in its history the Fourth International is seeking the military victory of a capitalist state backed by imperialism against forces fighting to remain part of a non-capitalist state.

The World Congress of the Fourth International started to systematise these positions into a world view which is social democratic not Marxist. It is asserted, for example, that: 'The working class in imperialist Europe remains — in spite of its partial integration into the state and the capitalist economy — the best organised core of the world proletariat.' Marxism, on the contrary argues that the conquest of political power by the working class — which has taken place in the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Cuba — constitutes a incomparably higher level of organisation than anything which currently exists in western Europe.

It is also proposed to amend the program of the Fourth International, because, it is claimed, the world is now in a 'period of real political impotency where the masses and their struggles are bereft of adequate political and organisational tools and without hope of being able to change society.'

If the working class had 'no hope of being able to change society' political organisation, including the Fourth International, would be futile. No doubt that conclusion will sooner or later be drawn from these positions.

3. The new international left

Today far larger forces, than those with Lenin in 1914, or Trotsky in 1933, stand against the new onslaught of imperialism.

With different starting points, on different levels and with many contradictory currents within them, these include the majority of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Cuban Communist Party and many of the forces around the Sao Paulo Forum in Latin America, some components of the former Communist Parties throughout eastern Europe and the former USSR, new left political forces like the Left Alternative in Hungary, Josef Piniar in Poland and Boris Kagarlitsky in Russia; forces coming together around the pole of the PDS in Germany, the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy, the United Left in Spain. The alliance of the Communist Party of Britain and part of Labour left in the Socialist Forum in Britain is part of the same process.

These organisations and currents contain contradictory political positions — some still containing rightward-moving social democratic currents and other forces moving to the left. Many are new organisations or alliances. Some are coming together on a regional basis. Their evolution is by no means finished nor determined in advance. But, in relation to the most fundamental events of the international class struggle today, they are converging. The strategic ideas of Trotsky have a vital contribution to make to that process.

Furthermore, the disasters of 1989 and 1991 have led to an openness to consider all views, including those of Trotsky, which can help understand how eastern Europe and the USSR were led to the point of capitalist restoration and what strategy is necessary to advance out of the present situation.

Thus the chair of the German PDS, the successor to the east German Communist Party, made clear in opening this year's PDS conference: 'Moreover, together we want to tap and use the ideas of communists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, the old Leon Trotsky or Antonio Gramsci. It is undisputed for us that we commemorate those communists who were persecuted

and killed by fascists. Yet it is also our duty to honour those who were killed by Stalin.'³³

Dario Machado, a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban CP specifically argued for a new revolutionary international bringing together socialists from different original traditions in a recent interview: 'It seems to me that a revolutionary international should also exist. It should undertake a global analysis of problems and provide an interchange and debate of ideas and viewpoints between revolutionaries without being subject to schema and criteria that there is only one form of revolutionary organisation. We need to understand that today's complexity presents many methods and formulas for change. We need to create the space for this dialogue to strengthen the recomposition and the ideology of revolutionary transformation and to nourish and interpret new elements.'³⁴

The South African Communist Party congress this year declared: 'The new international environment, dominated by our class adversary, is difficult for us as socialists. But it is a global reality that is not without possibilities for effective engagement. These include... a wide range of initiatives among socialist, communist, new left and other forces to regroup internationally. While these efforts remain uneven, the collapse of the Soviet bloc has necessitated and opened up possibilities for a much wider and less sectarian interaction.'³⁵

In eastern Europe, Hungary's Left Alternative has taken the initiative to promote debate between socialists from across western and eastern Europe.

Obviously, this international process of demarcation and political convergence is not going to advance on the basis of ideas alone. Immense common experiences will form the basis on which political and ideological clarification proceeds. The first struggle of that scope was the international mobilisation of millions against the war in the Gulf. This drew a clear line of demarcation between Gorbachev and the emerging international left.

The second, and in its historical implications, most important of

these experiences, is unfolding in Russia. In 1991 Yeltsin created Russia's first capitalist *government* since 1917. But he has not yet succeeded in creating a *capitalist state apparatus* powerful enough to break up the resistance of the Russian population to capitalism. Furthermore, although imperialism is extremely active in Russia, military intervention has been impossible because of Russia's possession of nuclear weapons.

The outcome of this struggle will be decided by whether the Russian working class can raise its subjective political capacity quickly enough to regain the leadership of society. This means overcoming the most disastrous legacy of Stalinism — the atomisation and demoralisation of the Soviet working class. The battles of the last four years constitute an immense learning process towards that end.

No other working class in the world has been through such a rapid succession of experiences in such a short space of time: perestroika, mass strikes, the August 1991 coup attempt, the dissolution of the USSR, the price liberalisation of January 1991 followed by a 50 per cent fall in living standards, the pressure of parliament against shock therapy, Yeltsin's first attempted coup blocked by parliament in March 1993, Yeltsin's dissolution and seige of parliament, the lifting of the seige by mass demonstrations followed by a misguided and abortive armed uprising, the destruction of parliament by Yeltsin's tanks, the victory of the nationalists and Communists in the December 1993 parliamentary elections, the amnesty for the August 1991 coup plotters and the defenders of parliament, mass strikes and demonstrations against non-payment of wages and the threat of unemployment, the rapid rise of the Communist Party since September 1993.

Today the leading force in this struggle is the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. This party, founded in 1993, is in rapid evolution. It is not yet clear what its final trajectory will be. The CP has won hegemony over the necessary patriotic struggle against western imperialism. Far from this being a

'The disasters of 1989 and 1991 have led to an openness to consider all views, including those of Trotsky, which can help understand how eastern Europe was led to the point of capitalist restoration and how to advance out of the present situation'

concession to right wing nationalism, it is the only way to wrest the leadership of the opposition away from nationalists like Rutskoi or Zhirinovskiy.

But, the Zyuganov leadership started on a wrong position on the class alliances necessary to wage that struggle. For nearly a year after December 1993, the CP attempted an alliance with the 'national bourgeoisie', voting for the 1994 budget. This line broke the CP's momentum and provoked major opposition in its ranks.

In September 1994 the CP broke with its previous line and has advanced ever since. But that issue of the class alliances — the fact that there is no way out for Russia in alliance with the capitalist class — is the key strategic issue for the left. As Trotsky put it: 'Russian capitalism today would be a dependent, semi-colonial capitalism without prospects.'³⁶ A second key issue is that the strategy of 'socialism in one country' destroyed domestic and international support for the Soviet state. An economic policy is needed which puts raising the living standards of the population, not heavy industry, as its first priority. Marxist theory, and the experience of the Chinese economic reforms, show this to be perfectly feasible.

Third, the creation of a socialist government in Russia will be met by a new cold war. That must be countered by recreating the international unity of the vanguard of the international workers movement, supporting every class struggle against imperialism and re-cementing an alliance with China.

Obviously, only the organisations of the Soviet working class are going to directly participate in the struggle in Russia. But every socialist in the world can learn from it. And every socialist can aid it — by helping to stretch the resources of imperialism so that they cannot be focused on crushing just one its enemies at a time.

A continuous struggle must be waged against imperialist interventions around the world. The bloody nose which the United States received in Somalia showed that the Vietnam syndrome has not been overcome. The NATO bombing in the former Yugoslavia is made possible not only by the Yeltsin's government's acquiescence, but also by complete disorientation of the left in the NATO states.

The international campaign



The Cuban leadership rejected Gorbachev and strengthened links with left forces internationally

'Only the Russian working class is going to directly participate in the struggle in Russia. But every socialist in the world can learn from it and aid it by stretching the resources of imperialism'

against the US blockade of Cuba, on the other hand, has made major progress, with the Cuban leadership actively seeking to unite the broadest possible movement of support. The Cuban Communist Party made clear its rejection of Gorbachev's concessions to imperialism and responded to the collapse of the Soviet Union by deepening their collaboration with communist, socialist and anti-imperialist forces throughout the world, but particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, through the Sao Paulo Forum.

In eastern Europe within the successors to the Communist Parties, social democratic currents moving to the right and other forces moving to the left, continue to co-exist within the same parties. At the same time, there is a convergence of 'new left' political currents with left Communists. Boris Kagarlitsky, who was jailed under the previous regime, will be a parliamentary candidate on the Russian Communist Party slate in December's elections.

In Hungary, the Left Alternative acts as an umbrella for left currents inside and outside the Hungarian Socialist Party — the successor to the Communist Party currently in government carrying out policies agreed with the IMF.

Tamas Krauz, one of the leading members of Left Alternative, specifically rejects the views of 1989 prevalent in the west European far left: 'It is a serious mistake to characterise the changes of 1989-90 in Eastern Europe as revolutions, as even many leftist and new leftist theoreticians and politi-

cians in the West have done. This has turned out to be a grave misinterpretation, both politically and theoretically... Compared to the old state socialist systems, the new ones signify a step backward from both the economic and social point of view.' He argues: 'The decisive link in the chain, however, is undoubtedly Russia. Historical preconditions in Eastern Europe will not allow the capitalist restoration to occur according to the recipes of the IMF or other monetary institutions and bourgeois political scientists. There is no 'liberal alternative'. Even if shock therapy is able to paralyse the old systems and structures in Eastern Europe, there is still no chance of a bourgeois democracy arising to take their place.'³⁷

In the Czech Republic, the Communist Party has stabilised 14 per cent of the vote and opened its slate to other forces on the left.

In Germany, communists, left social democrats and Trotskyists are regrouping around the PDS. This is the third strongest party in eastern Germany with 132,000 members. It contains contradictory trends to the right and the left. But it is the only parliamentary group which defended the right to abortion, opposed sending German troops abroad, opposed the restrictions on rights to asylum of refugees, opposed the Gulf war, opposed the military intervention in Somalia and opposed the German recognition of Slovenia and Croatia which triggered the war in Yugoslavia. Its includes members of other parties, including supporters of Trotsky on its parliamentary slate.

After Russia and eastern Europe, the next level of development of left communist currents in Europe has been in the south. We take here simply the example of Spain and Italy in what is an international process.

Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation (PCR) was founded in December 1991 by the non-Social Democratic minority of the Italian Communist Party. They by the main far left group — Democrazia Proletaria. In 1992 the PCR won 5.6% of the vote for the lower house of parliament and, in the municipal elections, beat the PDS in Milan with 11.4% and in Turin with 14.6%. In 1994 the PCR won 6 per cent of the vote in the general election. Refoundation campaigned against the Maastricht treaty, mobilised against the Gulf war; denounced Italian military intervention in Somalia; opposed NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and has called for the embargoes on Iraq, Libya and Cuba to be lifted.

In Spain, after its Euro-communist period, the Communist Party (PCE) moved left. It leads the United Left alliance — Izquierda Unida (IU) — the left opposition to Felipe Gonzales' social democratic government. This was set up as a result of the campaign against Spain's membership of NATO in March 1986. The IU included left social democrats, pro-Soviet communists, and Trotskyists.

The IU won 13.4 per cent in the 1994 Euro-elections and 11.7 per cent in the 1995 municipal elections.

In Britain the largest forces of the left wing of the labour movement are linked to the Labour left which developed after 1981 into a significant political force.

The decisive left/right split in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) took place in 1984/85, over control of the daily newspaper the *Morning Star*. The underlying political issue was the clash between the CPGB leadership going over to right wing social democracy, and in some cases, liberalism, for example, supporting wage restraint, and much of the the party's trade union base and left wing.

The *Morning Star* was saved because the leading part of the Communist left was even prepared to lose their party membership to politically defend the paper and retain its links with the left wing of the labour movement. The more Stalinist current, Straight Left, on

the other hand, put artificial 'communist' unity with the CPGB leadership, before the wider interests of the class struggle.

The largest part of those excluded from the CPGB later formed a new party the Communist Party of Britain. The *Morning Star*, particularly during and after the Gulf war, went on to play a key role in promoting left alliances and broader united action around the main international and domestic struggles which followed — the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, the Committee to Support Democratic Socialism in the former USSR, the Campaign Against the Maastricht Treaty, the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State, the launch of the Anti-Racist Alliance and then the National Assembly Against Racism, defence of Clause 4, the campaign against NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, the conference on social justice for women, for example. Many of these were initiated through the umbrella group Socialist Forum.

These experiences in Britain are part of the same international process which has given rise to the alliance of Kagarlitsky and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the work of the Left Alternative in Hungary, the Cuban Communist Party's cooperation with left currents throughout Latin America as well as the type of alliance emerging around the PDS in Germany and Refoundation in Italy. They are the first steps in the the most fundamental recomposition of the international worker' movement since 1917.

The driving force of this recomposition is the re-mobilisation of class struggles the majority disorientation which followed 1919. The re-forging of international political leadership of the left wing of the workers' movement will proceed by taking these struggles forward and drawing together and bringing to bear the collective international and historical experience of the working class movement.

Because its outcome will determine every other development, the key to this will be the fight for the survival of the Russian revolution — the race between the rise and renewal of the socialist left against the drive by capital to try to assemble conditions for a capitalist dictatorship.

Finally, it should be clear what the goal of this international proc-

ess should be — the re-foundation of the left wing of the international workers' movement on the basis of the elementary principle of socialist organisation outlined by Marx and Engels: 'Communists have no interests separate and apart from the interests of the working class as a whole.'

Footnotes

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4. *In Defence of Marxism*, 1940, Pathfinder, P.30
5. Lenin, 'Theses on the Agrarian Question', in *Theses, Manifestoes and Resolutions of the first four congresses of the Communist International*, Inklinks, P. 114
6. Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1921-26*, p448.
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9. *Wall Street Journal*, 10 April 1995
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16. Trotsky, *Writings 1939/40*, P. 209
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19. *Writings, 1937/38*, p 100.
20. *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p424.
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25. *International Viewpoint*, 3 April 1989.
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27. *Socialist Action*, June 1992.
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30. *Writings, 1933/34*, p 118.
31. *Writings, 1933/34*, p 20.
32. *Writings 1937/38*, p 44.
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34. *Links*, Number 4.
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'It seems to me that a revolutionary international should also exist'

Dario Machado,
Central Committee,
Cuban Communist Party

versing the Tories tax relief on those over £50,000 a year and bringing the public utilities back into public ownership.

In addition, support for individual left policies has to be maximised. Key issues include: the defence of the welfare state based on universal provision; a national minimum wage of half male median earnings or £4 an hour — the two key issues at this year's Labour Party conference — the re-nationalisation of the utilities; the defence of the Labour-trade union link; the defence of education, including higher education, open to all regardless of income; opposition to the rise of racism and the creation of a united framework strong enough to defeat racism; black and women's representation in the labour movement; opposition to the attacks on the democracy of the labour movement and opposition to pacts and proportional representation; pushing forward the Irish peace process and opposing the imperialist military attacks on the third world.

A crucial test of the balance of forces in the trade unions was the re-election of Bill Morris as TGWU general secretary. A victory for Dromey would have fundamentally shifted the balance of forces in the labour movement to the right. For this reason his campaign had active backing from Blair's camp, with the press conference launching his campaign being organised from Peter Mandelson's office.

A part of the union's left showed itself to be completely disorientated and made a bloc with the hard right to back Dromey. Marc Wadsworth wrote in the *Caribbean Times* 'whether or not Bill wins or loses ...will not make a difference to any one of us'. The TGWU has a very large number of black members. The outrage that followed this right wing sectarianism led to the removal of Wadsworth from the TUC race relations committee and the national committee of the Black Socialist Society.

Morris' re-election showed that the unions will not in the end be able to persuade their members to go along with a Blair government attacking living standards.

The Blair leadership has already clashed directly with single mothers, black communities seeking greater representation, the student movement and the homeless.

Labour's abstention on the Criminal Justice Bill earned the



Blair is on course to create the most right-wing Labour government since MacDonald

contempt of many young people who demonstrated against the Bill. The right wing Labour Students leadership of the National Union of Students was defeated in attempts to abandon NUS support for a living grant.

The Social Justice for Women conference organised by the Labour Women's Action Committee on 1 July demonstrated the opposition which attempts to dismantle the welfare state and renege on the promise to introduce a national minimum wage will face among women.

The much publicised critique of New Labour by Richard Burden, who is not a left winger and backed Blair for the leadership, was followed by a stream of discontent, spanning left and right, including Roy Hattersley, Bryan Gould, Bill Morris and a number of left MPs and most significantly the resignation of Kevin McNamara from the Labour front bench.

While the pace at which the right wing modernisers are trying to force their policies on Labour therefore has put a strain on traditional pre-election public unity, the TUC conference climb down on the minimum wage showed that the trade union bureaucracy is not prepared to stand up to Blair out of the belief that this might jeopardise the general election. This underlines the importance of clarifying the meaning of Blair's programme and drawing together the left which is prepared to stand up to Blair. The broad left alternative to Blair which

is coming into existence must become politically coherent by defining its way forward — particularly a left economic policy — to the maximum degree before the general election.

Blair is on course to create the most right wing Labour government since Ramsay MacDonald, whose failure to reduce unemployment destroyed the Labour government in two years, led to the creation of the National Government in coalition with the Conservatives — which governed for a decade and presided over the mass unemployment of the 1930s and the emergence of fascist currents — and destroyed support for the Labour Party for a generation.

Those who oppose Blair today are not being disloyal or threatening the election of a Labour government, as Mandelson claims. On the contrary, the development of a broad-based alternative to Blair's agenda is necessary now to prevent the imposition of policies which will demoralise the working class, encourage the extreme right and weaken the unions, dismantle the welfare state, massively reduce Labour's vote and pave the way for a new political party system designed to permanently reduce the influence of the labour movement on any future government. Loyalty to the working class and labour movement requires doing everything possible to prevent such a course of events.

'The Liberal Democrats are a shield against the possibility of Labour backsliding into socialism'

Lord Holme,
advisor to
Paddy
Ashdown.

Louise Lang

The left advances in Russia

Russia's parliamentary elections scheduled for 17 December this year are likely to register a massive revival of the left around the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The probable outcome will be that the Communist Party and its allies win the vote but are denied the parliamentary majority by electoral fraud involving the falsification of millions of votes.

The background to the rise of the left is that a further severe fall in living standards, a reduction of 15-20 per cent, has taken place since the beginning of 1995.

The privatisation programme ground to halt in the first part of this year — though there is now a sustained attempt to relaunch it. The government has raised only two per cent of what was projected from privatisation.

In real terms only about 15-20 per cent of the economy has been privatised. The banks are privatised. A few of the very largest factories are privatised. But 50 per cent of the economy is still in the state sector. Another 25-35 per cent is formally privatised but does not function as private companies. For example, of the 5,600 companies that are supposed to be privatised you can only actually buy shares in 35!

Glasiyev, head of the parliamentary budget committee, accurately described such technically privatised companies as 'the same as collective farms'.

The government's economic strategy for the election is to artificially prop up the exchange rate of the rouble to keep down the price of imported goods. The recent \$6.9bn IMF loan is designed to help this. In the big cities, particularly Moscow and St Petersburg, between 50 and 70 per cent of retail goods are imported. Only perishables — milk, tomatoes and so on — come in from the countryside. So the high rouble helps hold down food prices and keep up government support in the big cities. But the net result will be a big financial crash after the election. It has already created serious problems for the banks.

The situation in the countryside is catastrophic. Production has de-

clined 70 per cent since January 1992 and 15 per cent of livestock has been slaughtered this year. This will be reflected in the elections, where the countryside and small

towns will simply not vote for Chernomyrdin.

This economic backdrop means that social and economic issues are moving higher up the political agenda and it is becoming quite reasonable to talk about socialism again — which was impossible two years ago. The Russian population does not support capitalism. A recent European Union survey found the majority of people opposed to a market economy. No opinion poll

The need for a 'left

'Within the opposition to Yeltsin there has been a massive shift in favour of the Communists'

As the Russian parliamentary elections in December draw nearer, the attention of left activists is turning increasingly toward the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Established in 1993, the CPRF is the strongest left force in Russia.

The CPRF leadership has made an abrupt turn to the left during 1995. The Communist caucus in the State Duma voted against the 1995 budget, rejected an offer from Yeltsin of places in the government, and spoke out against a continuation of privatisation. Zyuganov declared that it was essential to establish a broad bloc of left forces including socialists and 'genuine democrats'.

The Third Congress of the CPRF saw the adoption of a minimum programme calling for the 'nationalisation or confiscation of property acquired in violation of the law, of the interests of the country and of the rights of workers', and for the re-establishing of the state monopoly of foreign trade. The programme spoke of the historic role of the modern working class, defined as including 'a significant part of the engineering and technical intelligentsia'. The late-Soviet regime was assessed as 'rotten

through and through'.

The evolution of the CPRF has presented independent leftists with the challenge of strengthening political collaboration with the CPRF — to reject this collaboration can only doom smaller and weaker left organisations to sectarian self-isolation.

Between 1991 and 1993 there was real possibility that a broad left party with a modern ideology would emerge in Russia. But for this to happen, several conditions had to be fulfilled. First, the majority of the new left organisations had to be ready to unite on a non-sectarian basis. Second, trade union leaders had to go beyond merely talking about the experience of labour-based parties, and seriously set to work trying to establish a political organisation. Third, adherents of the 'communist' and 'socialist' traditions had to show themselves capable of uniting in a single party. Fourth, left-wing politicians had to take a realistic attitude to Russian society and reject attempts to imitate Western social democratic models. Not one of these conditions was met.

Today the CPRF is stretching out its hands to other left groups. The strategy needed to

has shown support for the privatisation of large scale industry. A recent opinion poll which asked when were the best times in Russia returned 45 per cent who said 'under Brezhnev', 10-12 per cent who said 'now', and less than one per cent said 'under perestroika'.

Within the opposition to the government there has been a massive shift in favour of the Communists and against the nationalists.

This would not have been possible were it not for two things which the Zyuganov leadership of the CPRF has got right. First it understood the necessity of capturing the 'patriotic' ground from the nationalists and the right-wing. The position of the CP leadership is based on the progressive defence of Russia against western imperialism which is an absolutely necessary

political position for the left in Russia. All 'left' forces that failed to understand this have been driven back and virtually eliminated politically.

Secondly, the CPRF got right the question of participation in the 1993 elections. All those to the 'left' of the CPRF boycotted the elections. If the CPRF had done that it would have simply handed the leadership of the opposition to the nationalists and Zhirinovsky.

These shifts are indicated not merely by opinion polls, all of which show the Communists as the leading party in Russia today, but by the change in the size and composition of the major demonstrations.

The largest demonstration by far that has taken place was the unofficial demonstration called on 9 May 1995 — Liberation Day. The demonstration in Moscow,

once of the most right wing cities, was colossal. At least 200,000 marched.

Moreover, whereas last year the demonstration was split 50:50 between the Communists and the Nationalists, this year it was 99 per cent Communist. About 500 ultra-nationalists forced their way to the front of the march — in the way ultra-left groups sometimes force their banners to the front of a march in Britain. This was followed by about 100,000 Communists with a sea of red flags. A group of 200 nationalists formed a little contingent in the middle and that was followed by another 100,000 communists.

The demonstration was called by a committee headed by General Verenikov, the 1991 coup 'plotter' who refused an amnesty and who was tried, acquitted and compensated by a military court.

The committee organised the demonstration very effectively. The government at first said there would be no demonstrations except the official one in Red Square that Clinton was attending. The Committee responded by simply saying it was going to march anyway. Then the government agreed to a route through the back streets. The committee said it was going to Red Square. The government then offered an improved route one kilometre from Red Square. The committee rejected this. Finally, two days before the demonstration, the government agreed a route ending at Lubyanka, 300 yards from Red Square. The committee agreed.

The demonstration was so enormous and so well-organised that it would have been politically impossible to fire on it — which is the only thing that can have an impact on a demonstration of that size in Russia now. When the police were a big heavy handed on 9 May demonstrators drove heavy lorries at the police.

Other demonstrations have also been bigger. The 7 November commemoration of the Russian revolution last year was 80,000 compared to 15,000 the previous year.

The Nationalists, including Zhirinovsky and Barburin, have been drastically weakened by their support for Yeltsin on the war in Chechnya.

The CPRF took the position that it was a criminal act to launch the war. They said it was not launched to maintain the integrity of Russia but to prepare the ground for their

'The nationalists have been weakened by their support for Yeltsin's invasion of Chechnya'

bloc' in Russia

unite broad mass forces around the CPRF, as the largest left party in Russia, is that of the *left bloc*.

In other circumstances the party will not only remain in isolation, but will also place extreme limits on the opportunities available to its own activists.

In choosing unity in action with the CPRF, radical leftists are in no way obliged to renounce their own views, nor to cease making principled criticisms of the Communist Party's positions. The substantial differences between the CPRF and others on the left have resulted in the CPRF being estranged to a significant degree from the left intelligentsia, and to the latter being alienated from parliamentary politics.

The possibility of effective work will appear only in the course of united actions. Unless this happens, we have no future as a political movement.

If a united front becomes a reality, both the Communists and the left radicals will change as a result.

In some regions there is already experience of joint electoral work.

Interest in socialist ideas is clearly reviving in Russia. Millions of people are protesting against the current authorities

simply because these authorities are anti-democratic. The task of democratising society remains a pressing one, and if it cannot be managed by our 'democrats', who have capped their reforms by bombing their own cities, by trying to introduce censorship and by violating human rights, then the left must become the country's leading democratic force.

In time, new leaders and new organisations will appear, and it may be that we do not have long to wait. Whatever the case, the only people in Russian politics who have a future are those who recognise the need not just for a change of slogans, but for a fundamental transformation of the system and a complete change of political elites. We should not be under any illusions: if these tasks are not carried out by the left, they will be carried out by extreme right wing nationalistic groups using methods of their own. And these people will not waste time on theoretical discussions.

Boris Kagarlitsky

● *Boris Kagarlitsky is standing as a candidate on the CPRF slate for the December 1995 elections to the Russian parliament.*

torship. While supporting the Russian army in the military conflicts they explained that Yeltsin had invaded to provide a pretext for a state of emergency in Russia.

The Nationalists, who had started out way ahead of the left in popular support, with Rutskoi as the most popular single figure, lost ground to the Communists in virtually all areas of the country outside Moscow and St Petersburg. The CP even won the last by-election in Moscow — though this was affected by the fact that their candidate was the second person in space, so there was an element of personal popularity.

The problem for Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin is that no stable capitalist institutions have been created have been created in Russia. Every capitalist political party has failed. The army is not reliable, no one knows which side it would come down on in a conflict. This means that the social base of the bourgeois forces in Russia is insufficient to either win elections or impose a dictatorship.

Therefore, their first response to the rise of the left was to campaign for the elections to be cancelled. The Chechen war was launched to prepare the ground to cancel the elections or create such an atmosphere of intimidation that it didn't matter if they happened or not.

But this became impossible due to the popular opposition to both the war and to any cancellation of the elections. The two most recent polls showed 73 and 72 per cent against cancelling the elections and 7 and 9 per cent in favour. (All polls tend to favour Yeltsin and the government as the countryside is so large and inaccessible that the samples are all heavily weighted towards Moscow and the big cities where the government is stronger)

However, until June this year there was a clear attempt at every level to create a threatening atmosphere in order to build up to some steps against the elections. This was a total failure, and from June there was an identifiable change of line.

Yeltsin started stressing the importance of democracy and that he had 'always' been in favour of the elections taking place.

The elections are now likely to take place and will be a straight two party confrontation between the Communists and the Our Home is Russia party launched by Chernomyrdin.

All other attempts at founding



'The elections will be a straight confrontation between the Communists and Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia party'

pro-capitalist parties have completely failed — Gaidar's Russia's Choice, for example, may not even get into parliament. So the capitalist forces are entirely reorganising around Chernomyrdin.

Chernomyrdin represents the most comprador, the most pro-American element in Russian politics. Yeltsin has a slightly different approach — linking up with the nationalists — hence his occasional flights of anti-NATO rhetoric. So while both are agreed on the need to defeat the CP, including by electoral fraud, they have different tactics.

The only institution upon which Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin have been able to base their new party is the appointed regional governors. Under the new constitution, the president appoints the regional governors. As all pro-capitalist political parties have failed, Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin have been forced to rely on these regional town halls to form a political 'party' that can organise for them across the country. This is the basis of Our Home Russia.

Chernomyrdin invited all the regional governors to join Our Home Russia. It wasn't possible to refuse, because those who said no then found their region presented by a massive bill from GazProm — which Chernomyrdin used to run — for their energy consumption which

there was no chance of paying. So they quickly changed their minds and agreed to join.

The joke in Russia is that it shouldn't be called Our Home Russia but Our Home is GazProm! GazProm, which, if it were privatised, would probably be the world's largest company, worth around \$300bn and owning 25 per cent of the entire world's gas.

They have been forced to take this step because the original plan which was to cancel the elections and institute a state of emergency or dictatorship has failed. However, by bringing the regional governors, who have until now presented themselves as neutral, onto the political field they will discredit their only stable support. The elections will see a confrontation between the CP and the regional appointees.

Having got the question of patriotism and participation in the 1993 elections right the CP is moving far ahead. But there is an ambiguity in its leadership that thinks there is some progressive section of the bourgeoisie. This led it to support Chernomyrdin after the 1993 elections, voting for the 1994 budget and opposing the votes of confidence in the government until September 1994. This was based on the false analysis that Gaidar represented the 'comprador bourgeoisie' and Chernomyrdin the 'national' bourgeoisie and therefore

Chernomyrdin was better than Gaidar.

Since the end of last year, however, the CP has undertaken a political turn to the left, voting against the 1995 budget and for the votes of no confidence in the Duma. It is strongly pro-Cuban and pro-Chinese. There was a debate about adding the pen to the hammer and sickle in the CP symbol, because they felt they had been sectarian to white collar workers. The CP is a party in motion. Ninety per cent of its members are for 'soviet power'.

With two to three times the membership of all other political parties put together, probably around 300,000 members, the CP would have been able to smash through the electoral fraud which we will see in December, elections, if it had not reduced its momentum by supporting Chernomyrdin for nearly a year. The turn to the left this year has probably come to late to allow it to sweep through the obstacles at the elections.

Ampilov's Russian Communist Workers' Party will run a separate

list in the elections. Negotiations with the CP for a common list broke down because neither side really wanted agreement. Nina Andreyeva's Stalinist group are for a boycott.

But the whole atmosphere is loosening up on the left in Russia and there is much wider discussion of more issues in the CP and beyond. Boris Kagarlitsky, for example, will be a candidate for parliament on the CP slate.

For the pro-capitalist forces these elections are the last throw in a 'democratic' framework. The CP will win any election after these, and will only be denied these through fraud. Therefore after the elections Chernomyrdin and his allies will probably turn towards trying to win over part or all of the CP. This has started already with some banks offering to give money to the CP, which it has quite sensibly accepted without strings. But, paradoxically, to try this tack, Chernomyrdin would have to pretend to be very democratic and liberal after the elections, and so pose even greater scope for the left to

advance.

Overall the evaluation of the situation in Russia is a 'revolutionary situation' — the mass of the population does not believe in the regime or capitalism and the elements of capitalist state apparatus are too weak to confront them. All attempts to create militant political organisations of the bourgeoisie have collapsed. All of the main self-active forces are in the Communist Party. The key issue is therefore what political direction the CP will take — something not yet determined.

The left in western Europe can contribute to this struggle in one very simple way — by exposing and opposing every move by the West and those it supports in Russia to prevent the Russian people expressing their verdict on four years of capitalist economic destruction at the polls. Given that the struggle in Russia will shape the outcome of world history for the rest of our lives, it is the very least that must be done.

By Geoffrey Owen

'Boris Kagarlitsky is a parliamentary candidate on the CP slate'

Women lose out in Russia and Eastern Europe

The introduction of capitalism into Eastern Europe and the first steps in this direction in Russia led to a sharp assault on the position of women in the workforce, the withdrawal of social benefits, the introduction of legalised discrimination against women in some states and a sharp fall in the living standards of women, reflected in the growth of prostitution.

A recent report on the position of women in national parliaments reflects the change which has taken place in the social position of women. The study, by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, shows a sharp fall in the proportion of women represented in parliamentary structures in Russia and Eastern Europe. Although this was an international

study, the sharpest falls in women's representation anywhere in the world were recorded in eastern Europe.

In the 1993 elections in Russia women accounted for only 5.1 per cent of the council on the Russian federation and 13.4 per cent of the state Duma. In the former Soviet Union an average of 30 per cent of state deputies were women.

This pattern is borne out in Eastern Europe. In Hungary women's parliamentary representation fell from 30.1 per cent to 7.3 per cent, in the Czech Republic from 29.3 per cent to 10 per cent and in Poland from 23 per cent to 13 per cent.

In Romania women's representation fell from 34 per cent to 3 per cent.

Other indicators underline the fall in the status of

women. Russian government figures for 1993 listed 14,500 women murdered by their husbands and another 56,400 disabled or seriously injured.

In Germany in June 1993 women constituted 64 per cent of the unemployed, a figure which is even more striking considering that prior to 1989 women formed 45-51 per cent of the workforce, the majority working full-time jobs.

Since the change in the law in January 1993, Poland now also has the most severe anti-abortion law in Eastern Europe, with abortion legal only in very limited circumstances, such as threat to the life or health of the mother or severe and irreversible 'malformation of the foetus' and a consequent escalation in the

numbers of illegal abortions. Doctors who perform abortions outside the very limited legal grounds face two years imprisonment and the loss of their licence for ten years. A recent report showed that more than 40 per cent of women in Poland have never used any form of contraception.

Providing a sharp contrast to the decline in the position of women in Russia and Eastern Europe, a United Nations report issued in August showed that, measured by life expectancy, educational attainment and basic purchasing power, women in China are ten times better off than women in Saudi Arabia, even though China has a fifth of Saudi Arabia's real per capita income.

The evolution of the PDS

The German Left

The main party to the left of the Social Democracy in Germany now is the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). The party has only existed for 5 years and has 132,000 members. One third of the PDS parliamentary group are not Party members and include independent feminists, trade unionists and Winfried Wolf, a member of the German marxist organisation, the United Socialist Party (VSP). *Angela Klein* of the VSP spoke to *Socialist Action* about the evolution of the PDS and the pressures it faces today.

In East Germany the PDS is a mass party and has a good implantation at municipal and regional levels, and in parliament. But the party is subject to different pressures in east and west Germany. In the east it is seeking to replace the social democracy, which is much smaller than the PDS — it has a bigger electorate but a much more precarious party existence.

In west Germany the PDS is much smaller, with about 2,000 members, compared with 130,000 in east Germany. The social democrats in east Germany have about 23,000 members. Since the general orientation of the PDS is to become more deeply based in western Germany there is a constant pressure on it to present a less radical image and politics. This poses a continuous conflict between the orientation in the east and the west.

In order for the PDS to become more integrated into west German society and politics, they understand that their party needs a perspective, and that they cannot be a party based on hankering for the past.

In east Germany all the members of the former communist current are in the PDS. But in west Germany a separate Communist Party the KPD still exists with about 4000 people. They have hardly changed their ideology since before reunification and no longer play any real political role.

The PDS on the other hand has had a very open approach to the rest of the left, in particular around the general elections last year, when they needed the support of the western left.

Most recently, the PDS played an important role in protesting in parliament about the deployment of German troops outside the NATO area for the first time since the Second World War.

In the last parliament the PDS

deputies played a good role in fighting to defend abortion rights and to defend asylum rights for refugees. On these and other issues they have a really radical, good political stand. They are the only party in the Bundestag which has very clear cut left positions on such issues.

The overall situation of the PDS can be summed up as being contradictory. The leadership would like to move to the right but finds it difficult to do so. In western Germany they are much too small to focus on institutional politics, so they are reduced to the level of other groups of the radical left and they have to undertake extra-parliamentary politics.

In eastern Germany, including Berlin, they are more under pressure of institutional, governmental politics.

In Berlin the party is at its most left. There will be elections in the city in the autumn and it is possible there will be a green-social democratic majority. If this majority is very weak, there will be a pressure on the PDS to work with this government and there will be a debate under what conditions to 'tolerate' it. But the more probable outcome is a simple SPD-Green majority. This will put the PDS in opposition and it will have to develop the politics of an opposition.

In the other parts of eastern Germany, the situation is different. You have an SPD/Green coalition in Saxony which is already tolerated by the PDS, and the PDS hardly appears as an opposition. In Mecklenburg there are only three parties in parliament — Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and PDS, no Greens — and there has been a CDU/SPD alliance. This could break up, forcing the PDS to decide whether they go into a coalition or have a toleration policy.

'The PDS played an important role opposing the deployment of German troops abroad, fighting for asylum rights and defending abortion rights'

Socialism is the way, method, orientation of values and goal

Document from the Party of Democratic Socialism

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) was established at the end of 1989 by democratic reformers in the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the former ruling party in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In the 1994 German elections, the PDS won a substantial number of seats in the state parliaments of former East Germany and also won a presence in the federal parliament in Bonn. In November 1994, the leadership of the party put forward *Theses on the Way Forward for the PDS* for adoption at its fourth congress scheduled for Berlin in January 1995. This led to a very lively debate inside the PDS. As a result of this debate, three party leaders (Gregory Gysi, Hans Modrow and Lothar Bisky) put forward *Socialism is the Way, the Method, the Orientation of Values and the Goal*, which was adopted by the congress. This document is reprinted here.

The socialist character of the PDS

The socialist character of the PDS is anchored in its history, wanted by its members, accepted by its constituency, inscribed in its programme and statutes, and accentuated in its name. It is the result of our certitude that the capitalist social structures are not only ill-fitted, but also absolutely incapable of solving the major problems confronting humanity.

The domination by the interests of capital will continue to deplete non-renewable resources, hinder the harmonisation of the relationship between humanity and nature, accentuate the social inequality domestically and on a world scale, promote the militarisation of society and maintain patriarchy. For us socialism is the way, the method, the orientation of values and the goal. For us it is bound to the various forms of socialisation of production, the surmounting of capitalist domination, ecology, democracy, solidarity, social justice, the emancipation of humanity, overcoming patriarchy, freedom and the realisation of human rights, the elimination of unemployment, minority protection, equal opportunity in education and culture and decentralisation. This means that our comprehension of socialism incorporates the highest degree of democracy and liberality.

The issue is not how much democracy and liberality a socialist society can afford, but rather that the socialist character of a society depends upon its realisation of comprehensive democracy and liberality. Nothing can justify undemocratic and illiberal methods.

With each step towards true democratisation, the extension of individual freedom, the dismantlement of social injustice, the enhancement of communal self-determination, a step towards socialism is being made. We view democracy as a unity of representative, communal, grassroots, and economic democracy.

For us on the left, liberality is the combination of deep humanism, individuality, human rights, personal freedom, rule of law, tolerance, minority protection, pluralism, social justice, as well as equal opportunity in education and culture in a society. This is bound to the irreversible renunciation of a Stalinist or post-Stalinist model of socialism, which means an image of socialism with a dictatorial, anti-emancipatory, anti-democratic, illiberal, and centralist character. It must not be permitted to return to the period before the assessment made by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, that the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

The socialist character of the PDS demands not only a national but also a European and internationalist policy. This is in no way in contradiction to the struggle against the discrimination against East Germans and the contempt regarding their lives and experiences. On the contrary, it is a prerequisite.

The character of the PDS as an opposition party

The PDS strives for a democratic, social, ecological and civil transformation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), to open the way



for overcoming the predomination of capital, environmental destruction, exploitation of the developing countries, and all forms of big-power politics. As a result, the PDS stands in principled opposition to the social conditions dominant in the FRG. This does not mean that we do not recognise and use existent civilising, democratic and social advancements. On the contrary, the draft for a new constitution, submitted by the PDS-Left List parliamentary group during the twelfth legislative period of the Bundestag, for example, called not only for extensive constitutional changes, but paid tribute to and called for preserving essential elements of the existing constitution. Anyone who opposes to the existing relations and seeks to change society must do so from within society.

For the PDS, this means participating in all progressive extra-parliamentary movements and, at the same time, struggling for wider parliamentary possibilities. The question of whether a PDS parliamentary group should place itself in a situation of an opposition role, a role of 'tolerating' a government or one as a partner in a coalition, does not alter the PDS' basic conception of its role as an opposition party. Independent of which role the PDS plays in parliament, it must always consider itself as a force in opposition to this society, in the sense mentioned above, and maintain its alternative social and political goals.

The decision as to which concrete role it will play in parliament (which is not only dependent on the will of the PDS) will be made considering time and circumstances in accordance with how we can attain the maximum amount of social transformation in terms of our programmatic goals. Even if the PDS were to commit itself, at some level, to a governing coalition, this would be the best way at the time to achieve the maximum of social change. This would not — with a correct policy — alter its opposition to existing social relations.

It would be our standpoint that through such a constellation at particular times, the best possibilities exist to be able to put through changes. Therefore no abstract guidelines or rules can be established to determine which role the PDS should assume in parliament in which situation. But we are all in agreement that regardless of its concrete parliamentary role, the

PDS sees its main priority to be its engagement in extra-parliamentary movements and actions. Its comprehension of social opposition remains untouched by the role it might assume in any parliament.

Pluralism In the PDS

The PDS strives for a pluralistic society. Due to its own history, the PDS considers its pluralistic organisation a great step forward. We see the multiplicity of ideas, approaches and the standpoints in the PDS as an asset.

The pluralism in our party is guaranteed through our statutes and explicitly accentuated in our programme. But pluralism, even in accord with our statutes, is not arbitrary and may not be taken as an excuse for dispensing with a clear, comprehensive policy of the party as a whole and its autonomous profile. It has to be clear where the party stands on important issues, what the party is fighting for and what it is fighting against.

Parliamentary and leadership groups have, in this respect, a particular responsibility. They must be

able to play an active role in politics on the basis of the party and electoral programme and be based on party congress resolutions. But the parliamentary and leadership groups are not the only ones called upon. The delegates must elect parliamentary groups and leaderships that are functional and capable of making policy. The party is and will remain pluralistic.

Through the strategic decision in parliamentary elections to have open lists, we extend our pluralism even further. But this does not mean that in each leadership and parliamentary group our political directions must be represented. It is a question of their capacity for policy making. There are limits no PDS member is allowed to breach. Nationalist, chauvinist, racist, and anti-semitic viewpoints are incompatible with membership in the PDS. This applies as well to Stalinist viewpoints.

A return to the situation before the December 1989 SED Extraordinary Congress' decision to break with Stalinist structures must not be permitted. This means that we re-

Lothar Bisky was re-elected chairperson of the PDS at its fourth congress in January 1995. We reprint here an extract from his speech to the congress.

Nobody has been a member of the PDS for more than five years. Many have been shaped by the SED for decades. We accept and need them and their experience. We have members whose political lives comprise 60 years of membership in the PDS, SED, KPD or SPD and participation in the anti-fascist resistance. This is a treasure we must also explore for the radical change in the PDS. There is no party in Germany that has as many members with a Jewish history as the PDS. So it was not by chance that anti-semitic graffiti was used against the PDS in the 1994 election campaign. In this field we have sharp ears and are self-critical.

Certainly there are insufficiencies, delays and great differences in our history debate. But no other political force in Germany can present anything nearly comparable. The German media and the established parties almost totally ignore this fact. They prefer to portray the

PDS as a party of GDR nostalgia.

We take into account public yardsticks, yet we consider them critically, in view of the spiritual hegemony of the conservatives and a historiography designed to discredit any thought about social alternatives. We want to develop our position actively. For instance, that means that apart from social democratic, pacifist and ecological currents, we consider a democratic communist current indispensable within the PDS. Moreover, together we want to tap and use the ideas of communists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, the old Leon Trotsky or Antonio Gramsci. It is undisputed for us that we commemorate those communists who were persecuted and killed by the fascists. Yet it is also our duty to honour those who were killed by Stalin. A socialism that isn't democratic and doesn't fully observe human rights is bound to fail.

ject anti-democratic, anti-emancipatory, illiberal, avant-gardist and centralist concepts of socialism and party. These are incompatible even with the name of the party. The PDS, as a socialist party, cannot and may not be anti-communist. The PDS does not intend to renounce democratic communist positions within its ranks.

The relationship of the PDS to its history

Coming to terms with our history is and will remain an important concern of the PDS. Without this our politics is groundless and our politics for the future would be formless. The PDS faces up to the entire history of the German and international socialist movement. We know that this is just as much a history of great heroism and sacrifice, of great social movements and achievements, of a nearly inexhaustible wealth of ideas, as well as a history of enormous mistakes, errors and, unfortunately, also severe crimes. We face up to all of these aspects of our history and will persist in the struggle against one-sided and undifferentiated presentations of it.

We carry a special responsibility for the history of the SED and the GDR from which we evolved. The PDS is probably the only party that has a special duty to exercise socialist criticism of this history. For us, it is not the socialist aspects of the SED and GDR that we judge negatively but rather the many non-socialist aspects. Such an approach requires an unrelenting criticism as much as it does a differentiated evaluation. We have sincerely asked the true victims of the repressive mechanisms of the GDR for forgiveness and insist that this is the least that we could do. We continue to demand that SED property, now under control of the Treuhand Trust Agency, be used as reparations for these victims.

On the other hand, we will never contest or belittle the efforts and results of the engagement of hundreds of thousands of members of the SED, hundreds of thousands of citizens of the GDR to create a more socially just and more humane society, a society with more solidarity. GDR citizens brought into a unified Germany various negative and positive experiences with them. No one has the right to compel them to deny or scorn their lives and therefore dispense with applying their experience in the formation of

the FRG.

The PDS will not embellish the social realities of the GDR. We resist all efforts to deny the anti-democratic, anti-emancipatory, illiberal, ineffective, and anti-ecological realities of the GDR. We will just as vehemently oppose any and all attempts to reduce the history of the GDR to its deficits, to ignore the historical context, or to glorify the roles played during the cold war by powerful political and economic figures in the FRG. We will continue to contest the thesis that the GDR was an 'unlawful state' (Unrechtsstaat) because this would consequently mean negating the GDR's right of existence and indict its citizens for having lived on the basis of its constitution and abided by its laws.

We oppose the attempt to legally persecute GDR citizens on this basis. But this does not mean the negation or justification of injustice, arbitrariness, violations of human rights, or lack of rule of law that had existed in the GDR. For the PDS, the socialist criticism of the history of the GDR is of special importance as a prerequisite that we, as socialists, will never again adhere to an anti-democratic, anti-emancipatory, illiberal, avant-gardist and centralist concept of socialism.

The PDS' relationship to the SPD, 90-Alliance/the Greens

The PDS is developing its policy in accordance with its own programme and organisation. It has a clearly different profile from that of the SPD and the 90-Alliance/the Greens. We show respect for the social democratic and ecological movements in German and international history. This respect entails not only recognition of our own failures, but the failures particularly of the social democratic movement as well.

Since the SED Extraordinary Congress of December 1989, we have always declared ourselves in favour of practical co-operation with the SPD and 90-Alliance/the Greens, in spite of our varying political declarations. This, especially in the light of the fact that the necessary progressive social transformation in the FRG cannot take place without or against the SPD and possibly also 90-Alliance/the Greens as political enemies of the PDS.



PDS deputies in the Bundestag opposed sending German troops to Bosnia

They are neither primary nor secondary enemies. They are political competitors, with whom we may have hard disputes, but with whom we will remain ready to co-operate. Such an approach also excludes any form of buttering up as well. Our task is not to please certain members of the SPD or the 90-Alliance/the Greens. Just as we accept that they are different from us, we expect them to one day accept that we differ from them.

The types of co-operation with the social democrats and the greens will step by step develop within extra-parliamentary actions and parliamentary committees. Nothing can replace one's own experience in co-operation. Therefore it is useless to either artificially force or block such processes. The measurement of our relationship to the SPD and to the 90-Alliance/the Greens remains their real attitude toward democratic and civil progress in the FRG.

● Reprinted from *LINKS*, number 5, 1995

In Bessie Head's community

Bessie Head's writing offers an African foil to the reactionary images of 'community' being promoted by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant politicians and social theorists. John Church looks at the work of one of Africa's greatest writers.



Bessie Head

The daughter of a wealthy white woman and the family's black stable hand, she was born after her mother had been admitted to a mental hospital. She was given out to a white family by the unsuspecting adoption authorities. After that she was adopted by a so-called 'coloured' couple. Her adopted father died when she was about six, around the same time her own mother died, and seven years later, with conditions in the home deteriorating, she was sent to St. Monica's Home, Hillary, by the Child Welfare authorities.

She still believed herself to be the child of the family she had grown up with, but when the first holidays approached and she thought she would be going 'home' to her 'mother', she suffered a severe shock. Showing an appalling lack of insight, the principal told her that she would never be going to that house again. Her so-called mother was not her real mother. Her real mother was a white woman. She was insane. Bessie had better be careful or she might end up insane too. Her mother had had to be locked up because she was having an affair with a stable boy, who was a native⁽¹⁾

She was thirteen when her life was revealed to her thus. Added to this was her daily share of abuse as a 'Coloured' under apartheid. It is not surprising that she suffered a series of nervous breakdowns in later life.

Bessie Head's art is one of world literature's great personal triumphs.

The acute alienation she experienced in South Africa culminated in her being forced into exile in Botswana. She took up residence in Serowe. Over 30,000 people lived here in mud huts, the largest village south of the Sahara. Here she found the support and acceptance

which inspired her wonderful stories, novels and her remarkable recording of oral history, 'Serowe: village of the rain wind'.

The inspiration has a rational basis. Botswana had a degree of 'autonomy' under British colonialism. African land holding remained in place, in the form of common ownership. The community she entered had a degree of economic mutuality impossible under apartheid.

Still this was a society in change. The migration of men to work in South Africa was creating extraordinary imbalances. All the traditional customs were breaking down. From these tensions Bessie Head defined some of the crucial problems facing an African community in transition.

In her first novel, 'When Rain Clouds Gather', a young militant Makhaya, escapes apartheid and finds refuge in a community of 400 people. Embittered by apartheid and disillusioned with politics, Makhaya is reborn in the drama of a changing community. New economic activity based on co-operation is replacing the traditional reliance upon cattle. Women are asserting themselves through pioneering the new economics. The most odious form of traditional chieftancy must face the risen people of the village. Stable personal relations based on respect for women and children, are seen to be superior to the irresponsible fatherhood and male promiscuity which have resulted from migrant labour. All these constitute an alternative for Makhaya, and a new community is making itself.

In 'Maru' she explores the problem of community leadership in more depth. 'Maru' is a struggle of personal passion which must be resolved for the community leadership to be

settled. And because of the weight of caste-like prejudice society must itself be deceived to progress.

Both these novels are stories of 'nation-building'. That is, the question of political independence poses the problems, it doesn't solve them. Bessie Head fervently believed that progress was to be measured by the common elevation of the African people.

She was also most insistent that the great African traditions of co-operation were allied to traditions which denied the individual within the community. Breathtaking kindness and terrible cruelty as twins.

This conflict found shattering form in her most disturbing novel 'A question of power'. Here she struggled with sickness at the heart of the community.

Elizabeth has broken down. Her nights and days are a violent struggle to regain her sanity from the phantoms of madness. But these phantoms are no strangers, one of them even drives a truck through a village. In their disguises and demands we see good and evil as options for social awakening.

Never is she quite alone in her struggle. Gardening with village women and development workers is a relief.

Most beautiful is the role of her young son. By being a child he saves her life. Her awful agonies can only achieve proportion through a

child's imagination and resilience. As Trotsky said, time never hangs heavy in the company of children.

What holds the world together for Elizabeth is the common striving of those who have nothing or next to nothing.

Bessie Head's short stories offer many delights. 'The Collector of Treasures' is a series of stories which examine the position of women. The title story is about a most terrible crime that a deserted woman, Dikeledi, has to commit. The story justifies this crime as the 'crimes' of the most oppressed must always be justified. To live in pride and freedom can involve butchery.

Dikeledi finds her peace in the community of murderous women. The morality of the oppressed must sometimes express itself as a gruesome, horrifying deed. The story is great art.

Bessie Head's understanding of the cruel was linked to her ability to introduce tenderness into life's most wretched features. On the tenth anniversary of her premature death, it is to be hoped that she will achieve the international recognition she deserved. For Bessie Head's community is open to all who strive to free the world from oppression.

Note:

(1) From the introduction to 'Tales of tenderness and power'.

Novels:

When Rain Clouds Gather
Maru

A Question of Power

Short stories:

The Collector of Treasures
Tales of Tenderness and Power

Botswana history:

Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind

Autobiographical:

A Woman Alone

All published by Heinemann

The short life of *New Left*

'New Left' was the most shortlived left newspaper of the year. Its pilot issue was dated May 1995 and its swansong appeared in June, writes Ian Robertson.

New Left was launched ostensibly to unite all those forces who had defended Clause IV, and to campaign around issues such as the minimum wage and the defence of trade union rights. Its real purpose was to swallow up *Labour Briefing*.

The initial signatories to the New Left founding statement included representatives from the *Briefing* editorial board, the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network and even Revolutionary History.

But the paper reflected the narrower and right wing politics of Socialist Organiser, upon which it is not possible to unite anything on the left. An article by Paul Wright in the pilot issue on the struggle in Russia demonstrates the problem. Wright reflects on the effects of capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union: 'Thirty to forty per cent of the population have fallen below the poverty line...as the economy has been privatised...Industrial production has collapsed in chaos.' But he then adds that 'No socialist should defend the old USSR. Its bureaucratic state economy was not an experiment in common ownership.' Trotsky, who was a socialist and *did* defend the Soviet Union, had to deal with similar views during one of the last struggles of his life: 'Defence of the USSR does not at all mean rapprochement with the Kremlin bureaucracy, the acceptance of its politics, or a conciliation with the politics of her allies.' He emphasised: 'The defence of the USSR is related to the world socialist revolution as a tactical task is related to a strategic one.' ('The USSR in War', 25/9/1939, from *In Defence of Marxism*).

Being without a strategy, the authors of *New Left* could only adopt wrong tactics.

This became clear by

issue two, which outlined its main goal. The paper called upon the rest of the left to dissolve its press: 'There is no good reason' they proposed, 'why the broad Labour and trade union left, including the socialists grouped around the journals *Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Outlook*, *Campaign Group News* and *Tribune* should not combine to produce one paper.'

This ignored the fact that there are good reasons for the diversity of the left press, and these are *political*. Political differences cannot be dissolved or obscured. What practical purpose would the merger, for example, of *Tribune* and *Socialist Outlook* serve?

The main problem with



New Left was that it was a schema for trying to by-pass the existing left, its organisations, points of view, and press and to elevate one unrepresentative and right

wing point of view. It was a bureaucratic manoeuvre and for that reason it failed. It remains to be seen if its successor, *Socialist Briefing* will be any more successful.

Butterfly Kiss

Butterfly Kiss is a film about a relationship between two women, written and directed by two men (Frank Cottrell Boyce and Michael Winterbottom), a contrast, argues Sarah Colborne, which becomes increasingly obvious as the film struggles to deal with its chosen themes.



Eunice (Amanda Plummer) drifts around petrol stations in the north of England, where she meets Miriam (Saskia Reeves), a sheltered, naive petrol attendant who lives with her grandmother. Together they set off stealing cars and murdering across northern

England.

Despite the trail of bodies, Eunice and Miriam are so much on the edge of society that they remain undetected. It feels to Eunice that whatever she does, god ignores her. Eunice's biblical obsessions, painful self-mutilation and quest for

punishment reveal her to be scarred by a heavy christian past, a theme carried through to the end with a combined baptism and drowning.

Miriam, is simply obsessed with Eunice. Bewildered when confronted with one of Eunice's victims for the first time she draws grim humour saying, 'I'm sure you had your reasons'.

Butterfly Kiss is above all a frustrating film. Following a dramatic style comparable to the fly-on-the-wall documentary, it offers a snapshot of a few days in the lives of two working class, isolated and brutalised women living on the grimmest margins of society. But it offers no analysis, which at the very least should have explained the decision to cast a woman in the statistically highly improbable role of serial killer.

As a result any potential for exploring the women's alienation from society and the dynamic of their relationship is lost.

Burnt by the Sun

The internationally acclaimed Burnt by the Sun contains a profound political message for all who wish to uphold the ideals of the Russian revolution, writes Kate Hudson.

Market pressures have affected all creative workers in former communist countries, in many instances driving people from jobs in the sector. Others, like Kundera and Kieslowski have moved westwards, where their work, decontextualised, loses its political bite, and is added to the already massive range of self-referential, western intellectual angst which passes for art.

Such material pressures on a highly trained and

politicised industrial sector would lead one to expect an eventual major political and artistic response to these changes. Sure enough, out of the morass has emerged the superb and internationally acclaimed *Burnt by the Sun*. This is a film which seems to work on all levels: the clarity and radiance of the cinematography is a complete delight, the casting is faultless and the dialogue natural and touching. But the major significance of the film

lies in its political message, for it is this which will have a most profound resonance in the former Soviet Union.

Set in 1936, the story hinges around a Soviet hero, Colonel Kotov, who lives in the countryside with his young wife Marusia and their six year old daughter Nadia. Into a rather idyllic Chekavian setting arrives a young man Dmitrii, Marusia's lover until his sudden disappearance ten years earlier. What transpires is that Dmitrii had been a white guard and had been sent abroad by Kotov, at that time working for the NKVD, to work for the Soviet government to make amends for his counter-revolutionary



past. The twist in the story is that while everyone is concerned about whether Dmitrii and Marusia will rekindle their earlier love, Dmitrii is actually now working for the secret police himself, and has come to arrest Kotov and take him for interrogation in Moscow. The backdrop to all this is, of course, the show trials of the Stalin period.

The film has a very powerful political impact, for Kotov is a communist, a hero of the revolution, deeply committed to building the Soviet motherland, to ensure a better future for the Soviet people. His life, and the lives of those around him are then destroyed by the corruption of the revolution under the leadership of Stalin and the political terror which he initiated against the Bolshevik leaders and vast numbers of sincere communists.

The real contribution of this film is two-fold — to give a very real and moving portrayal of the human tragedy of the Stalin period, and more importantly, to make a very clear distinction between communism and stalinism. Kotov is a brave, honourable and tender man, whose aims for his country are the aims of the revolution, and can be the aims of everyone today. It is the corruption and destruction of those revolutionary aims and ideals which this film so effectively indicts. Through this film, Mikhalkov is re-raising and championing the aims of the revolution and lamenting their destruction — a very significant statement in today's supposedly post-communist world.

Tito's break with Stalin

The most interesting feature of Jasper Ridley's biography of Tito, argues JC Smith, is his exposition of Tito's confrontation with and ultimate break from Stalin.

Having risen to prominence in the Yugoslav Communist Party (JCP) and gone to work at the Comintern's Balkan Secretariat in Moscow at the height of the purges, Tito was forced to break with Stalin in order to pursue Yugoslavia's national struggle and social revolution.

Following Germany's invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 Tito began military training for all CP members. On 22 June the Comintern stated: 'at this present stage, what you are concerned with is liberation from fascist oppression, and not socialist revolution.'

In Uzice communists had already raised the hammer and sickle flag over public buildings and redistributed the land.

On the 21 December Tito formed the 1st Proletarian Brigade and introduced political commissars to all units.

On 21 February 1942 Tito said: 'The Serbian bourgeoisie instead of fighting against the Occupation forces, has begun a class war

against the Serbian proletariat; and although the CP will fight the bourgeoisie in this class war, the main enemy are the armies of occupation...the present struggle is national liberation in form, but class war in essence.'

The Comintern responded by attacking the resistance movement for having 'acquired a Communist character'.

On 26th November Tito called a conference on the future of Yugoslavia and to establish 'something like a government.' The Comintern insisted there was no discussion on the nature of the government or the future of the monarchy.

The deepening of political confrontation between Tito and Stalin after the war culminated in the Cominform's expulsion of the Yugoslav CP on 28 June 1948. Sanctions were imposed by the USSR in the summer of 1949.

Tito sought alliances elsewhere; and began to develop links with leaders such as Nasser and Nehru,



going on to establish the Non Aligned Movement.

Tito's final break with the Soviets came over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Fearing Soviet intervention against Yugoslavia he called upon all men and women aged between 16 and 65 to join partisan detachments.

Finally the book deals with Tito's role in redrafting the Yugoslav constitution to deal with the problems arising from the uneven levels of wealth between the richer northern republics, Croatia and Slovenia, and the poorer southern republics. Compared to what existed before and what came afterwards Tito's Yugoslavia will probably come to be seen as a golden age for the Balkans.

Tito, Jasper Ridley, Constable. £20

Burnt by the Sun, Nikita Mikhalkov (Russia/France, 1994, 134mins, 15 cert)

Ernest Mandel

1923-1995

Ernest Mandel died in July this year aged 72, having devoted almost his entire life to the cause of revolutionary socialism. Mandel's political contribution was inextricably bound up with his role as one of the most influential leaders of the Fourth International. He contributed to its leading role in international solidarity with the Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions and in the international student radicalisation after 1968. His gravest political mistake was his mis-estimate of Gorbachev and the re-introduction of capitalism into eastern Europe from 1989. He also made important theoretical contributions to Marxist economic theory.

Born in 1923 in Antwerp, Ernest Mandel was drawn into the Trotskyist movement at the age of 16 in the context of the struggle against fascism and the abject failure of the Communist Parties, particularly the KPD in Germany itself, to fight for an effective and united response to the rise of Hitler.

During the war, with great courage, he was actively involved in the resistance to the Nazi occupation of Belgium, was sent to Auschwitz once and escaped and was eventually sent to a German prison camp in 1944.

After the war he devoted his efforts to building the Fourth International and by the 1950s was a leading member of its international bodies. From the 1960s he was the Fourth International's de facto general secretary. He played a leading role in most of its subsequent debates. This involved analysing the development of the international capitalist economy after the Second World War which inspired some of Mandel's most important theoretical contributions and educated new generations in the application of Marxist economic theory to the analysis of reality.

Mandel's economic works

include the ground-breaking, *Late Capitalism* (1972), *The Second Slump* (1978) and *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (1979). These books made a decisive contribution to analysing the driving forces of the post-war boom in the world capitalist economy, how it would exhaust itself and the long depressive economic wave which would replace it from the mid-1970s.

But Mandel's primary contribution was always political. He considered the most important work of his life the development of political cadres through direct participation in the international class struggle. He totally understood the necessity of international organisation of the vanguard of the working class. With the Fourth International he was able to grasp the contradictory development of the international communist movement after the Second World War.

A crucial contribution by Mandel was his analysis of the Yugoslav, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions as breaks from the politics of the Soviet bureaucracy to the left. As he pointed out, on the line of the Soviet bureaucracy none of those revolutions would have taken place. Tito, Mao and Ho Chi Minh broke from the Soviet bureaucracy to lead social-



ist revolutions in their countries. Mandel and the Fourth International supported those revolutions, organised solidarity with them and totally opposed the Soviet bureaucracy's attempts to crush Tito and then Mao.

Following the Cuban revolution, Mandel was influential in ensuring that the Fourth International was an integral part of the new generation of revolutionary socialists in Latin America who were inspired by the revolution.

Mandel, together with the American Socialist Workers' Party, helped the Fourth International launch its most effective international campaign — in solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution. Inspired by the immense sacrifices and courage of the Vietnamese people, this campaign, conducted simultaneously throughout the world, made a difference, particularly in the United States. On that basis, particularly after May 1968 in France, the Fourth International became an important influence in the international radicalisation of youth which largely by-passed the traditional Communist Parties.

Ernest Mandel, and the leadership of the Fourth International, misunderstood the

dynamic of Gorbachev and the events in eastern Europe towards the end of the 1980s. He argued that their dynamic was leading towards the renewal of the planned economies by political revolution when in fact Gorbachev represented a turn to the right by the Soviet bureaucracy and the dynamic in eastern Europe was towards capitalist restoration. Mandel's analysis was wrong and led him to support processes leading to the greatest defeats of the international working class since fascism.

Mandel publicly debated these issues in the pages of *Socialist Action*. This journal took no pleasure in pointing out: 'Comrade Mandel failed to grasp the central dynamic in Eastern Europe, had a theory that didn't allow him to do so, revises the Marxist theory of the division of the world between classes, and ends up by concluding Trotsky was wrong in the greatest struggle he ever personally led.'

Ernest Mandel helped to write an important chapter in the history of the international working class movement through his work in the Fourth International. His wrong position on Gorbachev and eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s was, however, the gravest political mistake of his entire life.

The nature of World War II

World War II, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of which has been celebrated recently, set the entire framework of current world politics. It was incomparably the greatest armed conflict in human history. But it was also something more. It was the greatest class struggle in the twentieth century. *James Francis* explains the history the media does not tell.

The first problem in approaching World War II is its sheer size. With fifty million dead — thirty million of them in Eastern Europe. With war on three continents, with the greatest number of people under arms in human history it bears the same sort of relation to a strike that the Himalayas do an anthill.

For this reason, when the great class struggles of the twentieth century are noted, you often are given a list something like Russia in 1917, Germany in 1919-23, Spain in 1936-38, China in 1946-49 etc. Yet World War II, while absent from the standard agendas, towers over all these in terms of its impact on world politics. The immediate origins of the great conflagration of 1939-45 lay in the unfinished business of 1914-18. In World War I the combined power of Britain, France and above all the United States, defeated Germany in a straightforward inter-imperialist war. World War II was a direct continuation of this inter-imperialist struggle.

In this second conflict, however, the two chief imperialist antagonists, Germany and the United States were much more directly counterposed. Hitler rapidly crushed France and would easily have defeated Britain without the support the latter received from the US from 1939 onwards. From the point of view of inter-imperialist struggle the entire period has rightly been entitled 'the struggle for world supremacy between Germany and the United States — 1914-1945'. All other forces, including Britain, were essentially intermediaries in that clash.

In Asia, the United States fought it out directly with Japan. Through a war in which it smashed its imperialist opponents, and allies, the United States emerged in 1945 as the greatest capitalist state in the world.

But at the very moment of its triumph the United States found its power threatened by the two fundamental forces which, in their

'Out of the combined victory of China and the USSR flowed the entire course of the war and of the post-war world.'

combination, had allowed the relatively rapid defeat of Nazi Germany and Japan. They were the struggle waged by the USSR on the one hand and that of the people of Asia — above all the struggle led by the Chinese Communist Party — on the other.

Indeed, in a military sense it may be said that the outcome of World War II was in a sense already decided in the period 1931-39. The greatest strategic decision of the war was that of Japan not to attack the USSR from the east while Hitler simultaneously assaulted it from the west. If the Soviet Union had been forced in 1941 to fight a war on two fronts it would almost certainly have been defeated by Germany. Even purely militarily, let alone the more profound economic and social effects, the Soviet divisions which in 1941 threw back the German armies at the gates of Moscow, were those transferred from the eastern borders of the USSR where they had previously been facing the Japanese army in China. It was the war in China, spearheaded by the Chinese Communist Party, that saved the USSR from a war on two fronts and

thereby conclusively decided the outcome of World War II.

Japanese imperialism could not strike westwards and northwards into the USSR because its armies were bogged down in a war in China which absorbed two thirds of its armed forces. Even the war with the United States in the Pacific was, in terms of the forces committed, an enforced secondary effort for Japan while its main armies were concentrated in the campaigns in China. The war in the Pacific was waged between Japan and the United States for the control of China and east Asia. But in the end the Chinese people defeated both of them.

Whereas the crushing defeats of the European working class in the 1920s and 1930s led directly to opening the door to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the struggle waged by the Chinese Communist Party saved the USSR from defeat — despite the massive setback the Chinese revolution had suffered at Stalin's hands in 1926-27. Out of the combined victory of China and the USSR flowed the entire course not simply of the war itself but of the whole post-war world.

The victory of the USSR in Europe decisively made possible the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in Yugoslavia and the subsequent destruction of capitalist rule in Eastern Europe. Stalin blocked





revolution in Greece, France and Italy — and installed a bureaucratic tyranny in the new workers' states of Eastern Europe — but the victory of the USSR in the war decisively strengthened the working class movement throughout the world.

In Asia the Chinese Communist Party emerged from the struggle with Japan ruling one third of the country and with an army which succeeded in destroying that of Chiang Kai-shek in the last four years of civil war that followed in 1945. The Chinese workers' state then fought to halt the US armies in Korea. To the south of China the initial victories of Japan struck a devastating blow against the Asian empires of Britain, France and Holland. Out of the first victories of an Asian power over the white imperialisms of Europe rose an immense wave of crisis and revolt.

By the end of the war it was clear the British could no longer remain in India — inaugurating the vast wave of 'decolonisation' of the post war period.

By 1945 the Vietnamese Communist Party could launch the thirty years of war that led it to defeat first by French and then US imperialism.

The victory of the USSR, the victory of the Chinese revolution, the successive victories of the revolution in Indochina provided the world framework, and material aid, which allowed the revolutions first in Cuba and then in Central America to unfold. World War II provided the basis of all that followed it. It was an extraordinary realisation of a perspective seen long before by Lenin. In his words, 'In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle (for socialism) will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China etc account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the

struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be.'

World War II, and the struggles which it propelled, and which succeeded it, was the greatest confirmation in history of this perspective. The west European working class proved incapable of defeating fascism. But the Soviet working class, and the working class and peasants of China and Asia, proved capable of smashing to pieces German fascism, Japanese militarism, and then the triumphant march of the United States. But there was another socialist whose perspective was confirmed with shattering clarity by World War II in addition to Lenin. This was Leon Trotsky.

In 1933, at the moment of the rise to power of Hitler, Trotsky drew two fundamental conclusions. Firstly that the victory of fascism under Hitler meant inevitable war between Germany and the USSR — for only a state which had utterly crushed its own working class could risk war with the Soviet Union. Furthermore that this war would bring revolution in its wake.

The second conclusion of Trotsky, the most shattering of its time, was his conclusion that the policy of the Soviet bureaucracy in permitting Hitler to come to power represented the definitive end of its role as an instrument of world revolution — that world socialist revolution from then on would take place outside the politically defined orbit of the Soviet bureaucracy.

This conclusion, which led Trotsky to launch the Fourth International, appeared bizarre at a moment when Stalin stood at the height of his prestige — and when self-styled democrats in Britain, such as Shaw, the Webbs, and the *New Statesman* were singing the praises of the Soviet leadership. Yet Trotsky was proved entirely correct

in his overall perspective — although the time scale involved was far longer, and the forms more complex than he had foreseen. The USSR was victorious in World War II not because of but despite Stalin.

It was Stalin's policies which permitted Hitler to come to power, which allowed the defeat of the revolution in Spain and of the working class in France, and which finally led to the Soviet Union being militarily and politically unprepared for the assault of Hitler's armies.

If the Chinese Communist Party had followed the policies urged on it by Stalin, rather than those of Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese revolution would have been defeated and in consequence the USSR would have been destroyed. It was only through breaking with the orientation demanded by the Soviet bureaucracy that each of the victorious revolutions emerging from World War II — Yugoslavia, China, and Vietnam — were achieved.

Where the line of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy was followed — as in France, Italy and Greece — the result was either catastrophic missed opportunity or crushing defeat of the working class. The later revolutions in Cuba and Nicaragua did not even organisationally take place through the Communist Parties. In Cuba the Communist Party backed the revolution only at the last moment. In Nicaragua the FSLN triumphed independently of the Communist Party. While the forms of development were far more complex than Trotsky had foreseen — in particular he had not imagined that certain of the Communist Parties could break with the line of Moscow — nevertheless his overall historical perspective was triumphantly confirmed.

But, to return to our starting point. The recent media celebrities are largely concentrating on what was a sideshow — the small campaign in western Europe waged by Britain and the United States which never absorbed even a third of the German army. The real World War II — the one waged in the USSR and Asia — has only a few marginal gestures made to it in the celebrations. The sheer scale of what took place still makes it hard for sections of the left to grasp the magnitude of those years. For in 1939-45 took place the greatest single class struggle in human history. The Second World War.

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ERRATUM ERRATUM ERRATUM ERRATUM ERRATUM ERRATUM ERRATUM
Socialist Action Vol II, Issue 2, Oct/Nov 1995

Socialist Action Supplement, Page xii, second column, third paragraph, first sentence, which begins: 'The driving force...'
This should read:

'The driving force of this recomposition has been the re-mobilisation of class struggles after the majority disorientation which followed 1989.'

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