Workers ACTION

No.10 – September / October 2000 – Price £1.00

Socialist Alliances

Has the left lost its way?

- Fat cats gain from Labour spending
- Racism – ministers pay lip service to Macpherson
- Unison left to unite?
- Kosova – the KLA and national liberation
- Trotsky on hegemony
- Victor Serge on the Liberation of France

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Workers Action welcomes articles for publication and correspondence

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EDITORIAL

Labour's vote-buying fraud

The government had a rough couple of months in the early summer. The poor election results in May, increasing criticism of its policies by many who had hitherto been loyal, and an improvement in the Tories' poll rating brought about by a stepping-up of their right-wing populism left Labour looking distinctly shaky.

The rabbit which it pulled out of its treasury hat to restore its standing was the Comprehensive Spending Review, announced July 18. The CSR – the chancellor's revised long-term spending plan – promises billions of pounds for public services such as the NHS, education and transport. In general, socialists welcome investment in public services, with the obvious exceptions of 'defence' and policing, but these plans are not all that they seem.

Labour has come in for stick several times in the past for announcing the same policy twice in an attempt to seem more generous than it really is. Yet it has done the same again with aspects of the CSR – for instance, of the increase in the number of NHS consultants announced on July 18, half are already in training.

Moreover, many of the superficially attractive elements of the CSR also contain problems. The new hospitals will be built under the Private Finance Initiative, enriching private companies, often with the result that there will be *less* NHS beds. To cut waiting lists, the NHS will buy operations from private hospitals. The privatisation of education continues apace, and local authorities – on paper the democratically accountable bodies – will have less and less control over the budgets of even those schools which remain fully in the public sector. Transport spending is dogged by the same obsession with building a 'partnership' with private finance. Part of the Greater London Authority's transport budget is to go to pay off the contractors who built the Jubilee Line extension – completed before the GLA came into existence. And the government persists in its drive to privatise air traffic control and to partially privatise the London Underground.

That the government has relatively large sums of money to hand out is partly due to the fact that it stuck to Tory spending plans for its first three years, partly due to the continued growth of the economy which has boosted its income from taxation. The decision to release the money now has nothing to do with 'prudent' management of the economy, but is because of the pressure the government has come under to produce something tangible for its 'heartlands' – that is, its working class base of support. Of course, any improvements that might come from this 'new' spending will take years to take effect, but the government hopes that the mere announcement of the CSR will be enough to placate its critics and win the next general election.

At the same time, the government has stuck to its core political and social agenda, always with the interests of capital to the fore. Alongside the creeping (and not so creeping) privatisation of public services goes the refusal to grant a serious increase in the minimum wage or the basic state pension – let alone restore the link to earnings – and the willingness to let manufacturing industry go to the wall. 'Social inclusion' and the eradication of child poverty (or, indeed, any poverty) are distant memories, buried under the statistics that show that wealth disparity is still growing and that the 'fat cats' are getting pay increases four times those of lesser mortals. Being 'tough on the causes of crime' has been ditched in favour of recruiting extra police, privatising prisons, handing out longer sentences, creating draconian new laws and floating the occasional barmy idea such as marching drunken youth to cash machines.

The repeal of Section 28, the ban on foxhunting, and the 'ethical' foreign policy have all dropped well down, if not off, the agenda in the face of a combination of right-wing resistance and government indifference. Instead, we have an anti-terrorism law far worse than the PTA, a 'freedom of information' bill which will make it *more* difficult to obtain information on state activities, and plans to monitor e-mail and step up the persecution of whistle-blowers. Meanwhile, ever-harsher restrictions on asylum seekers serve to encourage racist attacks and media-sponsored mob violence against paedophiles goes virtually unchallenged.

Although Labour seems to have regained its substantial lead in the opinion polls, its problems are far from over. The threat is not so much from the Tory party – which remains in search of a charismatic leader and a credible set of policies – but from the lack of working class enthusiasm for Labour. Despite the hopes of the left, this has not translated into widespread active opposition to the Blairites, but rather into disgruntled electoral abstention. The level of strike action is still very low and, despite some positive signs, the bureaucracy remains very much in control in the unions.

The opposition movement is small, and has yet to have an impact on the wider working class. But it does exist – in numerous campaigns, some national, some local, ranging from the defence of asylum seekers to opposition to the partial privatisation of the London Underground. In this situation, the task of socialists is not to delude themselves that the resistance to New Labour is more politically developed or more widespread than it actually is, but to build on what does exist and develop a strategy to extend it and take it forward. **WA**

Demonstrate against tube privatisation

October 21, 11:00am outside Balfour Beattie
1 Angel Sq, Torrens St, N1 (Angel tube)

October 24, 9:30am, Emmanuel Centre
923 Marsham St, SW1 (Westminster / Pimlico tubes)

London mayor and assembly

Just one cheer for the mayor of London

Ken Livingstone's victory was a kick in the teeth for the Blairites, says **Pete Firmin**, but his timid campaign that kept the labour movement at arm's length and his new 'inclusive' politics do not bode well for the future

Ken Livingstone's achievement in winning the election to be London's first mayor should not be underestimated. He had to overcome the attempts by Labour's leadership to keep him off the ballot paper altogether, first by nearly ruling him out of the internal election, then by constructing an electoral college which made it almost impossible for him to win. Then there was the pressure to dissuade him from standing as an independent and the unity of the big parties against him when he did make the break.

Throughout, he faced personal and political denigration from nearly all of the cabinet and, once he stood independently, an assault from most of the media. The rumour circulates that it was Downing Street which leant on the press in the last few days before polling to come out in support of the Tory candidate, Steve Norris, as the most likely person to beat Livingstone.

Although candidates have won before when standing against their 'own' party (Dennis Canavan being the most recent, in the election to the Scottish parliament), Livingstone's victory was probably unique in terms of the size of the electorate and the scale of the vitriol emanating from both the Labour Party machine and the national media. Throughout all this Livingstone gained incredible support from people who wanted him to stand as an independent. His campaign raised over £700,000, mostly from small individual contributions – 45 per cent more than was actually spent during the election.

However, the scale of Livingstone's achievement in winning should not blind us to the problems of the campaign he ran. He won the support of the majority of balloted trade unionists and Labour Party members in the internal election primarily because of his stand against the partial privatisation of the London Underground and in defence of labour movement democracy. Yet Livingstone failed to use that internal election to raise the stakes politically. He rejected any idea of establishing a 'trade unionists for Livingstone campaign' and relied instead on friendly bureaucrats. Indeed, once he stood as an independent, Livingstone refused to accept donations from trade unions, including the London Region of the Fire Brigades Union, for fear of upsetting those same bureaucrats.

Livingstone declared from the start of his independent candidacy that he had no intention of setting up a new party and that Labour Party members should stay in Labour. All very well, but he could have done a lot more which fell short of a call to leave the Labour Party. He could have exacerbated the rift which had opened up between the bureaucracy and the membership, encouraging his supporters to organise, and given *some* indication of what they should fight around. Although Party and union members around London were waiting to campaign for his election, it wasn't until the last weekend that leaflets were made available. Up to now, no one has been expelled for pro-Livingstone activity in the election, probably because the bureaucracy realises that this would make the situation even worse.

Livingstone's pronouncements during the election also reflected confusion. Having declared rightly, if insensitively, that international capitalism is responsible for more deaths than the holocaust, he then said he meant US capitalism, absolving British capitalism from responsibility. He distanced himself from the Reclaim the Streets May Day actions in the worst possible way under pressure from the media. Indeed, he had called on people to attend the TUC's May Day event in the Millennium Dome rather than the London May Day demonstration.

Explanations from Livingstone's closest supporters for this behaviour are usually along the lines that he had to hold together an 'alliance' of people from all parties, none of which supported him, and that anyway the socialist revolution is not on the agenda. But it is not necessary to believe that socialism is just around the corner to use elections to put across socialist ideas and to politicise people who are supporting you from a variety of backgrounds.

Obviously, it is too early to make a full assessment of the performance of Livingstone and his administration since the election. However, it is possible to make some initial points. Livingstone's failure to put up a slate of labour movement candidates for the Assembly had early repercussions, first in his call to vote for the Green Party and then in his search for a deputy leader and chairs of various committees. Having rightly condemned Labour's candidates as a hand-picked second eleven, he then chose Nicky Gavron as his deputy and Toby Harris as chair of the police committee. He went even further in appointing the Tory candidate for mayor, Steve Norris, to the transport committee and reproaching Blair for not being as inclusive in his politics as him! Many of those closest to Livingstone who oppose the introduction of proportional

representation because it 'automatically' brings about coalitions have been strangely silent on this aspect of his election.

On the policy front, there has been little time for much to emerge yet, and the question of the partial privatisation of the Underground has yet to be resolved decisively, although the government is pushing ahead with its plans. Livingstone has rightly condemned the government for handing over its debt on the Jubilee line extension to the GLA, but his plans for charging motorists for entering central London are regressive, being a flat rate for all motorists. Apparently he rejected the idea of a levy on company car parks for fear of alienating the City.

To date, the furore over Livingstone's candidacy and election has had little effect within the Labour Party and the unions. Probably because of discouragement from Livingstone himself, few union bodies and no CLPs actually came out in support of him as an independent candidate. While many, including the national FBU conference, have passed resolutions calling for Livingstone's readmission to the Party, it is possible that the Labour Party machine will be able to ride this out with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy. Socialists should, of course, support the demand for Livingstone to be reinstated, although not at the expense of his making concessions to the government on the question of the partial privatisation of the Underground. **WA**

Is the pound too high?

by Laurence Barrett

To the hundreds of thousands in the manufacturing sector who fear the dole because of the high pound, this must seem a daft question. The high pound makes British exports more expensive, so exporters can't compete. There's an unholy alliance between the TUC top brass and the CBI to defend manufacturing, clamouring for sterling to be devalued, or at least tamed, in order to save jobs. But while manufacturing is squeezed, the financial sector is living high on the hog of a rampant currency. The high pound sucks into the City massive investment in sterling, and so the City is doing very nicely, thank you. This says a lot about the way the British economy works, and about New Labour's priorities.

Should socialists therefore call for sterling to be devalued? This is when it gets a bit more complicated. A lower pound means that imports are more expensive. Workers' jobs might seem safer, for the moment, but their wages don't go as far. Some socialists go further than this, saying that *all* devaluations are an attack on workers' living standards, but surely this is dogmatic: in the 1920s the pound was kept artificially high by being linked with the price of gold, and that didn't do a lot for workers' living standards. It is not the job of socialists to act as would-be financial managers on behalf of the ruling class, but neither should we take a hard and fast view for or against devaluation in every case. Our job is to defend the interests of workers, and we should decide each question on that basis alone. Wouldn't it be doctrinaire to refuse to take a position on this question simply because the workers do not control the economy?

The present high pound has been responsible for the loss of thousands of jobs, and is an integral part of New Labour's pro-City, anti-working class regime. One of its functions is to increase the level of exploitation in order to keep exports competitive, so in this instance, socialists should probably favour a devaluation. In taking this view we do not line up with the little-Englanders within and without the labour movement whose interest is in 'competing' with the rest of the world. They are happy to see workers in Germany or Spain lose their jobs in order to save 'British' jobs. We defend the jobs of *all* workers, so any demands for devaluation must be linked with the defence of all jobs against attempts to sacrifice workers for the sake of profitability.

The problems of sterling are intimately bound up with the problems with the European Union, as it is against the euro that the pound is too strong, or possibly the other way round. Looked at in these terms, the suggestion from TUC general secretary John Monks that Gordon Brown spend the money from the mobile phone auction on buying euros has a certain logic to it. Supporters of British entry into the single currency paint a rosy picture of a 'competitive' currency, inward investment, low interest rates and low prices. But we should beware! The convergence criteria imposed on entrants to the single currency was basically an austerity package to keep the euro competitive against the dollar and the yen, because the euro is the preferred strategy for the EU's capitalists to compete against East Asia and Nafta. For and against the single currency are the two competing projects of Britain's bosses and we shouldn't line up behind either of them, despite the tangible benefits that may result from entry into the single currency.

This raises the question of the kind of Europe we *do* want: a workers' Europe, not a bosses' Europe. This does not mean that we greet every new development merely with abstract propaganda for a workers' Europe, but it implies an independence in the way we approach those developments. Besides, the defence by French and Belgian workers of the Renault factory in Vilvoorde in Belgium, and the Euromarches ending at the Amsterdam and Cardiff summits show that joint action across national boundaries against unemployment and austerity is not just a propaganda slogan, but can be fought for and achieved. **WA**

Racism in Britain

Has anything changed since the Lawrence inquiry?

by Simon Deville

The publication in February 1999 of the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence marked a significant point in the struggle against racism in Britain on a number of levels. Most crucially, it provided a focus for anger about the levels of racism. Although the issues raised were nothing new for most black people or anti-racists, these issues were thrown under the public gaze in an unprecedented way. Whilst the initial remit of the inquiry attempted to focus purely upon the immediate issues surrounding Stephen Lawrence's horrific murder, the pressure of anti-racist campaigners and, most significantly, of Doreen and Neville Lawrence forced the inquiry to look at the wider social context.

The traditional response of the state to racist murders such as this is to describe them as an aberration, perpetrated by evil madmen. But the pressure placed upon the Lawrence inquiry forced it to look at the role of racism throughout society – in the police and the judicial system, in education, in local authorities and all large institutions – as well as at the more overt racism of the far right. For the first time, the inquiry attempted to establish a definition of 'institutional racism'.

Report acknowledges evidence of racism ...

Whilst it would be easy to point to the inquiry's failure to address a whole range of issues – what else would you expect from such an inquiry? – the surprising thing was the extent to which it was prepared to take on much of what the anti-racist movement had been saying for decades. Macpherson himself appeared to have been genuinely convinced by the mountain of evidence presented to the inquiry.

The response of the government, the Home Office, the police and almost every establishment figure was to jockey for position in condemning racism and in proving their commitment to rooting it out of society. Tony Blair, Jack Straw and Paul Condon, the then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, all went out of their way to prove their anti-racist credentials. A year and a half on from the inquiry, all this has been shown to be nothing more than hot air.

... but little change for blacks

Black people are still five times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than whites, but any moves to reduce the levels of harassment of black communities have been met with a backlash of claims that this leads to an increase in street crimes and muggings. With the ink on the Macpherson report barely dry, the police refused to investigate the hangings of Errol and Jason MacGowan in Telford, preferring to treat both deaths as suicide. Levels of racist attacks have not decreased – there has been a 66 per cent rise in reported racially motivated incidents over the last year. Such a dramatic increase cannot be explained solely by a greater awareness amongst black people of their rights as a result of the inquiry.

In Newham this year, two eleven-year-old Asian girls were racially attacked by a gang of around 20 youths when walking through a local park. One of the girls rushed home to seek help from her father, Mr Paul, who called the police and returned to the park to aid the other girl. By the time he arrived a

Demonstrate against racist attacks and to support Asylum Seekers

Saturday October 14, 1:00pm

Embankment (Embankment / Temple tube)
Called by the National civil rights movement and the National Coalition of Anti-deportation Campaigns

Demonstrate against Barbara Roche

(Home office junior minister)

Saturday October 7, 10:30am

March to her Surgery
Called by Kurdish and Turkish community organisations

large crowd had gathered who threatened and abused him. To show how much the police and the criminal justice system has changed post-Macpherson. the police arrested the victim of this racist attack and the Crown Prosecution Service refused to drop the charges (all of which were thrown out in court).

UN condemns British government on racism ...

At a meeting in Geneva towards the end of August, the United Nations committee on the elimination of racial discrimination produced a report which was deeply critical of the government's attitude to race issues on a number of counts. It attacked the institutional racism within the police that had led to 'serious shortcomings with regard to the investigation into racist incidents'. It criticised the government for failing to tackle the higher levels of unemployment amongst the black community or the disproportionate number of black children excluded from schools, and for its stance on asylum seekers. The withdrawal of benefits from asylum seekers, the denial of their right to work, and their dispersal throughout the country regardless of what support structures exist, are measures intended to make life so miserable for asylum seekers that so-called 'bogus asylum seekers' are discouraged from applying. In addition, they help fuel the rise in racism by attempting to scapegoat asylum seekers for all the government's shortcomings.

...while ministers move further right

At the same time as trying to pose as anti-racists, government frontbenchers have been competing with the Tories over who is toughest on asylum seekers. Whilst the government was quick to condemn the far right Tory who called for repatriation, the fact is that the government has moved so far to the right on this issue that there is little space left for Tories who want to show that they are to the right of New Labour. Labour leaders claim that having tough immigration controls is a central part in creating 'good race relations'; in reality all this does is make them the recruiting sergeants for the far right.

Despite all of this, there are some positive aspects to come out of the Lawrence inquiry, but these can only be realised if anti-racists consciously fight for them. Firstly, the recognition of 'institutional racism' does give some room for anti-racists to operate. That is not to say that we need to accept Macpherson's definition or the report's conclusions, but we can use it to add weight, and to a certain extent legal backing, in struggles against institutional racism. Whether it be in the running of local services, the actions of the police and the judiciary or whatever, the report can be used to challenge particular aspects of institutional racism.

The second positive aspect of the inquiry is that it has helped to develop a spirit of unity amongst the anti-racist movement, although that battle is far from won. There has been a marked increase in public awareness of racism that could be tapped into if there were an authoritative and inclusive anti-racist organisation. The task is to try and build one from the various existing organisations.

> Tony Blair, Jack Straw and Paul Condon ... went out of their way to prove their anti-racist credentials ... shown to be nothing more than hot air.

The Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers has made some useful initiatives in organising 'Scrap the Voucher Scheme!' pickets of supermarkets in order to raise awareness of the plight of asylum seekers. However, local groups are by and large SWP dominated, many do not actually hold organising meetings and instructions about activities are simply issued by the SWP to their foot soldiers. Where local groups have broken out of this short-sighted method of operation, some have been able to build themselves much broader, but for the campaign to have any relevance it needs to adopt this inclusiveness and democracy on a much more systematic level nationally.

Labour movement involvement needed

To really make an impact on society, the anti-racist movement needs to win the active support and participation of wide layers of the trade union and labour movement. Organisations such as the National Assembly Against Racism have in the past won wide affiliations from the trade union movement, but this has been on such a bureaucratic level as to make it meaningless. Often trade union leaders were quite happy to support affiliations and pose as anti-racists to their members, safe in the knowledge that they wouldn't be expected to do anything about it.

From September 15, the grassroots led 'Civil Rights Caravan' will be travelling across England, culminating in a demonstration in London on October 14 (see box). The caravan is supported by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, the National Civil Rights Movement and a plethora of campaigns and grassroots organisations, and is planned to coincide with a number of activities across the country. It is through practical initiatives such as this that anti-racist organisations can start to develop the unity and trust needed to create the anti-racist movement needed to take the struggle beyond the high point of the Lawrence campaign. **WA**

The demands of the Caravan for Civil Rights are:

- Full rights for asylum-seekers, undocumented workers, migrants and the victims of racist attacks;
- The right to asylum and an end to detention, deportation, vouchers and dispersal;
- An end to racist violence.

For more information, contact CaravanforCivilRights@ncadc.demon.co.uk ■

Socialist Alliances

Living in a dream world

by Neil Murray

The overall picture of the May 4 council elections was one of continued low turn-outs, with the Tories gaining from the abstentionism of Labour voters. Yet when it came to a contest for a parliamentary seat – in the Romsey by-election held on the same day – the Liberal Democrats gained an impressive victory in a constituency previously held by the Tories.

In London, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, sections of the far left hoped to capitalise on this disaffection with Labour, on the basis that there is a 'vacuum' just waiting for the left to step into and gather those disaffected workers around it. While this idea has been gaining ground on the left in the last few years and candidates have been put up before, the London elections represented a watershed in terms of the involvement of many groups and the scale of their campaigns.

The strongest bases of the Socialist Alliances are often in areas where there is a left Labour MP . . . It would certainly expose the sectarian character of the Socialist Alliances if they were to stand against such left MPs.

The London Socialist Alliance, drawing on the forces of the Socialist Workers Party, Alliance for Workers Liberty, the International Socialist Group, Workers Power, the Communist Party of Great Britain and, partially, the Socialist Party, was by a long way the most serious of the contestants in terms of the forces it involved and the extent of its campaign. However, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, the Socialist Labour Party, the Communist League and, not to be outdone by the 'ultra-left', the Communist Party of Britain all threw their hats into the ring. Peter Tatchell stood as an independent green/left/gay candidate and a couple of mavericks stood on the single issue of supporting Ken Livingstone.

Lefts fail to break through

In addition to the vacuum they perceived to exist, the London election took place under particularly good conditions for these left organisations. A rough form of proportional representation applied, supposedly allowing voters to pick those they really wanted rather than the 'least bad' option, and possibly allowing for the election of candidates from the left slates. The furore over Livingstone's candidacy meant that gut loyalty to Labour was likely to break down, opening up the possibility of Labour supporters voting for the left, and Livingstone's highlighting of the issue of privatisation of the London underground had given prominence to an issue in the forefront of the left's campaign.

To read the press of the various groups affiliated to the London Socialist Alliance you would think that its result was a major breakthrough. Yet its averages of 2.9 per cent in the constituency section and 1.6 per cent in the top-up section are unremarkable, even derisory, to any thinking observer. Even the 6–7 per cent obtained in a few constituencies, while just about respectable, is hardly ground-breaking. The other groups did not stand in the constituency section, but their votes in the top-up section were worse, CATP obtaining 1 per cent, the SLP 0.8 per cent, and the CPB 0.4 per cent. Tatchell got 1.4 per cent.

Some say: if you add together all these left votes, it comes to more than the 5 per cent necessary to win a seat in the GLA. But while this might be true, it takes politics into the realm of pipe-dreams. Scargill has always refused to allow the SLP to co-operate with other left forces in *anything*, least of all elections. CATP and CPB were both approached by the LSA and rejected a joint slate, CATP insisting on standing on the single issue of Tube privatisation. They now have the difficult task of re-creating a campaign against Prescott's plans for the Underground, undermined by their foray into the election arena.

Although the LSA talked a lot of its support for Livingstone during the election campaign, its components have played down the importance of his election since, partly because they have largely lost interest in developments in the real labour movement, but also because mentioning the peculiarities of the election rather undermines the concept of a breakthrough.

The protest vote in London went mainly to the Green Party rather than the left. But even among those Labour Party members and supporters who voted for the left, this act was seen mainly as a protest over Labour's shenanigans over Livingstone rather than any idea that the LSA etc represented some kind of way forward.

Better results with local base

Elsewhere in the country in the May elections the left did no better (and often worse), with one or two notable

exceptions. In Coventry the Socialist Party won another council seat; interestingly they stood as 'Socialist Party (Nellist)', an acknowledgement that their support stems from the work put in over the years by Dave Nellist, first as an MP and, more recently, as a councillor. In Kidderminster, where there is a mass campaign over PFI plans for a hospital, protestors won enough seats on Wyre Forest Council to be the largest 'party'. Both these examples underline the point made by many of us over the years that such election campaigns are a fruitless exercise unless a real base exists.

On June 22, building on its 'success' in the GLA elections, the LSA stood a candidate in the Tottenham parliamentary by-election caused by the death of Bernie Grant. They retained their deposit with 5.39 per cent of the vote (in a 25 per cent turn out), but even this took place in exceptional circumstances – by-elections are notorious for protest votes, Labour stood an outright Blairite, most of Bernie Grant's family backed the LSA, and all this took place shortly after the mayoral election with the fuss over Livingstone.

Since the GLA elections, the LSA has consolidated its existence and, together with the Socialist Alliances around the country, has decided to stand at least 50 candidates in the general election when it comes. This is clearly not on the basis of selecting areas with strong support for the left (unfortunately there aren't that many), but of wanting to 'fly the flag' and make a stand. Indeed, some argue that the very act of standing a candidate will bring a Socialist Alliance into existence.

SAs unable to agree a programme

We are continually told that the strength of the Socialist Alliance is the way in which it brings the far left together. But this has not been without problems. Some of the groups involved disagreed with the platform of immediate demands on which the LSA stood, wanting an explicitly revolutionary platform. The Socialist Party tried to ride two horses, supporting the LSA in the constituencies and the CATP for the top-up list (it had a candidate in both camps) until this became untenable and it left its voting advice open under pressure from the membership. The LSA could not agree on supporting Livingstone for the Labour nomination with a campaign in the unions, some only wanting to support him once he stood as an independent.

The decision to stand a large number of candidates in the general election is opening a can of worms. Some want to stand regardless of whether the Labour candidate is a left or not, others are more reluctant. For those like the Socialist Party which considers the Labour Party a bourgeois party 'just like the Tories', this has the merit of consistency. The strongest bases of the Socialist Alliances are often in areas where there is a left Labour MP (such as the Socialist Party in Hillingdon, where John McDonnell won at the last election, Hackney – Diane Abbott – and Islington – Jeremy Corbyn). It would certainly expose the sectarian character of the Socialist Alliances if they were to stand against such left MPs. Those involved in the Alliances also have radically different views as to how they should develop, ranging from simply remaining an alliance of convenience, through a new 'party of labour', to a fully-fledged revolutionary party.

In the past it has been argued that the Socialist Alliances should be campaigning organisations rather than election machines. While some in the Alliances still argue they should be both, having gone so whole-heartedly down the election route this is now a non-starter. Any campaign in the name of the Socialist Alliance would find it difficult to draw in those who don't support its main orientation, particularly Labour Party supporters. On the other hand, maybe the component groups of the Socialist Alliances no longer care about that. In fact, pretty much all these organisations can agree on is the need to stand in the elections. Workers Action will continue to argue this is a wrong orientation, only the latest in a long line of attempts by the left in Britain to find short cuts around the much more difficult task of fighting in the labour movement as it exists in the real world. **WA**

Left unity in Unison?

by Mike Calvert

There are several organised left-wing currents within Unison, Britain's largest trade union. At the last conference the biggest and best organised current, the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU, in which Workers Action supporters work), doubled its number of seats on the NEC from three to six. The national leadership around Rodney Bickerstaffe, the outgoing general secretary, has used every opportunity to attack the left, especially the other main left current within the union, the SWP. The increasing number of attacks on branch secretaries, left-wing branches, officials and shop stewards, especially those who support the SWP, has led the SWP into an unprecedented drive for 'left unity'. The response of the other socialist forces will be very important for how the left goes forward, not just in Unison but in the unions in general.

A divided left

There are historical reasons for the division of the left in Unison linked to the role of the SWP, and also of Militant (now the Socialist Party) when it was inside the Labour Party. But the main factor was the split that took place over the 1995 general secretary election. The AWL, some smaller groups, and several individual militants including Geoff Martin supported Rodney Bickerstaffe for the post, while the rest of the left campaigned for Militant supporter Roger Bannister. The rationale for voting for Bickerstaffe was that he was the 'lesser evil' when compared to Peter Hunter, a maverick right-wing candidate and prominent anti-abortion activist.

This tactic proved to be a mistake – Hunter got far fewer votes than Bickerstaffe, and only just beat Bannister. Bickerstaffe, on the other hand, has consistently refused to lead a struggle against privatisation, has witch-hunted the organised left, and on almost every issue has lined up with the right in the union against the left.

The national secretary of the CFDU, Glenn Kelly, himself a Socialist Party supporter currently being witch-hunted by Bromley Council, has several times made unity approaches to Geoff Martin and others on behalf of the CFDU, but to no avail. Martin, currently regional convenor of London Unison, has been promoting himself independently, to the extent of floating the idea of his standing for general secretary on Bickerstaffe's retirement. However, he eventually decided against this and subsequently called for support for Roger Bannister, the CFDU candidate.

SWP and the Socialist Alliances

In the past, the SWP in Unison has taken a very sectarian stance, party-building at the expense of defending members. In Islington Local Government branch, for example, where SWP supporters were in leading positions until quite recently, they virtually destroyed the branch by not attending to basic trade union tasks such as representing members in meetings with management or responding to telephone queries.

Now, however, the SWP is attempting to broker some form of left unity in the union. This is a step in the right direction, but is also linked to the SWP's current attempt to turn the Socialist Alliances into a left electoral alternative to Labour. The critical question for any new united left formation in Unison is: what will its attitude be towards the forthcoming general election?

What tasks for a united left?

The reputation built up by the CFDU over the years stands it in good stead. It is our view that left unity, whilst highly desirable, is not necessarily the be-all and end-all. If constructed on the wrong political foundations, it could marginalise the left in the union. We must continue the fight for union democracy and accountability at all levels, but in that struggle we must be seen to be applying our own principles. Any corruption or skulduggery in our own ranks will prove us to be no better than those whom we criticise.

The organisation will need a programme for winning control of Unison, but it will also need an orientation that takes it out into the trades councils and the local campaigns. It will need to consistently defend those like the workers at Hillingdon, whose tactics it may disagree with. It should have a positive attitude towards working with the left in other unions, with the eventual aim of building a cross-union left alliance.

Any new formation would be wrecked if it were to call for blanket support for the 50 or so candidates which the Socialist Alliances are planning to stand around the country in the general election. We want a clear orientation to the whole of the labour movement as it actually exists at the moment – and that includes the majority of the membership of Unison, the other unions and the Labour Party. Also, there are many people within, or influenced by, CFDU who still support Labour and who would refuse to join a united left grouping that was linked to the Socialist Alliances.

The fight within the union at both the national and local level will demand that any left-supporting officers who are elected are accountable. For this to work we need the maximum democracy and accountability within the structures of the new organisation itself. The whole of the united left must be involved in drawing up the political programme on which any candidates for union office will stand, not just a negotiating cabal of representatives of the left organisations involved.

Many members of the CFDU are reluctant to merge their organisation into something which has yet to prove itself, or which may end up being dominated by the SWP. We agree. There must be a trial period in which the structures of the CFDU continue to exist, and in which it is possible to call a CFDU caucus if necessary. The prize of a strong, united left in Unison is worth the effort, and if successful the initiative could serve as the model for similar new formations in other unions. **WA**

Kosova – new face of colonialism

After an 11-week bombing campaign of targets in Serbia, Kosova and Montenegro, NATO and UN forces occupied Kosova in June 1999. **Owen Jones** assesses the war and its aftermath, arguing that the Kosova Liberation Army was not fighting for independence but for a UN protectorate, and that it was therefore wrong to support it

Last March marked the first anniversary of the climax of the Yugoslav civil war's fourth stage, when the most powerful imperialist alliance in history launched an aerial onslaught on the meagre remains of Yugoslavia, a devastating bombardment that lasted for nearly three months. Initiated using the pretext of the national oppression of the Kosovar Albanians, this war was to be the biggest triumph for imperialism since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, speeding up Western expansion into the East, stripping Russia of its old sphere of influence, and providing new legitimacy for NATO, giving it the mandate to launch future wars against obstacles to Western interests.

Just over a decade ago, Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic federation, held together by the unity of the ruling bureaucracies of each republic. By the late 1980s this unity was beginning to crumble. Each of the ruling castes stirred up local nationalism to increase its power, but also to gain popular legitimacy to finally devour the gains of the Yugoslav Revolution. Thus, they superseded the privileges restricted to the ruling bureaucracies, and became the new class of gangster capitalists. Led by Milosevic of Serbia and Tudjman of Croatia, Yugoslavia was plunged into a horrific civil war that turned worker against worker, a nightmare continuing today.

Expulsion

In Kosovo today, largely 'forgotten' by the bourgeois press, an exodus of thousands of non-Albanians is fleeing a co-ordinated attempt at their expulsion, leaving NATO's stated 'humanitarian' objective a shoddy farce. Yet the reason now given for the war – to stop the oppression of the Kosovar Albanians – is itself a revision of history. Bill Clinton said a day before the bombing was launched: 'We act to prevent a wider war, to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe.' Wesley Clark, the former Supreme Commander of NATO, more recently stated that the United States continues to have 'vital interests in Europe. . . . We learned that lesson after World War Two.' Even an editorial of the hawkish *Guardian* (20/3/00) admitted that 'the code name "humanitarian intervention", which its proponents gave it, was not, of course, the whole truth. No countries go to war on the basis of altruism'.

Despite this, a sizeable portion of the Left, who were clearly heartbroken by CNN's live video feeds, provided a shameful moralising cover for this assault of Western capital, even when these same 'humanitarian' imperialists continue today to systematically rape and butcher Iraq – as always under the cover of 'democracy' and 'international law'. Similar fears of destabilisation are behind the present suppression of Kosovar independence; imperialism fears this could trigger a wider war in Europe, America's biggest and most important market. Tim Judah in the *Guardian*, two months before war began, speculated on what for imperialism would be the 'the doomsday scenario, [that] the spread of the war to Macedonia will suck in Serbia and Albania, and then perhaps Bulgaria and NATO members Greece and Turkey'. Indeed, imperialism today is no more 'humanitarian' than in the great inter-imperialist war of 1914-18, which Britain entered under the pretext of German oppression of Belgium, and Russia in 'solidarity' with its Serb 'brothers' following the Austro-Hungarian invasion. The most shameful 'Social Imperialism' amongst supposed socialists has re-emerged in an outright capitulation to one's own bourgeoisie.

Despite the horrific national oppression committed by the Belgrade regime against Kosovar Albanians, the propaganda of NATO leaders to justify their war described a Nazi-style genocide, with often terrifying death tolls approaching one hundred thousand. Geoff Hoon, British Foreign Officer Minister, had claimed that 'around 10,000 people have been killed in more than 100 massacres'. A prominent US Democrat Senator stated: 'By the time the snows fall next winter, there will be genocide documented on a large scale in Kosovo.' To this day, nearly a year after the occupation began, just over 2,000 bodies have been produced – a total that includes soldiers killed in fighting, victims of NATO bombs, as well as Yugoslav executions. Now bourgeois commentators like Andrew Alexander began to ask the forbidden question: 'Could it turn out to be that we killed more innocent civilians than the Serbs did?'

National oppression

Certainly Kosovo has faced severe national oppression at the hands of Serbia. Decades ago, in the period of major Serbian expansion with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Serbian Marxists of the time recognised Kosovo as an oppressed nation. After the Great War, the Yugoslav monarchy subjected it to a [illegible]

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tal colonisation with accompanying terror against the Albanian population. With the end of World War Two, the Yugoslav Stalinists forcibly incorporated Kosovo into the new state despite previous promises it would join Albania to prevent a Serbian nationalist backlash. The Kosovar resistance to this betrayal led to two decades of brutal rule, under a chauvinist wing of the bureaucracy headed by Vice-President Rankovic. When the leadership began to fear an uprising against national oppression, it deposed Rankovic, and provided concessions such as autonomy and cultural rights. Yet still Kosovo was not granted the right to self-determination, resulting in increasing tension between Albanian and Serb. Throughout the 1980s, Serbs claimed they were facing oppression at the hands of the Kosovar bureaucracy, with even wilder absurd claims of 'genocide'.

It was the 'national oppression' of the Kosovar Serbs that a reactionary wing of the Serbian bureaucracy led by Slobodan Milosevic exploited and exaggerated to seize power. Milosevic incited nationalist demonstrations over the issue to score a putsch against the remaining Titoists in the Party. However, his aim never was to solve 'national oppression' in Serbia despite his claims. Immediately, he liquidated the autonomy of Kosovo along with Vojvodina in the north, arrested its leadership including former Albanian allies, and instituted an apartheid system, including ethnic segregation and mass sackings of Albanian workers, culminating in the attempt during the bombing to expel the entire ethnic Albanian population.

Economy

Such a programme had existed amongst Serbian chauvinists, intended to maintain Kosovo with the interests the Yugoslav bourgeoisie had in it (including Milosevic personally), particularly rich mineral resources and the former jewel in the crown of the Yugoslav economy, the Trepca mines. It was proposed back in 1990 by now Western proxy and former regime member Vuk Draskovic, and the Serbian fascist leader Vojeslav Seselj described the plan in detail in a horrific article for the journal *Greater Serbia* in 1995. Only the arming of the whole Kosovar people (as distinct from the imperialist-funded KLA) could defend them from such a reactionary campaign. However, imperialist propaganda exaggerated the ethnic cleansing by playing on the revulsion the international working class still feel at the Nazi holocaust, thereby understandably confusing them into believing the war to be a humanitarian crusade.

Poorest in Europe

The bombing of Yugoslavia obliterated much of its infrastructure, destroying blatantly non-military targets, from bridges too small for tanks to tobacco factories, killing hundreds and destroying workers' livelihoods. The war combined with capitalist restoration has transformed a relatively prosperous country into the poorest in all Europe, replacing even Albania. Around 2,000 Yugoslavs were killed, equal to those found murdered by the Yugoslav Army during the war contrary to the propaganda of a new European Holocaust. The Serbian working class has been impoverished – nearly half the population faces unemployment, and from March to May 1999 average wealth per capita sank from £640 to £288, on a near parallel with Burkino Faso. The only shield the working class has from utter deprivation is the remnants of a welfare state yet to be devoured by capitalist restoration.

Throughout the Kosovar civil war, NATO backed an armed group known as the 'Kosovan Liberation Army', the KLA or 'UCK' as it is known by its Albanian acronym. Its roots are in various former Hoxhaite factions who originally fought for an Albanian republic within Yugoslavia. But it would be wrong to present their successor, the imperialist-funded KLA, as a national liberation army fighting for self-determination. This movement had been fused from two apparently deeply conflicting factions, but years of national oppression and the rape of Kosovo meant both were united by an extreme hatred of Serbs – one Hoxhaite, another composed of fascist-leaning supporters who glorify Mussolini's 'Greater Albania' which existed during World War Two. The latter won the leadership as shown by their uniform and salute, which were identical to wartime fascist collaborators.

The KLA began by attacking Albanian so-called 'traitors' and 'collaborators'. Early atrocities included attacks on Serbian refugees, particularly those fleeing the Croatian regime's ethnic cleansing of Krajina – a policy commanded by the later KLA military leader, Adem Ceku.

Their main backers were initially gangsters from Northern Albania who supplied them with arms to ensure the KLA would fight for their interests. However, as ordinary Albanian workers and peasants flooded in with the outbreak of civil war in February 1998, American imperialism adopted the army. They encouraged arms to be sent to them from Albania as well as exchanging military intelligence. It is alleged that during the Rambouillet talks, the KLA were ordered to provoke Yugoslav forces into brutal retaliation to build up support amongst the working class of the West for war. The US had ensured it could have the excuse for bombing by threatening the KLA with breaking off support unless it signed the agreement. It then established a clause in the document that neither Yugoslavia nor any other country would agree to – the right of NATO troops to unrestricted access throughout Yugoslavia – giving it the right to occupy the entire country. Another clause gave the green light to American capital, stating: 'The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles.'

Protectorate

The KLA would have been supportable if fighting for national self-determination. However, what the leadership fought for was an imperialist protectorate, and to provide Northern Albanian gangsters with a secure piece of territory to exploit. This led the famous KLA leader, Adem Demaci, often styled as the 'Albanian Mandela', to resign, declaring in a furious statement: 'Independence and freedom are some-

thing completely different from this Agreement. This is not even close to what we have fought and we are fighting for.'

Emerging facts reveal the extent to which the KLA fought for imperialism, rather than Kosovar self-determination. Veteran foreign correspondent Philip Knightly wrote on March 30: 'We were not told that the CIA helped train the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) before the bombing began. We were not told that the KLA realised its attacks on Serbian policemen would bring retaliation on ethnic Albanian civilians but it went ahead anyway because it hoped that Serbian atrocities would bring in the West – as they did.'

The bourgeois press throughout the war saw the KLA as NATO's land army – as indeed they were. Contrary to the arguments of some of its supporters, the KLA did not defend the Kosovar Albanian people from national oppression, whom they were quite happy to have killed for propaganda purposes, and simply maintained border attacks on Yugoslav forces. Indeed, its Hoxhaite wing was violently purged, and dissident Albanians expelled. For example, the KLA murdered the editor of the KLA-backed newspaper *Voice of Kosovo*, a death originally blamed on the Milosevic regime until new facts came to light. They then changed the newspaper's motto from 'Long Live Marxism-Leninism' to 'NATO Thank You'. Simultaneously, they began expelling non-Albanians from Kosovo, who fled mainly to Serbia; though at this point their actions were not comparable to the horrific oppression committed by Belgrade.

Criminal activities

When Milosevic capitulated, the Yugoslav Army withdrew and NATO won occupation of Kosovo, the KLA was fused with the state machinery, remodelled as the 'Kosovo Protection Corps'. The supposed role of the KPC was 'emergency disaster relief', but it has been using its £30 million budget rather differently, as a leaked report by the very organisation that funds it, the United Nations, declares. It holds them responsible for 'criminal activities, killings, ill-treatment/torture, illegal policing, abuse of authority, intimidation, breaches of political neutrality and hate-speech'.

The KLA began expelling all non-Albanian Kosovars as soon as NATO entered. This included not only around 175,000 Kosovar Serbs, but also thousands of Romas, Montenegrins, Turks, Slav Muslims, Jews, and so on, as well as dissident Albanians accused of 'collaboration'. A campaign of terror against the other Kosovars included murder, kidnap, torture, threats and intimidation. Thousands of homes were burned down. Serb refugee convoys were attacked on the way to Serbia proper, such as on February 2 when an elderly Serb man and woman died in a bomb attack. In Pristina, an original population of 40,000 Serbs dropped to a couple of hundred. Kosovo once contained around 200,000 Serbs; it is estimated ninety percent fled the terror. The remaining gypsies who once numbered over 40,000 are confined to a single refugee camp.

The Serb militiamen were the first to flee Kosovo. Now the terror campaign is directed at ordinary working class and peasant Serbs, often elderly, and often too poor to flee. In one massacre in August 1999, 13 Serbian farm labourers were shot dead on their way to work in the fields, presumably with the intention of seizing their land. A sinister pattern has emerged of elderly Serbs found in their homes with their throats slit. Examples were cited by dissident bourgeois reporter Robert Fisk, who in the *Independent* of November 24, 1999, stated: 'An OSCE official reports that in Zupa, a 96-year-old Serb man was found bound and gagged with a gunshot wound to the head. In Kamenica, a Serb woman, 82, who had been ordered to leave her house was burnt to death in her home.' A report in the *Guardian* on August 24, 1999, shows the terror is not directed at chauvinists; one elderly woman said: 'We are not to blame, neither are the Albanians; it is that fascist Milosevic in Belgrade.'

Revenge attacks

NATO and its allies in the bourgeois press have emphasised that what is occurring in Kosovo are spontaneous revenge attacks. This does not, for example, explain why the terror is not just directed at Serbs, and how hundreds of thousands could possibly have been purged across the province without any form of co-ordination. A November 24, 1999, *Independent* article gave an example of the range of victims: 'The 300-strong Croat community at Lecnice were preparing to celebrate their 700th anniversary in the province but left en masse last month for Dubrovnik. And this week, the president of the tiny Jewish community in Pristina, Cedra Prlincevic, left for Belgrade after denouncing "a pogrom against the non-Albanian population".'

The *Independent* on December 12, 1999, made it clear who was responsible: 'Serbs who sought to live peacefully among their Albanian neighbours have almost all been driven out, either to Serbia or into a handful of heavily guarded enclaves, in what bears all the signs of a co-ordinated campaign: the officially disbanded but still well-armed Kosovo Liberation Army convinces few with its denials of responsibility.' But it would be wrong to present this campaign as one solely motivated by ideology.

Often the motivation for expulsions is to claim land from expelled peasants; the same reason that Serbs joined the quasi-fascist militia that stalked Kosovo previously. In such rural peasant nations, land is of central importance. On the other hand, many of those orchestrating the terror are not Kosovar at all, but gangsters based in an area that descended into chaos resulting from capitalist restoration, Northern Albania. They provided guns, plentiful since the Albanian revolution, and funds from activities such as drug running and prostitution, and expected their favours to be returned. A rightwing American think-tank said on March 17, 2000: 'The KLA is indebted to Balkan drug organisations that helped funnel both cash and arms to the guerrillas before and after the conflict.'

When NATO occupied the province, the gangsters moved into Kosovo with KLA help. The province has been flooded with sports cars with no licence plates, estimated to make up 20-25 per cent of the total cars in Kosovo. It is

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these same gangsters from Albania proper who orchestrate the terror, taking advantage of the chaotic situation to set up base. Protected by the KLA, they have transformed Kosovo into the drugs centre of Europe, often using the province for prostituting girls too, as the *Independent* stated late last year. 'Apart from smuggling drugs, arms and cigarettes into Kosovo, Albanian gangsters have taken to kidnapping young women for prostitution in western Europe. Mr Haxhiu said one had been snatched from outside the Grand Hotel in the heart of Pristina last week, while four UN policemen looked on.'

Colonial governor

NATO itself has essentially established a colonial protectorate in Kosovo, a view not simply confined to the anti-war Left. The prominent bourgeois commentator Jonathan Dimbleby described the occupying KFOR troops as the 'military wing of a colonial governor, better known as the Security Council of the United Nations'. With Kosovo's basic infrastructure battered by the bombing, basic amenities such as electricity and water are lacking – but the West is apparently less willing to spend money rebuilding Kosovo than it did smashing it to bits. The administrative situation in Kosovo could be described as an unholy alliance of NATO, the KLA and gangsters from Northern Albania. 'Liberated' Kosovo lacks any democracy; positions are taken by obscenely overpaid UN bureaucrats who enjoy one third of the Kosovo 'budget'. Police recruited from the capitalist states are apparently indifferent to the crisis – as the *Independent* reported in December: 'Their commitment is also in question – according to one aid worker, an Albanian policemen he knew found himself trailing his foreign superiors from one coffee bar to another. "Many of the international police see no point in risking their skin," he said. "All they want to do is bank their bonuses and get home in one piece."'

The last vestiges of the Kosovar Serbian population have been confined to small ghettos of the poor and elderly. Supposedly under the protection of occupying troops, they are in daily danger from the KLA, too afraid to even use hospitals or educational facilities. The *Independent* reported on December 12 last year: 'The Mitrovica administrator would have been horrified to hear the UN official who admitted that attempts to keep Pristina University open to all groups had failed. Since it was now entirely Albanian, Unmik was considering whether to turn the mining and metallurgical faculty, on the Serbian side of Mitrovica, into a separate university for Serbs. "Apartheid?" responded the official. "call it that if you want to."'

Imperialism publicly proclaimed humanitarian objectives; the stated aim of their occupation was to maintain a 'multicultural' Kosovo. Despite continuing to boast the fulfilment of these objectives, by their own criteria they have failed. Whilst not forgetting the previous national oppression instigated by the gangster-capitalist Serbian regime, including the outright fascist 'Radical Party', during this occupation the vast majority of ethnic minorities have fled the NATO-backed KLA.

Independence

Meanwhile tension is mounting in Kosovo. Those who today are the allies of imperialism can become as quickly its deadliest enemies – the Afghan fundamentalists being but one example. Though the KLA leadership settled for an imperialist protectorate, other factions exist, particularly true after ordinary Kosovar workers and peasants signed up with the outbreak of civil war. After ten years of horrific national oppression, the Kosovar Albanian people will settle for nothing but independence – officially the province remains Yugoslav, and there has been talk of imperialism handing it back over to Yugoslavia in the future. The pressure in KLA ranks is for independence, and though this is a banner the leadership will not carry, tension between the old allies mounts as their interests diverge. NATO is set against independence lest it trigger its 'nightmare scenario' of destabilisation; Kosovar Albanians increasingly demand their right to self-determination. Meanwhile, a new guerrilla war led by the KLA has exploded in an area of southern Serbia with an Albanian majority, in a mistaken belief NATO will aid the insurrection. Yet NATO fears precisely such actions could eventually trigger a general destabilisation – potentially war between NATO members Greece and Turkey, splitting the imperialist alliance.

To prevent this danger, imperialism will not tolerate an independent Kosovo and its unification with Albania. As the *Observer* of March 19, 2000 stated: '[US military officials] say they [the KLA] must be stopped now if bloodshed across the entire region is to be averted – not least in Macedonia, where conflict could easily trigger a much wider conflagration.' Pentagon commanders are believed to have warned of war with the KLA this very year as their interests diverge; the results of which could prove catastrophic.

Mineral resources

Early this year came an upsurge of violence in Kosovska-Mitrovica, the last multi-ethnic settlement in Kosovo, despite the fact it is partitioned between the last significant Serbian enclave in the north, and an Albanian south. The KLA leadership worry that a potential future partition could lose them north Kosovo – something they will not accept, given its wealth of mineral resources. Yet in the crossfire, Albanians and Serbs are prevented from reaching homes and jobs on either side.

In early February, northern Mitrovica exploded in riots in protest at attacks on Serbs, and resulting in nine Albanian deaths. When Albanian Mitrovica demonstrated and was met with a NATO clampdown, the KLA began sniping operations at occupying troops, who then killed a KLA soldier. Protests resulted against French troops, often met with water cannon and police attack. Mitrovica is a prime example of growing serious confrontation between NATO and the KLA, and a possible future battleground between the two.

With the mass crackdown on Mitrovica, KFOR claimed that both Albanian and Serb militia were to blame. Seeking in this way to avoid the wrath of their ally the KLA, they began house-

to-house searches on both sides of the city to remove the guns – no doubt out of a concern weapons could be used in a future insurrection against NATO. Yet when the Kosovar Serbs are facing such extreme national oppression, communists should call for their arming in defence – the same position comrades took in respect to the Kosovar Albanians. By removing the guns from the Serbs, NATO took their last defence against mass expulsion. The inevitable responses are increasing demonstrations by the oppressed Serbs, though unfortunately often nationalistic in character. A stark choice now faces remaining Serbs – only by gaining the support of the Albanian working class against the terror can a strong working class movement be formed with the ability to confront those oppressing them. If the Kosovar Serb workers and peasants and the other endangered peoples cannot accomplish this, then they have no future.

There is more progressive hostility to foreign occupation than the KLA. The Trepca miners were the last to come to the defence of the crumbling Yugoslavia in 1989, fighting for the re-instatement of the 1974 Constitution which had granted Kosovo its autonomous status, in defence against Milosevic's suppression. Belgrade responded with mass sackings, particularly when it locked out striking miners after proposing Trepca's privatisation.

Social ownership

At present, the bourgeoisie of several nations stake their claim in this precious complex – Yugoslavia, France, and Greece. Occupying French troops refuse to allow the Albanian miners to resume work, causing the workers to issue a call for international solidarity for their fight to place it under social ownership as it formerly had been in old Yugoslavia. Their statement declares: 'Our campaign to demand the rights of miners and other workers is not just for Albanians but for all Trepca employees.' Possibly the most important workers' struggle in Europe outside Russia, being fought against imperialist troops and foreign capital, it is one deserving the utmost support of all working class militants.

However, what is vital now is for Albanian workers to ally with those of Serbia, both sharing a common exploitation at the hands of the Yugoslav bourgeoisie. Only by winning over the Serbian working class to national self-determination and helping them break with the chauvinism of their ruling class can Kosovar Albanians hope to guarantee their right to self-determination; and, as the old maxim goes, a nation that oppresses another cannot be free. There is already progressive sentiment amongst Serbian workers, and even during the bombing some trade unions pledged solidarity with the Kosovar Albanians.

The Serbian 'opposition', virtual proxies of the West which quite openly funds them, are unsupportable opportunists and often as chauvinist as many elements of the regime whom imperialism is using to open Serbian markets. They offer no alternative to Milosevic, and there is little wonder Serbian workers feel no faith in them.

Montenegro also appears on the edge of war. Committed to opening its markets at a quicker pace than Serbia, the Montenegrin bourgeoisie wants to shake off remaining Yugoslav restrictions – private property is still not enshrined in law – as well as gain access to foreign capital. Meanwhile, pro-Yugoslav militia are already being recruited, largely petty-bourgeois gangster elements with vested business interests in the federation. Imperialism has entirely mobilised behind its Montenegrin ally, promising it will militarily aid the republic in the event of war, despite previously declaring itself in opposition to immediate independence. It appears very likely the West may resume war with Serbia in the not too distant future, though a full-scale occupation remains extremely improbable.

If Montenegro is separated, the viability of Serbia as an independent entity is in question. Already full of weak statelets, the Balkans is utterly dependent on imperialism; the war further encouraged this as three states joined NATO and other applications were speeded up. Without Montenegro, Serbia would be land-locked and utterly isolated. There have been unsubstantiated rumours that the West could stir up ethnic trouble in the northern Serbian 'bread basket' province of Vojvodina with its large ethnic Hungarian minority as a pretext for its separation. If there turned out to be any truth in this, there would be absolutely no chance of Serbia continuing as a viable state, leaving it entirely dependent on imperialism.

Working class militancy

Some on the Left describe Albanian nationalism as 'reactionary'. Yet during the years of brutal oppression that they faced, the international workers' movement provided little solidarity – often outright capitulation to the Milosevic regime showed how corrupt sections of the Left had become in this epoch of reaction. No wonder Kosovars saw the imperialists as their liberators. There is, however, a Kosovar Left, albeit understandably disorientated. Working class militbbancy is already visible at Trepca. If tapped into, the struggle for self-determination could be linked into the struggle for socialism. The link between national oppression and the restoration of capitalism is very apparent throughout Yugoslavia, and hence only the overthrow of the system, which divides and rules workers, can finally end it. As the Trepca mine situation demonstrates, the true enemy of the Kosovar working class of all national groups is the capitalists and the imperialists, and not other workers.

The only thing that can stave off a now approaching Balkan catastrophe is working class unity between all the Balkans people, but this requires a swift break from the chauvinism of each bourgeoisie. The Trepca miners are an example that the working classes of every Balkan nation could follow, as seen already in Bosnia. The Balkan wars instigated by each ruling class did indeed throw working class unity in the region back a generation, having set worker against worker. But never for one second should the long-term aim of a voluntary Balkan Socialist Federation be abandoned, no matter how distant it may appear at a particular time. In the end, it is the only escape from the present nightmare. ■

NATO/UN out of Kosova!

Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians!

Nick Davies responds to some of the points raised by Owen Jones in the preceding article

NATO's 'humanitarian crusade' in Kosova went sour quicker than a pint of milk, and we are grateful for Owen Jones's vivid account of its predictably barbaric outcome. Can the Polly Toynbees of this world, the liberal and left intelligentsia who wrote so eloquently in support of this imperialist police operation bear to look at themselves in the mirror these days? The present situation vindicates those on the left who saw through the rhetoric of Jamie Shea and Tony Blair and opposed the war from the start.

A smaller number of socialists, while opposing NATO's war against Yugoslavia, also supported the right of the Kosovars to self-determination. This was because of the Kosovars' severe national oppression at the hands of Serbia. It was also to try to remind the Kosovars who their real friends were and to emphasise that NATO's war would not give the Kosovars self-determination. Looking at the result of NATO's rescue act – a ruined, impoverished bantustan, its government controlled by NATO and its economy controlled by gangsters – these socialists have the grim satisfaction of saying 'we told you so'. The independence wanted by a majority of Kosovars is off the agenda. The Kosovars, as we argued at the time of the war, have been used. Some victory.

Owen's article reveals that on most questions, his views on Kosova are similar to ours, although his lengthy analysis of the KLA shows where some differences may lie. He says the KLA 'would have been supportable if fighting for national self-determination. However, what the leadership fought for was an imperialist protectorate, and to provide northern Albanian gangsters with a secure piece of territory to exploit'. Elsewhere he maintains that 'it would be wrong to present ... the imperialist-funded KLA as a national liberation army, fighting for national self-determination'. Possibly Owen mistakenly reads back from the present situation a set of clear perspectives or aims on the part of the KLA.

Revolutionary Marxists have always had difficulties with national liberation movements. Depending on whether they have decided to support the struggle in question, their attitude can either be positively starry-eyed or unremittingly sectarian or moralistic ... criticism of the KLA by its socialist opponents seemed to be premised on the fact that it was opposing 'socialist' Yugoslavia ...

The combustible combination of Hoxhaite Stalinism and Albanian nationalism suggested a certain instability on the part of the KLA, and so it proved. However, it is a little glib of Owen to say that 'their (the KLA's) main backers were initially gangsters from northern Albania who supplied them with arms to ensure that the KLA would fight for their interests'. Support for armed struggle against national oppression by Serbia has always had far deeper roots than that. Much of the financial support came from the Kosovar diaspora in western Europe, principally Germany and Switzerland, assisted by the radio station 'Homeland Calling'. It is certainly true that the mass weapons seizure, which occurred in the Albanian uprising of 1997, ensured a steady stream of ordinance to the KLA guerrillas over the border. Kosova adjoins the north of Albania proper (with which it shares the Gheg dialect of Albanian) which has always been more conservative, not to say reactionary, than the Tosk speaking south. It is in the mountainous north-east that the clan system is still intact. Whether it is the highly regulated system of blood-feuds or the more random LA-style turf-wars which keep a large number of Albanian men indoors is probably academic, but both explain, in part, the character of the present situation in Kosova. What Owen says has some truth, but it is not the whole truth.

Revolutionary Marxists have always had difficulties with national liberation movements. Depending on whether they have decided to support the struggle in question, their attitude can either be positively starry-eyed or unremittingly sectarian or moralistic. The Provisional IRA's fund-raising activities. its rough-and-ready law and order in areas where the 'official' police force is detested, and its killing of innocent Protestants or British civilians, are either invoked to brand it a Catholic-communalist terrorist outfit, or explained away as necessary self-defence or unfortunate

mistakes, depending on the needs of the argument. Much of the criticism of the KLA by its socialist opponents seemed to be premised on the fact that it was opposing 'socialist' Yugoslavia, and would not be made with such vigour against other organisations adopting a broadly similar *modus operandi*.

It can reasonably be objected that in making an alliance with NATO the KLA ceased to be a national liberation movement, properly so-called. However, there is nothing new in this. Such movements have often hidden behind the skirts of one or other great power; look at the history of the Cold War. The problem is that there is now only one great power, thus reducing the range of options. Why did the KLA do this? It was desperate. This is not to justify what the KLA did, simply to explain it. The KLA could not count on international working class solidarity, due to the weakness of the working class in the West, and due to the sympathy for 'socialist' Yugoslavia. Of course, the KLA needed a 'makeover'; hence the eclipse of Adem Demaci, who was for equal rights for the Serb minority in an independent Kosova, and the rise of Adem Ceku. Owen details very thoroughly in his article the result of this makeover on the ground and, as we argue above, the only real winners are the Albanian gangsters and those among the imperialists who advocated military intervention in the Balkans. However, as Owen says, those who today are the allies of imperialism can quickly become its deadly enemies. We do not know exactly how the rage and disappointment of the Kosovars will manifest itself once they realise that they have been used and sold short. Without consistent support and solidarity from workers in the West, Kosovars, including KLA supporters, may continue, however half-heartedly, to regard NATO as their only real friend.

Support from socialists must include the demand that the Kosovars have the right to self-determination. Some have argued that as the KLA are in alliance with NATO there is no point in making this demand now, as there is no-one able to exercise that self-determination. Without putting words into his mouth, this might be Owen's view also, as he argues that the KLA were not in fact fighting for self-determination, and this is possibly why Owen does not make this an immediate demand in his article. But, to repeat the analogy with Ireland, does the fact that Martin McGuinness has the education portfolio in the northern Ireland government, and that the 'Real' IRA is showing that it has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing in 30 years, prevent us from calling for self-determination for the Irish people, free of British interference? The demand is not subject to the mistakes or crimes of nationalist movements, and is certainly not an endorsement of the current policies and practice of the KLA. Albanian and Serb workers could only really be reunited on the basis of a free and equal association: a voluntary socialist federation, which either side would be free to leave. Anything short of that isn't worth fighting for. **WA**

St Nicholas the Bloody

by Richard Price

On August 14, the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, his wife and five children were proclaimed martyrs and saints by the Russian Orthodox Church, 82 years after they were shot by the Bolsheviks.

The canonisation of the man Lenin called Nicholas the Bloody would be laughable if it weren't so disgusting. After all, even compared to the other European monarchies of their time the Romanovs were a special case. They stood aside while famine condemned thousands to starvation, they were deeply implicated in the organisation of pogroms through the Black Hundreds, they led Russia into a disastrous world war, and they stood at the summit of the most oppressive autocracy in Europe.

It should come as no surprise that the deeply reactionary Orthodox Church should want to create a cult around the Romanovs. Nicholas II's body has been reinterred alongside all the Tsars since the early eighteenth century in the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul. Fittingly, the cathedral forms part of the Peter and Paul Fortress, in which many political prisoners of the Tsar were incarcerated. But even in the Orthodox Church the canonisation proved controversial. Moscow theology professor Alexei Osipov spoke out against the decision, arguing that the Tsar 'suffered not for his Christian convictions but as a political figure'. Others found evidence of miracle working – another condition of canonisation – a bit skimpy.

The rehabilitation of the Romanovs was prepared during the last years of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. In 1987, the official publication *Sovetskaya Rossiya* described the execution as 'tragic and inevitable', and claimed it was the work of 'extremists' in the local soviet at Ekaterinburg.

But this was a deliberate misrepresentation of the truth. In his *Diary in Exile, 1935*, Trotsky recalled: 'My next visit to Moscow took place after the fall of Ekaterinburg. Talking to Sverdlov, I asked in passing: "Oh yes, and where is the Tsar?" "It's all over," he answered, "he has been shot." "And where is the family?" "And the family along with him." "All of them?" I asked, apparently with a touch of surprise. "All of them!" replied Sverdlov, "what about it?" He was waiting to see my reaction. I made no reply. "And who made the decision?" I asked. "We decided it here. Ilyich (Lenin) believed that we shouldn't leave the Whites a live banner to rally around, especially under the present difficult circumstances . . ." I did not ask any further questions, and considered the matter closed. Actually, the decision was not only expedient but necessary. The severity of this summary justice showed the world that we would continue to fight on mercilessly, stopping at nothing.' **WA**

Back to Lenin . . . or back to Stalin?

Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: A Leninist Critique by Doug Lorrimer, Resistance Books 1998, 79pp, $A5.95
Reviewed by **Al Richardson**

The inevitable result of the American SWP becoming a propaganda agency of the Cuban state was the reversion of its politics to Stalinism. Obviously, Jack Barnes could not take it all the way back to the high Stalinism of the Yezhov period, which neither Castro nor his Russian patrons would have countenanced, so he hit upon the mid-twenties instead. Let us recall for a minute how this first stage of the Stalinist operation was carried out: to begin with, orchestrated by Zinoviev (who later admitted it), the technique was to comb the past writings of Lenin and Trotsky for quotations, lay them side by side, and by a minute comparison use them to define an orthodoxy, 'Leninism', and a heresy, 'Trotskyism'. As a method of revolutionary thinking, the whole concept of an orthodoxy is, of course, deeply alien to Marxism. But the main aim in extracting these quotations was not to develop Marxism at all, but to prove that Trotsky had 'underestimated' the peasantry in the Russian Revolution, a charge that was later converted into one of outright hostility towards that class.

The Australian Democratic Socialist Party, from which this pamphlet comes, is deeply influenced by the American SWP, and makes a careful use of the same technique. Its declared aim is to deal with 'the misrepresentations of Bolshevik theory and policy made by Trotsky in the 1920s and 30s' (p.8), particularly vis-à-vis the peasantry. Unfortunately, there is far more to both Trotsky and Lenin than the selection of quotations: we also have to take into account global political developments, the movements in their thought, and the context of any given statement within the body of their writings. And this is where such a methodology fails, and was bound to fail.

For example, only two pages later we are told that whereas 'the Mensheviks sought to forge a strategic alliance between the working class and the anti-tsarist "enlightened liberal" elements of the bourgeoisie', the Bolsheviks 'sought to forge a revolutionary alliance between the working class and the peasant masses' (p.10). Unfortunately for this pretty scenario, when the controversy first broke out it was Lenin who was willing to share power with the 'liberal bourgeoisie' and the Mensheviks who charged him with breaking the resolution of the Socialist International about not entering a bourgeois government, passed in the aftermath of the Millerand affair. A hint of this later appears on page 57, where Lorrimer has to admit that Lenin argued for participation in such a government on the basis of the Paris Commune. Unfortunately, to prove his point he also has to describe the Commune as a 'revolutionary-democratic government' (i.e., a bourgeois state) in preference to Marx's formulation of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. As to his attitude to the peasantry at the time, Lenin had just written a whole book to prove that peasant agriculture was being rapidly undermined by the spread of capitalist market relations, now contained in volume three of his *Collected Works*. The quotation our writer adduces to prove the necessity for a worker-peasant alliance in a revolutionary government in fact comes from well *after* 1905, and shows the further *development* of Lenin's thought in the light of his experience of the revolution in that year.

> *. . . the technique was to comb the past writings of Lenin and Trotsky . . . and . . . Use them to define an orthodoxy, 'Leninism', and a heresy, 'Trotskyism'.*

Another two pages on, and Lenin's *Two Tactics* is quoted to prove that 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' is the basis of the coming revolution, these being 'the classes on which the new "builders" of the new superstructure can and must rely'. Further quotations are adduced from before 1914 to claim that these two classes made up the 'superstructure' (i.e., state) erected by Bolshevik power in 1917. But anyone who has read only a few pages of *State and Revolution* will immediately grasp the obvious point that by the time of the 1917 Revolution Lenin had abandoned the notion that two classes can share the rule in one state, which he had still been arguing as late as 1909 (p.55). And the fact that our writer repeatedly describes the Bolshevik state as 'an alliance of the workers and peasants' (p.39; cf pp.35, 59, 64, etc.) shows that he has yet to learn this fundamental proposition of Marxism.

Speaking of Lenin's controversy with Trotsky before 1917, we are then told that 'the Bolsheviks projected a line of march that was necessary for the working class to take and hold power in Russia' (p.19). But all Lenin's writings up to the First World War show that he still believed that the next stage of development in Russia was a *bourgeois* revolution, and that the country still had a *long period* of capitalist development before it. That is why his *April Theses* caused such a profound shock to the Bolsheviks, since he was flatly contradicting official policy and all he had so far taught them. Without this, Lenin's argument with Stalin and Kamenev in February/March 1917, which Lorrimer regards as a mere

tactical matter (p.73), is completely inexplicable. And indeed, there is considerable evidence that Lenin still believed in capitalist development for a long time *after* the Bolshevik seizure of power.[1] In this context the formulation of a 'Bolshevik policy of a two-stage uninterrupted revolution' (p.32) is a fiction of the writer's imagination, for when Lenin used the word 'uninterrupted' it is clear that he was using it in exactly the same sense as Marx: that the struggle for the Socialist revolution must carry on immediately after the triumph of the bourgeoisie, however long it might take to succeed.

And because the exercise depends so heavily upon quotation-mongering, both Lenin and Trotsky are taken at their every word when they use arguments to justify policies in popular language that they did not defend in formal theoretical analyses. For example, the context of the remarks quoted from Lenin's *Letters on Tactics* of 1917 on page 34 is obviously an *ad hominem* argument to justify his unexpected change of policy from 'a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' (i.e., a bourgeois government) to one of a soviet seizure of power. Similarly, the application of the formula of 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' to China in the 1927 *Platform of the Joint Opposition* (pp.6-7) is used to argue against its rejection by Trotsky later. But we know that this section of the *Platform* was written by Zinoviev, and that Trotsky himself regarded it as insufficient, incomplete and positively false.[2]

Having restricted the bourgeois component of the democratic dictatorship to the peasantry (p.70), and failing to remember that Marx regarded the peasant mentality as 'a sack of potatoes', our writer then has to make a determined assault upon history (pp.26-27) by arguing that it proved possible for the Russian peasantry to set up 'a powerful revolutionary peasant party – the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party' (p.27), even described as 'the left-wing majority' (p.63). The merest glance at the election figures for the Constituent Assembly should have put him right on this score, apart from the Left SRs' slim and temporary representation in the Bolshevik government (which, by the way, Lenin opposed). For Trotsky's argument held true – and still holds true, even where peasants are led by Stalinists – that peasant parties are invariably organised by other strata, whose interests are reflected quite as much as their own, if not more so. For example, this is what really happened during the Third Chinese Revolution, described by Lorrimer as 'a dictatorship of the proletariat "drawing behind it the poor peasants"' (p.58). We might well argue exactly what these other strata were, but anyone who can describe Chinese Stalinism in any way as 'proletarian' should put a tighter rein on his imagination. And imagination is what it really is, for this vigorous defence of an unviable and rapidly disappearing peasant class comes to us from Australia, a country that never had one.

And because the author is so anxious to restrict the bourgeois content of the Bolshevik revolution to the land question, he has to neglect all its other aspects (political democracy, the destruction of clerical power, etc), including what Lenin himself regarded as the most important for the future – the expansion of heavy industry by the methods of 'state capitalism'. For there is far more than the peasant question involved in his basic definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in *State and Revolution* as 'a bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie'. Lorrimer is unfortunately unaware of these further propositions of Leninism, since his description of the organisation of the Chinese economy in 1949-53 makes it clear that he regards the dictatorship of the proletariat as synonymous with the state ownership of industry (pp.59-60). He obviously feels a bit uncomfortable here, since he admits that 80 per cent of China's capital assets were already nationalised under Chiang Kai-shek. And if he follows his formalistic logic to its final conclusion, he also has to accept that the USSR only became a complete dictatorship of the proletariat when Stalin went on to generalise wage labour and annihilate the peasantry in 1928-32.

Perhaps it is just as well that our writer does not have Stalin's means to make this further link between theory and practice. ■

NOTES

1. Cf, Ed., A. Richardson, *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: A Selection of Bolshevik Writings 1917-23*, Porcupine Press, 1995, pp.viii-ix.
2. L. Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin*, New Park, 1974, pp.97, 137ff.

Hooray for Hollywood?

Easy Riders, Raging Bulls by Peter Biskind, Bloomsbury 1999, 506pp, £8.99
Reviewed by **Richard Price**

Something very strange happened in Hollywood in the late 60s. The dream factory, which for nearly two decades after McCarthy had pumped out little but glossy propaganda for corporate America, found itself totally out of sync with the emerging youth rebellion and counter culture. In desperation the studios turned to youth. A group of young directors, some of them barely out of film school, swept the studio system aside and for just over a decade went on to produce a body of work unrivalled in the history of US film making. By 1980, with the arrival of Reagan in the White House, the radicalism of New Hollywood had burnt itself out, with the key players opting for the main stream, running out of ideas or backers, or ending up physical and emotional wrecks.

Early on in his book, Peter Biskind flags up his enthusiasm for this tumultuous period: 'The thirteen years between *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 and *Heaven's Gate* in 1980 marked the last time it was really exciting to make movies in Hollywood, the last time people could be consistently proud of the pictures they made, the last time the community as a whole encouraged good work, the last time there was an audience that could sustain it.' (p.17) For all that has been written about the end of the 60s being symbolised by the Manson 'family' murders and Altamont in 1969, as far as film went, the passing of that era's more utopian nonsense was good news. 1969 marked not an end but a beginning, with most of the best films made between 1971 and 1976.

It is certainly hard to think of any other period that has thrown up such a range of consistently interesting films. Compared to Hollywood's appalling output today, the 1970s produced so many films noteworthy for their innovative direction, subject matter, acting and technique, that a list of some of the highpoints can only scratch the surface: *The French Connection*, *The Last Picture Show*, *The Godfather* Parts I and II, *The Conversation*, *The Last Detail*, *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *Badlands*, *Annie Hall*, *Night Moves*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Chinatown*, *Nashville*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and many more.

Easy Riders, Raging Bulls is a collective biography of the period, focussing on a number of its key figures – among them, Hal Ashby, Warren Beatty, Peter Bogdanovich, Francis Coppola, William Friedkin, George Lucas, Bob Rafelson, Bert Schneider, Paul Schrader, Martin Scorcese, Steven Spielberg and Robert Towne.

But instead of a high flown treatise on cinematic art, Biskind gives us New Hollywood warts and all. Not for nothing is the book subtitled 'How the sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll generation saved Hollywood', and in the acknowledgements he thanks one person 'for teaching me the importance of the *National Enquirer*'!! But neither is the book is just an updated *Hollywood Babylon*: the author writes with a wealth of knowledge, and not without justice clearly thinks that the generation's achievements and problems cannot be divorced from its legendary excesses.

At the 1975 Oscar ceremony Schneider stunned the audience by, instead of delivering an acceptance speech, bringing greetings from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam.

The French New Wave of Godard and Truffaut heavily influenced New Hollywood, and the new generation of directors saw themselves as the next *auteurs*. They venerated very few American directors. One was Orson Welles: 'the wreckage of his career was regarded with horror and indignation as the most egregious example of how the town destroyed the *auteur*'. (p.57) The elevation of directors from hired hands to all-powerful dictators inflated their egos no end. But it produced films of an entirely new quality. They became character-driven, rather than plot-driven, often with a loose, improvised feel which enabled actors to realise their full potential. Moralising was replaced by moral ambiguity, heroes by anti-heroes and social outlaws. Set pieces were abandoned in favour of a smaller scale, more personal style, which often used jump cuts and hand-held effects. Production values had been turned on their head.

Wade through the sex and drugs – there's plenty of both – and this book has some genuinely acute observations. Beginning with *Bonnie and Clyde*, Biskind has a strong line in reading movie sub-texts: 'If the Bond films legitimized government violence, and the Leone movies legitimized vigilante violence, *Bonnie and Clyde* legitimized violence against the establishment, the same violence that seethed in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of frustrated opponents of the Vietnam War.' (p.49) *Easy Rider* touched a similar nerve: 'Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider* portrayed rebels, outlaws, and, by extension, the counterculture as a whole, as victims; they were extinguished by the straight world, by LBJ, by Richard Nixon's silent majority or their surrogates.' (p.74) *M*A*S*H*, 'despite the fact that it was set in the Korean War ... was perceived as a slap at US involvement in Vietnam'. (p.97) *The Godfather* demonstrated that 'the American dream has failed, the melting

pot is an illusion, and the ethnic poor are trapped at the bottom of an unjust system. The Mafia provides what the government does not: simple justice, and a version of welfare for the underclass, an Old World system of values that cushions the shock of capitalism.' (p.164) Of *Star Wars*, he writes: 'It benefited from the retrenchment of the Carter years, the march to the centre that followed the end of the Vietnam War ... Lucas and Spielberg returned the '70s audience, grown sophisticated on a diet of European and New Hollywood films, to the simplicities of the pre-'60s Golden Age of movies ... They marched backwards through the looking glass, producing pictures that were the mirror opposite of their peers.' (pp.341-4) *Raging Bull*, released in 1980, was a film out of its time, 'very much a beached whale on the shores of the new decade. It was an actor's movie, a film that valued character over plot, that indeed contained no one to "root for".' (p.399)

Much of the radicalism of New Hollywood was to do with a general reflection of the times on the one hand, and a question of technique on the other, rather than conscious political radicalism. The generation that included Martin Scorcese was, according to Biskind, 'culturally and emotionally sandbagged by the '50s'; it was 'a bomb waiting to go off'. (p.234) But these were also mostly rich middle class baby boomers for whom principles would rarely be allowed to stand in the way of success. We learn that at Francis Coppola's Zoetrope company, 'some of the employees tried to unionize. Coppola was not sympathetic' (p.93); that, although Warren Beatty made *Reds*, he 'is said to have induced [Robert] Towne to work on the script of *The Parallax View* during the writers' strike in the spring of 1973'. (p.107)

Here and there, there was some evidence of a political background. Hal Ashby had been involved in the civil rights movement, supported striking farm workers, and was strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam. Martin Scorcese came from a family of 'hardworking union people' (p.227), while actor Richard Dreyfuss had been a conscientious objector, and friend of Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman. (p.271) In contrast, Peter Bogdanovich (whose one great movie, *The Last Picture Show*, must have been an aberration) 'relished invitations to the White House, didn't mind a bit that it was Nixon doing the inviting'. (p.209) Steven Spielberg 'had no interest in anything but movies, not art, books, music, politics'. He was 'absolutely a part of the system without even a second thought, not a drop of rebellion in him'. (pp.257-8)

The most interesting character politically out of the group seems to have been the producer Bert Schneider. Despite coming from a wealthy background and being older than most of the directors around him, Schneider took his radical chic fairly seriously. He gave large amounts of money to the Black Panthers, donating $300,000 on one occasion to fund a conference they organised. Here was a man whose chequebook was always open: 'He would walk into Panther headquarters in Oakland and write a cheque for $100,000 without blinking an eye.' (p.186) Schneider was close friends with Black Panther leader Huey Newton, with whom he shared not only political lines but also large amounts of cocaine. Schneider organised Newton's escape from the US, where he faced murder charges, to a property Schneider had acquired in Mexico in 1968, when he thought Nixon was the advance guard of fascism. At the 1975 Oscar ceremony Schneider stunned the audience by, instead of delivering an acceptance speech, bringing greetings from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam.

'If the Bond films legitimized government violence, and the Leone movies legitimized vigilante violence, Bonnie and Clyde legitimized violence against the establishment ...'

Lacking firm foundations, Hollywood's middle class radicalism in the 70s was always likely to be domesticated by the sheer scale of the financial rewards. These days, box office success and artistic value seem to operate in inverse proportions, but the 70s was one of few periods in which many of the best films were also among the highest grossing. With directors now receiving percentage points of the box office takings, villas, ranches, estates, private jets and even studios were within reach of a director with a couple of big hits under his belt. For the first time, 'you could get high, express yourself, and make money all at the same time' (p.75) By 1974-5, takings were their highest since the exceptional year of 1946, and with them rose directorial megalomania. As he was leaving his own modest sized skyscraper on the way to location shooting for *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola is supposed to have shouted 'Someday I won't just own this ... but I'll own you too', pointing at Transamerica's headquarters. To be fair, throughout the making of *Apocalypse Now* he seems to have acted as if he already did, along with a good slice of south-east Asia, so legendary were the excesses.

With the money came cocaine in huge quantities – all the more amazing given its price has barely risen in a quarter of a century. Where it initially raised self-confidence, regular, sustained use induced paranoia, overconfidence, and the collapse of critical reason, and the snowdrift of white powder destroyed many Hollywood careers.

Having always disliked *Easy Rider*, it was also with some relish that I read that one of its screenwriters, Terry Southern, admitted to some very confused and reactionary thoughts at the core of the film. The purpose of the last scene, he thought, was as 'an indictment of blue-collar America, the people I thought were responsible for the Vietnam War'. (p.68)

Biskind should be congratulated for not falling in with the strenuous attempts in recent years to rehabilitate Dennis Hopper as some kind of lost genius, and for playing down the artistic merit of *Easy Rider*. Hopper comes across as crazy, dangerous, paranoid and offensive in roughly equal proportions,

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Hooray for Hollywood?

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incompetent as a director, and with a nasty line in domestic violence. You almost cheer when you read the account of the premiere of Hopper's epic turkey, *The Last Movie*, at which a young woman asks Hopper politely if he directed the film. 'He said, "Yes". He was being very flirtatious, very charming. She hauled back and popped him from about six inches away, right in the nose. Blood started streaming out and she started screaming at him, "You sexist fucking pig!"' (p.135)

New Hollywood's version of the sexual revolution sounds close to the old feminist joke about how women in the '60s exchanged being exploited by one man for being exploited by several. Thinly veiled prostitution, trophy wives and the traditional casting couch all had a role to play. Sexually liberated and sexist seem to have been almost synonyms, from Warren Beatty appointing an assistant by asking her to raise her skirt (p.49), to *Exorcist* director, William Friedkin screaming and frothing at the mouth, demanding his partner has an abortion. (p.222) And, of course, the directors were all men.

So, whatever happened to the 70s? By the end of the decade, reaction had set in, and the new wave of directors had either jumped aboard, or been pushed aside. The Vietnam War and Nixon had provided a focus for radical opposition but the Carter administration seemed like an anti-climax. New Hollywood was in one sense the victim of its own innovation and success. Having covered so much ground in such a short time, it suddenly ran out of ideas in an environment that was no longer favourable. The youth rebellion that had sustained Hollywood's most radical phase had fizzled out. With the accession of Reagan in 1980 the Cold War was ratcheted up and the moral shutters came down.

Easy Riders, Raging Bulls is compelling entertainment, even if a bit more social context and a bit less gossip would have made a better book. But if it does nothing more than encourage people to discover the world before *Rocky*, *Rambo*, *Die Hard*, *Robocop* and *Terminator*, it will have done a good job. **WA**

Trotsky, strategy and hegemony

by Jonathan Joseph

The theory of hegemony is most closely associated with the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. The central argument is that the dominant position of the ruling group is not simply given by the economic order but has to be constructed and maintained. Although Gramsci admits the importance of economic factors, he maintains that political, cultural and ideological factors must also be taken into consideration. The dominant group must put itself forward as leading in all areas of society.

Gramsci's theory emphasises that for hegemonic order to be successful, coercion must be balanced with consent. The masses must accept the attitudes, values and beliefs of the dominant group as their own – through the various institutions and practices present in civil society. This is in contrast to those Marxists who see the leading role of the capitalist class simply as a reflection of its dominant economic position backed up by the coercive force of the state ('an armed body of men'). Gramsci argues that the ruling group has far more subtle methods for achieving consent based on such things as the legitimacy of political parties, the soundness of 'common sense' belief, cultural practices, norms and values, regulated work practices, corporatist consciousness and so on.

East and West: strategy and tactics

This civic hegemony runs deep and provides the most powerful form of defence against an attempted challenge to the system. Gramsci emphasises the importance of hegemony in civil society when comparing the situation in Russia, where a revolution had overthrown the state, to the situation in Western Europe where bourgeois society was more sturdy and resilient:

> 'In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks . . .'[1]

If this is to be taken into consideration, then an assessment of strategy and tactics is necessary. For Gramsci there are two types of movement: the war of manoeuvre and the war of position. A war of manoeuvre means a head-on confrontation with the state such as occurred in Russia when the Bolsheviks took power. His argument is that in Russia the undeveloped nature of civil society meant that a frontal assault on the state was always going to stand a chance of success. However, in the West, the complex defences of fortresses and earthworks of civil society mean that a longer, more drawn out and more tactical confrontation is necessary. This is not to say that an attack on the state should be indefinitely postponed as the Eurocommunists have interpreted Gramsci as saying. Only that it must be prepared for by a struggle within civil society based on the construction of a counter-hegemonic bloc that can draw together various diverse elements through a unifying project.

It is usually argued that Gramsci rejected such an approach. The Trotskyists themselves often claim this in order to preserve their ideological purity, rubbishing the idea of more tactical and strategic considerations as selling out to Eurocommunism and reformism. Gramsci also criticises Trotsky for ignoring the question of hegemony within civil society and favouring fron-

tal offensives against a war of positions.[2] The purpose of this article is to challenge these suggestions by suggesting that Trotsky's writings contain an implicit, if underdeveloped, notion of hegemony.

If we start with the question of differences between the East and the West we find that Trotsky's position is in full accordance with Gramsci's. Contrary to what Gramsci claims, Trotsky recognises that the possibility of a frontal attack on the Russian state is due to the particular conditions of uneven and combined development. In the West, as Trotsky states time and time again, a more careful war of positions must take place. It is, therefore,

> '. . . necessary to understand that it will not be possible to overthrow the bourgeoisie automatically, mechanically, merely because it is condemned by history. On the highly complex field of political struggle we find, on the one side, the bourgeoisie with its forces and resources and, on the opposing side, the working class with its various layers, moods, levels of development, with its Communist Party struggling against other parties and organisations for influence over the working masses. In this struggle the Communist Party . . . has to manoeuvre, now attacking, now retreating, always consolidating its influence, conquering new positions until the favourable moment arrives for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.'[3]

This does not sound at all like the advocacy of a straightforward frontal assault. And even if power is to be taken, this does not eradicate the problem of building up a lasting base of support within civil society:

> 'The ease with which we conquered power on November 7, 1917, was paid for by the countless sacrifices of the Civil War. In countries that are older in the capitalist sense, and with a higher culture, the situation will, without doubt, differ profoundly. In these countries the popular masses will enter the revolution far more fully formed in political respects.'[4]

Trotsky repeatedly makes the point that an underdeveloped civil society makes the capture of state power easier. However, it also makes the maintenance of state power more difficult. The proletariat will have to slowly extend its hegemony through the development of a stronger civil base. In the West, on the other hand, the proletariat faces a more difficult initial struggle for power; it will find it more difficult to build up its bases in civil society. However,

> '. . . after the conquest of power, the European proletariat will in all likelihood have far more elbow room for its creative work in economy and culture than we had in Russia on the day after the overturn. The more difficult and gruelling the struggle for state power, all the less possible will it be to challenge the proletariat's power after the victory.'[5]

In such statements we can see that Trotsky clearly does make a distinction between conditions in the East and conditions in the West. In what follows we will examine this distinction, starting with Trotsky's writings on the East and his dynamic conception of historical development.

Uneven and combined development

For Trotsky uneven and combined development is an objective process. It is a phenomenon of the more backward nations which are subjected to a peculiar combination of different stages of the historical process. Under pressure from external influences these countries are forced to modernise and develop capitalist features, to take up new forms of economic production and social organisation. This leads to a strengthening of the working class. However, this is combined with a backwardness of culture and a strong agrarian base. This gives the country's development an uneven character.

The bourgeoisie is in a weak and compromised position. It is almost entirely dependent on foreign capital and investment. It thus lacks strong national roots and contains a significant comprador section. Consequently, it cannot command much of a social base of support and is overly reliant on the state. It is unable to play a hegemonising role due to its inability to give national and democratic leadership.

> 'Living historic societies are inharmonious through and through, and the more so the more delayed their development. The fact that in a backward country like Russia the bourgeoisie had decayed before the complete victory of the bourgeois regime, and that there was nobody but the proletariat to replace it in the position of national leadership, was an expression of this inharmony.'[6]

From these features of uneven and combined development Trotsky develops the theory of permanent revolution. Objective conditions prevent the bourgeoisie from playing a leading role. It is incapable of uniting the nation around a set of national and democratic demands. It is caught between the peasantry, the feudal aristocracy, foreign capital and the developing working class.

From this analysis Trotsky develops an understanding of hegemony and the historical tasks of the working class. The bourgeoisie is unable to carry through the tasks of the democratic revolution. The peasantry, despite forming the majority of the population, is incapable of playing any kind of independent role. The rest of the petit bourgeoisie is similarly incapable of economic and political independence and is subject to deep internal division. Given that the bourgeoisie is unable to accomplish its national-democratic tasks, it is necessary that the proletariat hegemonises the masses under its own leadership. By doing so it takes the struggle beyond the limits of the specific democratic demands. The peculiarities of uneven and combined development and the dynamic of permanent revolution give the working class an *objectively* revolutionary role.

This should not, however, tempt us into committing the error of objectivism. There is no 'objective' guarantee for the fate of permanent revolution. It is founded on the specific objective conditions of uneven and combined development. But this should not lead to us giving the process of permanent revolution a mechanical and purely objective character. Although it is founded on objective possibilities, its success depends on subjective factors of leadership and proletarian hegemony. The working class must be able to success-

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fully construct and maintain its alliances and to resolve the problems being faced by the peasantry. Permanent revolution must therefore be seen as a *historical possibility*. The potential for working class leadership is founded on what objective material conditions exist. These conditions have to exist if working class hegemony is to be possible. Thus hegemony is given a very specific historical role and clear material limits.

Trotsky's theory represents an important break from idealist and mechanical influences. 'The laws of history,' he writes, 'have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism.'[7] History does not have to go through a series of pre-ordained stages. In Russia, it was not only possible, but necessary, to fight for the proletarian rather than the bourgeois revolution. Although we have criticised Trotsky and his followers for productive forces determinism (principally in his schematic views on the development of the world economy and Western societies which are criticised in Workers Action Nos.6 and 7), it is also possible to find in his best writing a rejection of such views:

> 'But the day and the hour when power will pass into the hands of the working class depends directly not upon the level attained by the productive forces but upon relations in the class struggle, upon the international situation, and, finally, upon a number of subjective factors: the traditions, the initiative and the readiness to fight of the workers.'[8]

This is what makes possible a meaningful theory of hegemony. History is not pre-determined and certain, but is about the objective conditions of *possibility*. History does not pass mechanically from one period to another, but combines different, often opposing, elements. In Russia these conditions seriously constrained the ability of the bourgeoisie to play a leading and dominant role. Its hegemony could be challenged by the working class due to the peculiar historical conditions.

Trotsky . . . starts from the objective situation and the position of the ruling class and then proceeds to outline the necessary strategy. In Spain, the immediate task for communists is not the struggle for power itself, but the 'struggle for the masses'. Here is a clear case of hegemony being a pre-requisite for revolution.

The Soviet bureaucracy

Trotsky notes that the problem of the bureaucratic degeneration of a workers' state had not really entered into the heads of many Marxist theorists. Marx, for example, had not reckoned with a revolution in a backward country and Lenin could not have foreseen such a prolonged isolation of the Soviet state. The Soviet state, nevertheless, was gripped by a bureaucratically parasitic caste, a symptom of material want, cultural backwardness and the dominance of 'bourgeois law'.[9]

Therefore, the force behind the Soviet bureaucracy is not Stalin or any other figure but the conditions of social and material isolation, of scarcity in objects of consumption, of unproductive labour, of civil war and foreign intervention. Stalin arose as a Bonaparte, rising above a politically atomised society, a personification of social and material degeneration.

Rather than reducing history to leaders and events, Trotsky bases his analysis on material laws and processes. The Bolsheviks had themselves come to power 'not through the personal superiority of their leaders, but through a new correlation of social forces'.[10] However, they came to power within definite material conditions, those of economic and cultural backwardness. Without the spread of the revolution abroad, these social conditions would catch up with them. As Trotsky puts it, 'the most powerful locomotive cannot perform miracles. It cannot change the laws of space, and can only accelerate movement'.[11]

In particular Trotsky links the rise of bureaucracy to 'the heterogeneity of society, the difference between the daily and the fundamental interests of various groups of the population'.[12] So bureaucracy arises because of a lack of hegemony in society. This turn is presupposed by basic material forces. As a result, it is not possible to truly reconcile the different interests of the various groups. The bureaucracy therefore rises above society imposing its own rule through the political apparatus. This rule is based on the defence of privilege. However, it is not class rule and has no independent economic role or property rights. Rather, the bureaucracy feeds off the working class in parasitic fashion.

The overthrow of this bureaucracy required a political rather than a social revolution. Trotsky is thus able to sufficiently distinguish between the exercise of power by a hegemonic group and the material basis of society. The Soviet Union is defined as a degenerated workers' state according to the material basis of that state rather than its leadership, whose own degeneration is a product of these material factors.

Writings on the West

It is clear from an analysis of Trotsky's writings on Russia and China that the Eastern states are not to be dealt with by straightforward frontal attack. The peculiar objective conditions and the weakness of bourgeois hegemony give the working class particular possibilities. However, taking state power is still a complicated tactical affair. The 'division' between East and West should not be seen as a division between wars of manoeuvre and position. It should be seen in terms of different objective conditions, different levels of historical development, and specific hegemonic relations. These vary from one state to another. Tactics, therefore, must be assessed in relation to the particular

situation, whether in the East or the West.

Trotsky's writings on Britain represent an analysis of a particularly stable and hegemonic situation, which, nevertheless, is beginning to fall into decline. The working class is potentially very strong. Its consent is therefore vital to the ruling class. Trotsky notes that 'the organisational unity of the working class has long existed in England'. Unfortunately this unity has been achieved through 'the political unity of the working class with the imperialist bourgeoisie'.[13]

Central to this analysis therefore is the role played by social democracy in relation to the interests of the ruling class and the struggles of the working class. A party such as the Labour Party is a workers' party by virtue of its base in the working class and its relation to the trades unions. Its politics however, are those of class compromise evolving in the direction of almost complete subordination. The interests of the social democratic leaders are tied to the capitalist state and the bourgeois nation. Through the complicity of social democracy the bourgeoisie is able to build a historical bloc which incorporates the labour bureaucracy as subordinate allies of the ruling class. The British state rests on the back of the working class through the intermediacy of this bureaucracy.[14]

With such an entrenched bourgeoisie, revolutionary tactics require patience and serious preparation. The most important task is to expose the labour bureaucrats in the eyes of the masses by revealing their subordination to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. This is best done through the tactic of the united front which seeks to put the bureaucrats on the spot and force them to choose sides. The united front can mobilise the masses while highlighting the weakness of their leaders. It is part of a wider strategy to win their base away from them.

There is no doubt that Trotsky's analysis has its schematic side. Britain is an economically advanced society, providing a firmer base for the superstructural forms of civil society which the ruling class uses to secure consent through ideological means. Trotsky combines a degree of economic determinism with what might be called an instrumentalist conception of class rule - i.e., one that conceives of politics and the state as simply tools at the disposal of the ruling class which can be used when necessary. The schematism involved in such deterministic and instrumental views leads, at its worst moment, to some wayward predictions about the coming British revolution based on selected empirical evidence mainly centred on various political crises. (For example, his over optimistic view of the 1926 General Strike where it is believed that the British proletariat, like a leaping lion, will burst out of its ideological shackles, is based on an underestimation of the hegemonic grip of reformist, labourite and gradualist ideology.)[15]

The fact that a crisis like this did not lead to a revolutionary situation is often attributed solely to the crisis of working class leadership. The failure of a revolutionary situation to materialise is a result of the treachery of the social democratic leaders. This ignores the real material forces, the ideological and political structures which, among other things, determine the role of the social democrats. In these instances, Trotsky's account of hegemony assumes a shallower, surface role defined as the way that classes organise. When this organisation is seen to be in crisis, Trotsky sometimes mistakenly sees this as a crisis of the whole system. He fails to see that bourgeois hegemony has a deeper, more material basis inscribed into the institutions of civil society and the structures of social life, securing the cohesion of society as a whole. Hegemony is seen as an instrumental tool at the disposal of the ruling class rather than as an organic part of society itself. This is down to the rather crude nature of the base-superstructure metaphor that all 'classical Marxists' were forced to adopt. Nevertheless, Trotsky begins to question this schema by shifting its emphasis, so that,

> '. . . the question itself boils down to the inter-relation between the basis and the superstructure and to the inter-relation of bases and superstructures of different countries one with another. We know that superstructures – state, law, politics, parties and so on – arise on an economic basis, are nourished and determined by this basis. Consequently, basis and superstructure have to correspond. And this happens in fact, only not simply but in a very complicated way. A powerful development of one superstructure (the bourgeois state, bourgeois parties, bourgeois culture) sometimes holds back for a long time the development of other superstructures (the revolutionary proletarian party), but in the last analysis – in the *last* analysis, not immediately – the basis reveals itself nevertheless as the decisive force.'[16]

Further, Trotsky's method at least allows for a concept of hegemony, which is more than most deterministic analyses do. Although this needs to be given a firmer basis, Trotsky is able to pick out the main features of a hegemonic crisis. The problem of historical leadership has a particular importance regarding the petit bourgeoisie, the class historically caught between the two main classes and which looks to them for leadership. On the situation in France, Trotsky writes that:

> 'The political crisis of the country is above all a collapse of the confidence of the petit bourgeois masses in their traditional parties and leaders. *The discontent, the nervousness, the instability, the fluidity of the petit bourgeoisie* are extremely important characteristics of a pre-revolutionary situation.'[17]

The position of the petit bourgeoisie was crucial to Trotsky's analysis of fascism in Germany and Spain. The failure of the working class to exert leadership over this layer would result in the petit bourgeoisie becoming the focus of reaction.

On Spain, Trotsky's subject matter is similar to Gramsci's Italy. In particular, Spain was an example of a weak bourgeoisie unable to provide national leadership and offer itself as a hegemonising force. In contrast to the hegemonic position of the British bourgeoisie,

> 'The history of Spain is the history of continual revolutionary convulsions . . . The petty rivalry of the juntas was only the outward expres-

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> sion of the Spanish revolutions' lack of a leading class. Precisely because of this, the monarchy triumphed over each new revolution. A short time after the triumph of order, however, the chronic crisis once more broke through. Not one of the many regimes that supplanted each other sank deep enough roots into the soil.'[18]

As in Italy, the left wing of the bourgeoisie, led by young intellectuals, set itself the task of converting Spain into a republic. Catholicism led the reaction against this. The bourgeoisie was too young and too weak to remove the influence of the old aristocratic order. Hence 'the cracks and gaps of bourgeois society are filled in Spain with declassed elements of the ruling classes, the numerous seekers of positions and income'.[19] In keeping with this slum leadership, at the bottom of society are slum proletarians and declassed workers.

According to Trotsky, the Spanish bourgeoisie cannot play the historic role associated with the French and British bourgeoisies. It appeared late on the scene and as a consequence is dependent on foreign capital and is unable to establish for itself a sufficient social base. Its dependence on foreign capital and domestic feudal interests deprives it of independence. The big bourgeoisie is objectively unable to come forward as a leader of the nation.[20]

Trotsky does not, therefore, start from the tasks of the working class. He starts from the objective situation and the position of the ruling class and then proceeds to outline the necessary strategy. In Spain, the immediate task for the communists is not the struggle for power itself, but the 'struggle for the masses'.[21] Here is a clear case of hegemony being a pre-requisite for revolution. Revolutionaries must avoid any 'premature attempts at decisive battle'.[22]

The struggle against fascism in Germany

Trotsky wrote that the emergence of fascism in Germany was due to a combination of a number of factors. Underlying everything was a deep structural crisis along national and economic lines. There was a crisis of the ruling bloc while the working class was also beset by internal differences. As a consequence, the petit bourgeoisie was given an elevated importance.

The petit bourgeoisie is usually little more than a supporting class. It does not have the social basis or the forms of organisation necessary to mount a challenge to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. In particular, 'the petit bourgeoisie is *characterised by the extreme heterogeneity of its social nature*. At the bottom it fuses with the proletariat and extends into the lumpenproletariat; on top it passes over into the capitalist bourgeoisie'.[23] It leans on various forms of production while lacking collectivity.

However, despite this compromised position, the petit bourgeoisie is of immense importance to the functioning of the system:

> 'The economically powerful big bourgeoisie, in itself, constitutes an infinitesimal minority of the nation. To enforce its domination, it must ensure a definite mutual relationship with the petit bourgeoisie and, through its mediation, with the proletariat.'[24]

In other words, while the big bourgeoisie may enjoy economic power, this is useless unless it can put together a political alliance which gets other classes to support its interests.

Trotsky is concerned with the moribund nature of social democracy. For him, social democracy or reformism is characteristic of petit bourgeois influences within the workers' movement. Thus, although it has a working class base, the direction of social democracy is founded on the material privileges of the labour aristocracy and on the narrow, sectoral influences of the bureaucrats and trade union leaders. It constitutes a political and ideological defence of these strata.

Because of its relation to the capitalist state and its adaptation to parliamentary democracy, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) becomes increasingly tied to the interests of the system and hence to its failures. Economic crisis in turn leads to a political or hegemonic crisis in which all of the major political parties are discredited. Despite playing a subordinate role in the ruling alliance, the SPD also suffers from the crisis of leadership. And because of the SPD's relationship with the working class, the workers too face a crisis of their own leadership.

Thus fascism arises as a mass movement as a result of a deep structural crisis which is reflected at a political level in the futility of parliamentary rule. Each of the traditional political parties suffers from a failure to give leadership. The ruling class maintains control at the economic level, but in the political sphere it suffers a crisis of political representation of these interests. The working class organisations, in part due to their compromises with a system in decay, also fail to take control of the situation. Fascism assumes a *political* significance due to this paralysis on both sides of the class struggle. *However, it assumes this significance within the context of the ruling class maintaining economic power.*

The fascist programme is a product of the frustration of the petit bourgeoisie with the social and economic order. However, the fact that fascism can only come to power with the support of the bourgeoisie means that this programme, as a programme aspiring to political independence, can never be implemented as initially intended. The fascist programme of the petit bourgeoisie becomes increasingly torn away from reality and is reduced to ritualistic acts.

Consequently, Trotsky draws the conclusion that: 'Fascism is a specific means of mobilising and organising the petit bourgeoisie in the social interests of finance capital.'[25] However, this mobilisation of the petit bourgeoisie is a dangerous matter. The social demagogy of fascism is of danger to bourgeois interests. The bourgeoisie does not therefore willingly turn to fascism. Rather, fascist rule is a last ditch attempt by the bourgeoisie to maintain power over the working class when all other means have failed. Consequently fascism evolves out of the failure of the parliamentary system and the paralysis of social democracy.

But while Trotsky has the correct

starting point – the structural crisis and the consequent crisis of social hegemony – his explanation of the role that fascism plays is again increasingly an instrumentalist one, treating it as a tool at the disposal of the ruling class. Fascism, therefore, is the means by which monopoly capital mobilises the petit bourgeoisie and the declassed layers against the organised working class. It attacks the parliamentary system, acts as a battering ram and is used by the bourgeoisie to annihilate the organisations of the working class once traditional methods have failed. Once in power, the interests of finance capital predominate and a bonapartist regime takes over.[26]

This analysis is one sided if the 'battering ram' theory is allowed to predominate. The ruling class does not simply take up fascism and decide to use it against the working class. It is certainly true that under certain conditions the ruling class turns to fascism in despair, promoting it and financing it. This makes fascism's path to power the easier. But fascism has its own dynamics which grow out of the structural crisis.

A crisis of the political system – of political parties, values and beliefs – reflects a deeper structural crisis. Fascism is not simply a battering ram to be used by the bourgeoisie in such situations – it is itself a product of this crisis. Fascism is not simply an instrument to be used in crisis, its growth is a structural feature of the crisis itself and as such cannot be separated from it. The growth of fascism is not attributable to a hegemonic crisis at the surface level of political representation. Fascism grows out of a deeper material crisis although it manifests itself at the political and ideological level. Trotsky is right, therefore, to relate the growth of fascism to economic crisis and structural dislocation. It is only in this context that we should allow ourselves to talk of fascism as a battering ram.

Social stratification

By emphasising the structural and hegemonic features of Trotsky's writing, a more satisfactory reading can be achieved. Certainly it is necessary to emphasise the stratified or layered character of social reality and class relations. From this is it possible to understand the importance of achieving a social hegemony and the strategies employed by each class:

> 'The class itself is not homogeneous. Its different sections arrive at class consciousness by different paths and at different times. The bourgeoisie participates actively in this process. Within the working class, it creates its own institutions, or utilises those already existing, in order to oppose certain strata of workers to others. Within the proletariat several parties are active at the same time. Therefore, for the greater part of its historical journey, it remains split politically. The problem of the united front – which arises during certain periods most sharply – originates therein.'[27]

Objective divisions exist independently of any particular conscious class project. However, the particular nature of the dominant social relations allows for certain groups to become dominant and to construct their own hegemony out of these divisions, while undermining attempts at a counter-hegemony. Then such social divisions can be made use of for class purposes. Hegemony, given this objective casting, is about securing cohesion of one's own side and of emphasising the divisions of one's opponent within the context of definite material relations. In this context, Trotsky's emphasis makes sense when he writes:

> 'Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard but in holding the entire class in a state of forced disunity ... It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organisations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions.'[28]

From this analysis, Trotsky outlines the necessary strategy to confront fascism. Here Trotsky is closest to Gramsci whose own concept of hegemony is developed out of the need to confront the fascist threat and the disorganisation of the working class. He has a cautious approach based on the recognition that the coming struggle is principally a defensive one, albeit an active defence. He recognises that an offensive by the Communist Party alone would come up against the bloc between the state and the fascists and would lead to defeat.

A war of positions requires an active defence of the self-organisation of the working class and its institutions in society. The workers have built up their own bulwarks and strongholds – the trade unions, political parties and so on. Social democracy had played a progressive role in building up these working class bases. Now the fascists wish to remove them as part of their strategy of smashing working class power. It is necessary to unite, therefore, with the social democrats in a common struggle for the defence of these bodies.

This leads to the policy of the united front. It has a dual character for it both closes ranks with other forces against the common enemy, while at the same time questioning the ability of the social democratic leaders to carry through the struggle in the interests of the working class. It is a case of pushing the social democrats as far as they can go in the struggle against fascism while recognising that to fully remove the threat of fascism it is necessary to overthrow capitalism itself. This means that the united front tactic must allow for both unity of action and the political independence of the forces concerned. As Trotsky famously stated:

> 'March separately, but strike together! Agree only on how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grezesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one's hands.'[29]

Unfortunately, Trotsky was almost alone in seeing the threat of fascism taking power, of the defensive character of the working class struggle and of the need to apply the united front tactic between the communists and the social democrats. Trotsky criticised the Italian Communist Party, with the exception of

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Gramsci, for over-estimating its own strength and possibilities and of underestimating the possibility of fascism coming to power. The Italian CP, including Gramsci, had always failed to understand the importance of the united front tactic.[30]

The German situation was even worse. The Stalinists decided that there was in effect no difference between fascism and social democracy and that the condition of the working class was no better off whoever was in power. Instead of forming a bloc with the social democrats, Stalin's German puppets decided to call them social fascists and to cut themselves off from the majority of the working class. Trotsky noted with despair that:

> '. . . the proletariat is abandoning its positions without battle and is beating the retreat without plan, without system, and without direction. The enemy is unleashed to such a point that it does not constrain itself from discussing right in public where and how to strike the next blow: by frontal attack; by bearing down on the Communist left flank; by penetrating deeply at the rear of the trade unions and cutting off communications, etc. . . . The bourgeoisie enjoys full freedom of manoeuvre, that is, the choice of means, of time, and of place . . . The proletariat combines nothing at all and does not defend itself. Its troops are split up, and its chiefs discourse languidly on whether or not it is at all possible to combine forces.'[31]

Culture

Trotsky opposed Stalin's attempt to impose a working class culture on society on the grounds that a new socialist culture must be allowed to evolve through new social structures. Such a process takes time and runs alongside the general transformation of society into a socialist one. Until this process is well under way, the dictatorship of the proletariat must be regarded as an abnormal period for art in which it has difficulty in finding roots. It is a transition phase born out of the fact that the working class is still unable to hegemonise all areas of social life.

The years of socialist revolution will be ones of fierce class struggle in which most effort will be spent on taking and maintaining power. Only once power is achieved and established can culture start to take a new turn in its development. The working class, by definition, is culturally disenfranchised and alienated. It cannot be compared to the bourgeoisie who enjoyed a degree of cultural autonomy many years before assuming political power. Those who talk of proletarian culture in relation to bourgeois culture are therefore comparing two quite dissimilar things and are wrongly identifying the historical destiny of the proletariat with that of the bourgeoisie.

Trotsky first raised these objections in relation to the Proletkult movement which, under the influence of Bogdanov, was arguing for the development of a self-sufficient proletarian culture. Bogdanov believed that the cultural revolution was a vital part of the social transformation, although, in keeping with his positivist materialism, he saw the process of cultural transformation in a rather mechanical way. The Proletkult movement established educational and cultural groups throughout the country, giving those involved a fair degree of autonomy. Ultimately this aroused the suspicions of Lenin and Trotsky who believed that Bogdanov was trying to build himself a power base. A directive of the Central Committee eventually closed the Proletkult down, but Trotsky (who opposed the closure) based his opposition to Proletkult more on a critique of the mistaken ideas behind the movement:

> 'It is fundamentally incorrect to contrast bourgeois culture and bourgeois art with proletarian culture and proletarian art. The latter will never exist, because the proletarian regime is temporary and transient. The historic significance and the moral grandeur of the proletarian revolution consist in the fact that it is laying the foundations of a culture which is above classes and which will be the first culture that is truly human.'[32]

The proletariat, unlike other classes in history, does not have the same degree of access to property and the means of production. It cannot just make working class culture. It must first make a revolution and hold power. This is different to the pattern of a classical bourgeois revolution where the bourgeoisie already holds a significant degree of economic and cultural hegemony. The weakness of the position of the working class in bourgeois society makes it impossible for it to establish its own hegemony to any great degree until it actually takes political power:

> 'The bourgeoisie came into power fully armed with the culture of its time. The proletariat, on the other hand, comes into power fully armed only with the acute need of mastering culture. The problem of a proletariat which has conquered power consists, first of all, in taking into its own hands the apparatus of culture – the industries, schools, publications, press, theatres, etc. – which did not serve it before, and thus to open up the path of culture for itself.'[33]

This makes necessary the dictatorship of the proletariat – an exceptional period of crisis management where state power is held by a class still too weak to establish full social hegemony. Building up a socialist or classless culture at a deeper material level is a long task. By the time the working class has been fully able to develop its own cultural basis, it will already have ceased to exist as a proletariat. Trotsky's analysis therefore represents a rejection of culturalism (an overemphasis of cultural factors) and its idealist implications in favour of a materialistic conception. The working class is faced not with the matter of creating socialist art but of creating the material conditions for socialist art.

In this sense, Trotsky is able to move beyond the culturalism of Gramsci's analysis. It is not possible for the working class to establish full cultural hegemony prior to taking power because of the very objective basis on which the working class exists. As a disenfranchised class,

> 'The proletariat is forced to take power before it has appropriated the fundamental elements of bourgeois culture; it is forced to overthrow bourgeois society by revolutionary

violence for the very reason that society does not allow it access to culture.'[34]

The weakness of the position of the proletariat within bourgeois society and the lack of an economic and cultural basis makes the question of working class hegemony all the more dependent on revolutionary political leadership and direction. The period of the proletarian dictatorship should be seen as reflecting this need for leadership, extending from the leadership of the working class to the leadership of society as a whole. This period is a transitional, emergency period which reflects the weakness of the proletariat's material base and the need to begin laying the necessary conditions for a future communist society. Only then can the matter of a socialist culture fully emerge.

Trotsky's realism

Trotsky is able to separate out the different areas of life and culture giving each its own degree of autonomy and resisting the temptation – that Gramsci was prone to – to give Marxist science an all subsuming character. Nevertheless, Trotsky maintains the linkage between each social field and the totality which Marxism seeks to explain:

'It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics . . . A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why.'[35]

The point is therefore to maintain that things have meaning and validity, whether scientific or artistic, in themselves. They do not necessarily have an intrinsic class character. However, all things, as social products, are subject to class determination to a greater or lesser extent. This is the case with science, where:

'All science, in greater or lesser degree, unquestionably reflects the tendencies of the ruling class. The more closely science attaches itself to the practical tasks of conquering nature (physics, chemistry, natural science in general), the greater is its non-class and human contribution. The more deeply a science is connected with the social mechanism of exploitation (political economy), or the more abstractly it generalises the entire experience of mankind (psychology, not in its experimental, physiological sense but in its so-called "philosophic sense"), the more does it obey the class egotism of the bourgeoisie and the less significant is its contribution to the general sum of human knowledge . . . As a general rule, the bourgeois tendencies have found a much freer place for themselves in the higher spheres of methodological philosophy, of *Weltanschauung*.'[36]

Scientific practice can therefore be seen as being its own distinct field with its own distinct object. However, how that knowledge is reached depends, to greater and lesser degrees, on the pre-existing social character of the knowledge and methods employed. The social or class character of knowledge affects the ability of science to explain its object of study. This theory of science can be matched with Trotsky's views on art where the task is not to try and 'create' some new form of art, but to create the necessary *conditions* for a new kind of art. In both cases the relationship is one that is concerned with the relations between a particular social practice, the material conditions within which this practice takes place, and the social character of these material conditions.

Trotsky's realism is derived from his concern to study the particular and the concrete. 'There are no abstract truths,' he writes.[37] Trotsky avoids most speculative slippages although, to an extent, all Marxists of this period were committed to a certain amount of mechanistic philosophical speculation with regard to dialectical materialism or the adherence to the base-superstructure model.

Trotsky's stress is above all on social processes. The concrete situation is a product of a combination of various processes, giving this situation a particular rather than a universal character, while maintaining certain general features. This stress on processes – such as uneven and combined development or bonapartist degeneration – is important from a realist standpoint. Indeed, Trotsky makes the point that idealist thought sees the complexity and multiplicity of the object but not of the process.[38]

This is important in terms of seeing how classes are constituted and how the class struggle evolves. Class is not seen as some kind of uniform object whose only task is to realise its consciousness or its true interests. Class is seen as belonging to a process, a complex combination of different factors – economic, political, ideological – which gives that class a stratified character. As a result, the task for Marxism is to relate to the political vanguard of the working class and through them reach out to the broader layers:

'The unity of the proletariat, as a universal slogan, is a myth. The proletariat is not homogeneous. The split begins with the political awakening of the proletariat, and constitutes the mechanisms of its growth. Only under the conditions of a ripened social crisis, when it is faced with the seizure of power as an immediate task, can the vanguard of the proletariat, provided with a correct policy, rally around itself the overwhelming majority of its class. But the rise to this revolutionary peak is accomplished on the steps of successive splits.'[39]

Strategic implications

These points may seem fairly basic but they constitute a fundamental split between the Leninist conception of class and, for example, Stalinist and reformist appeals to populism and the general interest which treat the mass of the people as one lump with no significant conflicts of interest between different sections. Both Stalinism and old style reformism uphold a teleological ideology which maintains that the common interests of the mass of the people will gradually bring about change in the system. This acts as a convenient excuse

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Trotsky, strategy and hegemony

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for not offering leadership to the class struggle and for surrendering political hegemony to the bourgeoisie in return for one or two concessions.

Hegemony in classical Marxism especially emphasises the role of leadership, something which today's commentators want to abandon. Lenin and Trotsky recognise the plurality of society. But from this fact they draw proper realist conclusions – that the different layers like the peasantry, petit bourgeoisie and intellectuals must be united behind the proletariat and its vanguard. The unity of the masses is based on a genuine struggle for hegemony.

It is absolutely necessary to resurrect the concept of hegemony and oppose those wooden dogmatists who maintain that Marxist politics and class struggle are clear and straightforward. At the same time, it is also necessary to insist that the concept of hegemony retains its original Russian emphasis on leadership and direction. It is clear that both Lenin and Trotsky recognise these issues.[40] However, we must also recognise a tendency in Trotsky and other classical Marxists towards an instrumental viewpoint where hegemony is not given sufficiently deep social roots. Consequently, Trotsky and subsequent Trotskyists tend to see a crisis of political hegemony as a crisis of the whole system. This might have been the case in Russia, but in the older bourgeois democracies there are more developed fortresses and earthworks and more entrenched layers of the ruling class and its associates. This means that we must take Gramsci's distinction between the war of manoeuvre and war of positions seriously, recognising that in today's capitalist societies a serious tactical battle must take place within the structures of civil and political society. The ruling class bases itself on more than just the ownership of the means of production and the coercive state apparatus – its rule is also based on social consensus and legitimacy.

This is not to adopt the Eurocommunist view of how to win support through peaceful and gradual change, but it does represent a rejection of the view that all that is required is for revolutionaries to prepare themselves for a sudden decisive moment. Such a moment has to be built for. It means it is necessary to win over a sizeable section of the working class by engaging in their day-to-day activities and developing a base and implantation in their organisations – political, industrial, cultural, intellectual and social. It is no good proclaiming ourselves to be a revolutionary party and hoping that we can pick up a few followers; we must engage with the real material forces – economic, political, cultural and ideological – that tie the masses to reformism and prevent them from adopting such a viewpoint. It seems clear that although many Trotskyists today base themselves on Trotsky's more wooden and dogmatic statements, it is quite possible to find a recognition of these problems in his work, and it is quite possible to find an implicit notion of the need for a hegemonic strategy to confront the situation in the more developed societies. The task today is to take up this work by analysing the complex structures of bourgeois hegemony in the West, and developing what the Trotskyist movement has so far failed to produce: a genuine socialist strategy. **WA**

Notes

1. A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1982, p.238.
2. For example, ibid., p.236.
3. L. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol.2, New Park, 1974, p.7.
4. Ibid., p.221.
5. Ibid., p.222.
6. L. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Pluto, 1977, pp.334-35.
7. Ibid., p.27.
8. L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, Pathfinder, 1969, pp.62-63.
9. L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder, 1972, pp.55-56.
10. Ibid., p.87.
11. Ibid., p.172.
12. L. Trotsky, *The New Course*, New Park, 1972, p.33.
13. L. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, Pathfinder, 1977, p.65.
14. L. Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, Vol.2, New Park, 1974, p.248.
15. L. Trotsky, 'Preface to the Second German Edition', *Where is Britain Going?*, New Park, 1974, p.xv.
16. L. Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, Vol.1, New Park, 1974, p.27.
17. L. Trotsky, *Whither France*, New Park, 1974, p.46.
18. L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, Pathfinder, 1973, pp.71-72.
19. Ibid., p.72.
20. Ibid., p.74.
21. Ibid., p.128.
22. Ibid., p.130.
23. L. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder, 1971, p.212.
24. Ibid., p.280.
25. Ibid., p.441.
26. Ibid., pp.155-56.
27. Ibid., p.163.
28. Ibid., p.144.
29. Ibid., p.139.
30. Ibid., p.191.
31. Ibid., p.350.
32. L. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Bookmarks, 1991, p.50.
33. Ibid., pp.220-21.
34. Ibid., pp.223-24.
35. Ibid., p.207.
36. Ibid., p.226.
37. Ibid., p.252.
38. Ibid., p.211.
39. L. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.393-94.
40. This, to some extent, is a follow up to my 'Lenin's Theory of Hegemony' which is printed in *What Next?* No.3.

Victor Serge and the Liberation of France

In this issue we print a rare article by Victor Serge. Focusing on developments in France, **Richard Price** examines the evolution of Serge's views in his last years

The accompanying article by Victor Serge, first published under the title 'French Expectations' in *Partisan Review* Vol. VII, No.2, Spring 1945, has, to the best of our knowledge, not been republished in English since it originally appeared. It is interesting for two reasons. It was written by Serge in Mexico, to where he had been exiled in 1940. Despite his distance from the events and his political isolation, the article displays his knack for rapidly appraising the essential features of events, and is a frequently acute analysis of the political situation in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation of France in 1944. It also sheds some light on the controversy surrounding the development of Serge's thought in his last years.

Serge's analysis makes no attempt to romanticise the period of the Occupation. He gives short shrift to the myth of a nation united in resistance to Nazi rule. He notes quite accurately that a significant proportion of the French population collaborated actively or passively with the Nazis. While the Fourth International was still clinging to the perspective of European socialist revolution in the short term, Serge soberly reflected on the political balance between the various contending forces. He notes the strength of Gaullism; he traces the re-emergence of the Socialist Party; and he accurately attributes the strength of the Communist Party to its pivotal role within the Resistance.

Much of the big bourgeoisie and the 'political class' in France had capitulated ignominiously in June 1940, and actively collaborated under the Occupation. It needed urgently to boost its patriotic credentials after the war. To do so required that the wartime history of France was rewritten shamelessly. A handful of politicians and generals around Pétain became scapegoats for the collapse of 1940. To detract from the fact that France was liberated by Allied troops, it was necessary to play up the military significance of the Free French forces under de Gaulle outside the country, and the Resistance within the country, to the point where it appeared that France had liberated itself.

In keeping with its rediscovered patriotism, the French bourgeoisie attempted to act the part on the world stage. Serge notes the drive to re-establish France as a world power, even before the Second World War was over. This was linked to a foreign policy which was strongly independent of the United States, and which aimed to restore the pre-war position of French colonialism. It would come to grief spectacularly in Vietnam, Suez and Algeria.

The Communist Party also needed to cover its tracks. The PCF had been in almost total disarray from 1939-40 as it attempted to follow the zigzags of Stalin's foreign policy.[1] Taken completely unawares by the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, the PCF had been thrown into confusion. From upholding the Popular Front and 'collective security' between France, Britain and the Soviet Union as being the way to resist Nazi Germany, the PCF now claimed that Stalin's rapprochement with Hitler was the best means of ensuring peace. In advance of even a declaration of war, the government of former Popular Front partner Daladier responded by seizing the PCF papers *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*. Backtracking again, the party called for 'union of the French nation against the Hitlerite aggressor' on August 26, and its parliamentary deputies voted for war credits on September 2. The invasion of eastern Poland by the Soviet Union on September 17 prompted another U-turn – the war was now declared an imperialist war, which the PCF opposed. On September 26, the government dissolved the PCF, its parliamentary group, and its numerous front organisations. In doing so, it paradoxically gave the party a new lease of life, in the midst of complete confusion and widespread disaffection among its rank and file. By forcing the party at an early stage in the war to rely upon its illegal apparatus, it ensured the PCF would have the edge over its rivals under German occupation. Moreover, most of those who ordered the PCF's suppression for lack of patriotism were themselves up to their necks in collaboration nine months later.

Nonetheless, the party had been dealt a severe blow by the events surrounding the Pact and its aftermath. Its parliamentary group lay in tatters, with 21 out of 72 deputies breaking with the party and some of them going over to outright collaboration with the Vichy regime. In the next six months 3,400 PCF members were arrested and 2,718 dismissed from elective office, while many others were dismissed from their jobs. This repression does not make the policy of the party in the period up to 1941 any more commendable. Its line was neither clearly defeatist nor pacifist; if anything, it was (as Serge notes) a policy of 'benevolent neutrality' towards Stalin's ally, Hitler. There was no attempt to rally workers during the German advance of May-June 1940, and on two occasions the party applied to the Nazi authorities' propaganda bureau for rights to resume publishing *L'Humanité*.

Although there is limited evidence of some PCF members and fellow travellers taking part in resistance activities before Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, it was this event which

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transformed the party's fortunes. It would emerge as the most influential force within the Resistance and the largest party within the Fourth Republic. (It won 26 per cent of the vote in the October 1945 general election.) As such, it played a decisive role in dampening down the radicalism which gripped large sections of the population. Further evidence of this radicalism could be found, as Serge's article mentions, in the spectacle of even bourgeois parties having to pay lip service to the need for post-war 'planning' and for the economy to be reconstructed along more 'social' lines.

What, then, does the article tell us about Serge's political evolution at this time? As the editors of *Revolutionary History* have noted: 'One of the least known and less understood aspects of Serge's political thought has been its evolution during the final part of his life ... He may have been changing his views, for when applying for a visa for entry to France, six days before his death he wrote to André Malraux approving of the collaboration of the Socialists with the Gaullist Rassemblement du Peuple Français.'[2] The publication of the letter[3] in January 1948, two months after Serge's death, caused consternation among his friends, and has remained an unresolved issue ever since. Did it mark a decisive evolution towards a Cold War 'third camp' position, or was it merely a cover to speed his visa application? As Peter Sedgwick, who edited the English edition of Serge's memoirs, pointed out, while there is no doubt that Serge penned the lines published triumphantly by the Gaullists, it is not in keeping with his other late writings.[4]

There are certainly some odd aspects to the relationship between Serge and Malraux. Having worked closely with the Comintern in China, Malraux's experiences of the defeated revolution of 1925-27 formed the basis of his two famous novels *The Conquerors* and *Man's Estate*. Trotsky, although he was critical of Malraux's method, described them as 'an annihilating indictment against the Comintern's policy in China'.[5] Malraux's admiration for Trotsky led, in August 1933, to him visiting Saint-Palais in southern France where Trotsky was living in clandestine exile. But the visit did not lead to political collaboration and Malraux subsequently published an inaccurate account of the visit.[6]

By 1935, Malraux was firmly back in the orbit of Stalinism. As a close fellow traveller, he was one of the main organisers of the International Writers Congress for the Defence of Culture in June that year. From the chair and behind the scenes, he did everything possible to prevent prominent intellectuals who were supporters of the campaign to free Serge from Soviet imprisonment from speaking at the congress.[7] Serge's account in *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* is strangely muted, referring only to Malraux's 'embarrassment' at the machinations of the Stalinists, although friends must surely have informed him of Malraux's active hostility.[8] Serge does, however, hint that Malraux may have played a part in the vicious slander campaign that the Stalinists subsequently launched against him after he arrived in the West in 1936.[9] During the Spanish civil war, Malraux remained close to Stalinism, without ever apparently joining the Communist Party, and commanded a Republican air squadron. Serge, meanwhile, vigorously supported the POUM, which was viciously repressed by the Stalinists, and was elected to its council in 1937.

Serge and Malraux met again in Marseille in 1940 while Serge was waiting for an exit visa. By then, Malraux had shifted away from Stalinism, which had been thoroughly compromised by the twists and turns of the past year, and towards enthusiastic support for de Gaulle. Serge doesn't mention them meeting at all in the *Memoirs*. Serge's son Vlady wrote in an article in 1948 that in Marseille Malraux had claimed responsibility for Serge's release by personally interceding with Stalin. In his own turgid *Antimemoirs*, Malraux made no such claim. The one reference in the book to Serge – hidden away in a footnote – is, however, intriguing. Malraux quotes from a letter which states that Serge was present at a meeting in Marseille between Malraux and two other refugees at which Malraux first attempted to contact de Gaulle in London and volunteer for the Free French Air Force.[10] Of course, this doesn't necessarily reflect on Serge's own views, and may have only a coincidental relationship to his controversial letter of 1947. At any rate, Peter Sedgwick wrote that their last meeting was 'of an estranging character',[11] and there does not seem to have been further contact between them for the next seven years.

While Serge left for Mexico, Malraux went on to become an important Gaullist figure in the Resistance. After the Liberation, he served as Minister of Information in de Gaulle's coalition government, in which capacity he ordered the repression of the Trotskyist press.[12] Altogether, a strange

NOTES

1. What follows is drawn substantially from E. Mortimer, *The Rise of the French Communist Party 1920-1947*, Faber, 1984, pp.278-306.
2. *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 5, No.3, Autumn 1994, p.177.
3. See the appendix to Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941*, Oxford, 1980, pp.383-6.
4. Ibid.
5. L. Trotsky, *Writings (1933-34)*, Pathfinder, 1972, p.275.
6. See J. van Heijenoort, *With Trotsky in Exile*, Harvard, 1978, pp.52-4, 157-8.
7. See R. Greeman, 'The Victor Serge Affair and the French Literary Left', in *Revolutionary History*, op. cit.
8. V. Serge, op. cit., p.318.
9. Ibid., p.328.
10. A. Malraux, *Antimemoirs*, Penguin, 1970, p.110.
11. V. Serge, op. cit., p.384.
12. D. Spooner, 'Malraux's Achilles Heel', in *Fourth International*, Vol. 7, No.1, Winter 1970-71.
13. *Revolutionary History*, op. cit., pp.177-198.
14. D. Cotterill (ed.), *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*, Pluto, 1994, p.210.
15. V. Serge and N. Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*, Wildwood, 1975.

'friend' for a revolutionary.

It is unlikely that we shall ever know the significance of Serge's letter to Malraux with complete certainty, although it is to be hoped that the biography of Serge in preparation by Richard Greeman will shed more light on the subject. In the meantime, *Revolutionary History* has drawn attention to the article 'Planned Economies and Democracy',[13] written between September 1944 and May 1945, as offering some pointers to his evolution at this time.

The present article adds another piece to the jigsaw puzzle. Written around the same time, it touches on similar themes, in particular, the expectation of a future in which bourgeois governments will have to undertake a high degree of economic planning. The references to Gaullism and national defence seem almost neutral, while the Soviet Union and the PCF are referred to as 'totalitarian'. If the future was to consist of 'planned' economies both East and West, then the main pillar of the Trotskyist defence of the Soviet Union – the superiority of planned economy to capitalism – fell. Faced with the residual choice between the political regime of Stalinism and that of bourgeois democracy, it is not difficult to understand how Serge may have preferred the latter. We know from other evidence that he regarded Trotsky's later writings – including presumably *Revolution Betrayed* – as 'not on the level of his earlier work',[14] and it seems certain that he had moved substantially away from defending the Soviet Union.

Yet, elsewhere, Serge could still mount a critical but vigorous defence of the Russian Revolution, and completed a sympathetic biography of Leon Trotsky in collaboration with his widow Natalia in the last months of his life.[15] If the jury is still out, it is because the contradictions in Serge's thought, while undoubtedly present, had not been resolved at the time of his death.

The present text remains something of a bumpy translation. Without access to a French original, it has only been possible to correct a small number of words where the translation was self-evidently wrong. However, a number of spelling mistakes and stylistic errors have also been corrected. **WA**

French perspectives 1945

by Victor Serge

The 'liberation' of France came in answer to vast anxiety. Oppression, pillage, rationing and terror had been making national humiliation seem even heavier to bear. And I tend to believe that, on the morrow of defeat [in 1940], a majority of Frenchmen believed in reconciliation with the victors who then seemed invincible, and in the need for a 'National Revolution' that would be reactionary in its political institutions but progressive in its economic innovations. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact at that time forced the Communists to encourage or tolerate this state of mind. Disappointment came towards the end of 1940, when people saw, during the winter, the results of the systematic pillaging of France. The first attempts at resistance date from that time. In June 1941, the Russo-German war changed everything; Marshal Pétain's 'National Revolution' sank into discredit and panic while the Communist Party, recovering its strength, directed its excellent organisation towards armed resistance to Nazi occupation. From the time the United States entered the war, some official circles in Vichy strove to play a double game and the man in the street began believing that the Second World War would end as the first one had.

Complete refusal to collaborate with the enemy – with the authorities in power – means suicide under a totalitarian domination. As long as it was still possible to entertain some illusions, a strong minority of Frenchmen collaborated sincerely with the Germans, while a large majority resigned themselves to collaborating. It was necessary to live, to work and to avoid being thrown into a concentration camp. A former French deputy recently estimated that nine out of every ten French citizens could be charged with collaboration. France, with its critical mind and common sense, thus entered upon an *era of duplicity*. I had seen this modern ailment's birth in Russia, during the years 1927-30, when absolutism asserted itself. Official lies, moral reservations and clandestine resistance then became commonplace: they are among the basic traits of totalitarian regimes, when people seek to reassure themselves by invoking an historical predestination that, in the long run, is beneficial.

In France, the wealthy classes had, in general, been friendly towards Nazism: only by associating themselves with the 'New Order' could they keep their factories and businesses going and their fortunes intact. Now these same classes are emerging from German occupation with their plants pillaged and worn, with their fortunes invested in inflated paper money and with an expression of treason on their faces. The extreme rightist organisations have disappeared, from the Royalist *Action Française*, whose leader Charles Maurras has been condemned to life imprisonment, to the group of adventurers from the industrial suburbs which include Jacques Doriot and Paul Marion, both of whom are former members of the Communist Party. Some 'Cagoulards', who formerly were planning a conspiracy similar to Franco's coup in Spain, indeed fought well in the de Gaulle forces and in the Resistance movement, and one section of the capitalist class of France staked its wealth on de Gaulle in the early stages of the game and still has reasonable hopes for the future. But on the whole, France continues to veer towards the left.

The middle class has been ruined and has drawn closer to the working class which has regained unity through privation. In the early days of defeat, all sorts of refugees could be heard on the roads expressing sensible opinions concerning those who were to be held responsible, or on structural reforms or the imminence of revolution; a sort of socialistic consciousness wider in scope than that of the militant Socialists was thus born within a few days. Now Jacques Maritain readily uses the word 'revolution' and the economic programme of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, a Catholic organisation, does not perceptibly differ from

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that of the Socialist Party! Everyone realises that France's reconstruction cannot be accomplished by a return to the past, that the sick capitalism of the end of the Third Republic is now dead, that large-scale nationalisation and social security measures are the necessary basis for the planning and direction of economy. Would it be possible to permit the accomplices of Nazism to retain their capital, to rebuild the devastated regions to the profit of private enterprises which are bankrupt and cannot do without the aid of the state, to give the press back to the corrupt trusts, not to control exports and imports? Necessity alone puts France on the threshold of a deeply revolutionary economic transformation. When the prisoners of war and workers now interned in Germany return home, they will have no fear of being outspoken after having seen from near the results of planned economy. Hence it will probably be difficult to defend the old economic order with much vigour, and it will seem obvious that, to achieve its re-establishment, a reactionary neo-fascist dictatorship would have to be established. In General de Gaulle's circle itself, there are many who favour planned economy. Big capital will thus concentrate on preserving managerial positions in this new economy, and on maintaining the medium and small private ownership of production facilities.

The Resistance was far from being a revolutionary movement in the socialistic sense of the word. It was a *national* movement, gathering together men of all political backgrounds on a platform of immediate salvation which excluded traditional conservatism but did not completely exclude totalitarian tendencies. The ideology of the 'single national and social party' remains quite strong among men of the right and the left and even among some Communists. The ranks of the Resistance were composed of young men who did not want to be deported to Germany, of men who were compromised and feared the fate of hostages; in short, of men who felt more secure in the woods – the Maquis – than in cities and villages. They were defending their elementary right to live. They compromised those who backed them through family ties, through generosity or duty. With the help of Gaullist officers and of the clandestine Communist machine which had its own financial and armament resources, they became an organised army as soon as it was felt that Nazism was doomed.

Gaullism, whose birth I witnessed in Vichy France, was at first only a confused idealism based on the pleasant knowledge that someone, in London or elsewhere, was not surrendering, was continuing the fight, was being supported. But it soon became a vast national conspiracy. According to official declaration of the Communist Party, the organisation of Communist resistance began a month before the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, evidently under direct orders received from Moscow. Most probably, the difficult Balkan situation then forced the Soviet Union to consider necessary the creation of an opposition movement within the Nazi-occupied countries. As soon as the German armies crossed the borders into Russia, the Communists formed their first bands of partisans and guerrillas. Later, they constituted the Gaullist 'National Front' which never managed to obtain leadership among the clandestine Gaullist movements. Their strength, however, resided in their coherent organisation, in the loyalty of many workers and intellectuals, in the Russian victories and in the old revolutionary myth. In addition, anti-Bolshevism played into their hands with its bloodshed.

While the Socialist Party was splitting into pro-Nazi advocates of surrender (Spinasse, Chasseigne, Zoretti and others), into a trend towards resigned adaptation (Paul Faure), and into a trend towards underground resistance (Max Dormoy), the Communist Party turned without a split from a policy of benevolent neutrality towards Nazism (with some propaganda against the plutocratic democracies) to cold hostility and finally to open warfare against Nazism. All this took place in spite of unpopularity, imprisonments, intrigues and firing squads. The importance of this fact must be stressed to indicate how this totalitarian party, thanks to its psychology and organisational methods, brings a new element into history.

At the time of France's liberation, the Communist Party controlled powerful troops in the heart of the Resistance movement. The Socialists, however, had armed militias only in northern France; elsewhere in the country, they had joined various organisations which were often under the leadership of the Communist Party, a thing which made them feel most uneasy.

Could the Resistance hope to gain power and become the source of a revolution? It had neither the essential leaders nor the backing of the people. The Resistance demanded just retribution, and this worried a majority of French who had not taken an active, visible and recognisable part in the fight against Nazism. The Resistance was divided. Radicals, Socialists, members of the right, all admitted the heroism of the Communists but feared their leadership and turncoat policy. The Communist Party styled itself 'The Party of the Hostages', the true national party and, in addition to this, the party of Red Army victories and of the Soviet Union's future international influence. Too many aces and too many marked cards! But with Allied troops on French soil, the Communist Party could no longer resort to a *coup de force* and had little interest in starting a lot of trouble. The Communists claimed the right to keep their arms, but then consented to having their armed groups transferred to an auxiliary police. After all, it is of vital interest to them to gain positions within the police force.

A well-disciplined minority, backed by a powerful organisation, can easily control a large number of well-intentioned men who, for a certain amount of time, may not even realise that they are being completely controlled. Under the pressure of the Communist Party, which was acting through the intermediary of the Resistance, the elected institutions of Paris were replaced by a council under the presidency of the Communist scholar Langevin. On the day that Paris was liberated, two Communist dailies, *l'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, were being sold on the streets. It must be admitted that the strongest political press is now owned by the Communist Party. Part of the Spanish Maquis, in southern France was under the influence of the Communist Party which, in the name of the Junta *Suprema de Liberación* and *Unión Nacional*, attempted to gain control of the

entire colony of Spanish exiles. It failed in this attempt, but Dr. Negrín, the only legal owner of Spain's gold reserve which now lies in Moscow's vaults, still has some strong arguments on this point. The 'Free German Committee' was finally recognised by the French Forces of the Interior and was permitted to use their radio facilities.

The Maquis in the Limoges area was under the command of both the Communist writer André Malraux and the fellow-traveller André Chamson. It came to light that, among the writers of French clandestine literature, a jack-of-all-trades like Louis Aragon could enjoy a tremendous influence. This Aragon is the man who wrote the infamous propaganda during the Moscow trials, who hid all the crimes of his party during the Spanish Civil War and even in France, for instance the kidnapping and murder of Rudolf Klement in Paris in 1938. This same Aragon today has the audacity to demand that André Gide be ostracised. At the same time, artistic circles were informed that Picasso had formally joined the Communist Party, and scientists such as Joliot-Curie and Langevin invested the Communist Party with an intellectual aura. Communist tendencies were also predominant within the Confédération Générale du Travail, where the position of secretary-general fell to Benoît Frachon of the Party Executive. Etc.

But the Front National, which was definitely under Communist influence, was opposed by the Mouvement de Libération Nationale, which includes a few former and present members of the Right, such as d'Astier de la Vigerie, numerous socialists and trade union men and a pro-Communist minority; and this movement decided to strengthen the Socialist Party by joining it as one man. The pro-Communist elements reacted by suggesting the merging of the two important groups of the Resistance. So far, they have failed in this attempt. In the meantime, with the restoration of political parties, the influence of the Resistance has decreased.

It is generally admitted that the Radical Party has lost a great deal of its prestige, but it still has enough power to regroup conservative elements. The Socialist Party has reappeared with renewed vitality and seized control of the municipal governments of large southern communities, such as Marseilles and Toulouse, and now publishes again the Party daily *Le Populaire*; this party can count on the loyalty of the working classes and its active members at times insist that it is the most popular party, which I am inclined to believe. The Socialist Party has also become the natural haven of middle class people who have developed in the direction of a moderate socialism. The language of this party is honest and firm, without novelty or verve, very careful, no doubt too careful. It is very friendly towards the Communists, but deeply suspicious of them. The two parties have now formed a 'Committee of Co-ordination', though at a very late stage in the game. The formation of a committee of organic unity, whose work will be anything but easy, has also been announced. The Socialists doubt very much whether unity between believers in democracy and totalitarians would lead to anything but the domination of the former by the latter. There are, however, the weighty arguments of foreign policy in favour of this.

The Christian Democrat Movement (Mouvement Républicain Populaire) is young and vigorous. Its members include Georges Bidault, Teitgen and François de Menthon, all three of whom are members of the Provisional French Government. Its framework consists of intelligent but disinterested men such as those of the pre-war *Esprit* group, and it is backed by the Christian unions and can count on some support from the Vatican.

The pre-war revolutionary minorities are no longer in favour. The Parti Ouvrier et Paysan (PSOP), founded in 1938-1939 by Marceau Pivert, Lucien Hérard, Daniel Guérin, Collinet and several thousand dissidents of the Socialist Party, lost the bulk of its membership and leaders as a result of internal crises. Now it has only a few scattered groups left. The two microscopic Trotskyist groups have merged, but together they numbered only a few hundred members throughout all of France, including five hundred in Paris. The Revolutionary Syndicalists, once very active, are now dispersed in the CGT and have not really resumed their activities. The Fédérer et Libérer group, which is composed of members of the revolutionary left of various tendencies, has only one member in the Consultative Assembly. It should be noted that the anti-Stalinist left has lost many qualified active members whose ideological weakness predisposed them to collaborating with the Nazis. Thus, in the CGT, the old miner Dumoulin and the bureaucratic team Belin-Froideval all deserted to the Nazis; among the writers men as remarkable as the two pacifists Felicien Challaye and Emery did the same. It really seems as if not a single French publication, with perhaps the exception of the clandestine Trotskyist publication *La Vérité*, can now allow itself to criticise totalitarian regimes and the international policy of the Soviet Union.

One of the striking traits of French opinion is its traditionalism. The old political formations which have been resurrected use their good old language of the past. Few new names have yet come to light. The secretary-general of the Socialist Party, Daniel Mayer, and the leftist Catholic George Bidault, must be mentioned among the new political leaders. Thorez, Marcel Cachin, Marty, Jacques Duclos, Florimond Bonte, Frachon, have resumed their activities within the Communist Party in France. But for the time being, there is neither any striking ideological rejuvenation nor any change in personnel. And the vital problems of social reorganisation have scarcely been stated. Intellectual life must, without doubt, first be resumed, and the masses must really be called upon to state what they want through elections and union activity before men and ideas can be brought forth. But above all, one must first do away with the anxieties of cold, of privations and of the war that goes on.

The spectre of terror has disappeared. There were some 150,000 arrests, which is no great figure, and very few executions. Those who called for a prompt and pitiless cleansing, either in a spirit of retribution or for political reasons (it was nothing but a claim to power), came up against insurmountable barriers. The price of life remains very high in France. An execution is an event and, after the Nazi massacres, this is a most healthy psychological trait. Furthermore, such terrorism would have threatened the majority of Frenchmen who do not in any way feel guilty of having been subjected to German occupation and the Vichy regime. Finally, a large number of the true pro-Nazis declared that they had helped

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French perspectives 1945

Continued from previous page

the Resistance, that they had played a double game, and this is often the truth. Such a situation presents rather difficult questions. The influential newspapers which served the Nazi cause have not yet been formally confiscated. Every capitalist who is charged with collaboration proves that he 'protected his workers', and produced for the Wehrmacht only to 'save French industrial equipment'. The profiteers of defeat and treason have kept their booty.

The nationalisation of the mines in northern France and the commandeering of the Renault factories are symbolical gestures, albeit important ones. The large-scale measures of economic planning and nationalisation still remain on the agenda but the government apparently wants to await the election results and the end of the war; in short, to gain time while remaining indecisive, all of which favours the survivors of the influential bourgeoisie and the profiteers of darker times. The French Government is obviously afraid of displeasing the Allies and of entering a period of internal crisis in the course of which it would remain to be seen whether the Communist Party would lean towards social planning or towards a maximum restoration of capitalism. As for the Communist Party itself, it does not even know the answer to this question and has no power to decide upon it.

The new Franco-Soviet pact did not bring forth anything very substantial in its polished text and only repeats the policy of a similar pact that Pierre Laval concluded in Moscow in 1935. This agreement was, however, hailed by all parties without exception as a great diplomatic achievement. Its main result was the appeasement of the Communist Party which, within a few days, returned to very moderate language. Stabilisation and procrastination of internal politics have been given new life. For the time being, there is much more talk of rebuilding France as a military power than of social and economic reorganisation. But against whom will this military strength be used, and why? The Germany of tomorrow will be crushed. The war effort, however, allows the postponement of other plans, and finds its justification in the following reasoning: if we do not resume our position as a military power, we risk being treated in the same way as the small nations. Another point: a strong army would necessarily become an important factor in internal politics, and might even decide, in case of civil war, between public opinion and the government. Survivors of the Right can hope to find good jobs in the high command, and the party in power, acting in accordance with a certain foreign policy, and using totalitarian ways, can build high hopes on the existence of a strong army.

On the other hand, it is also obvious that if France is resuming the production of arms, she has no illusions on the possibility of a world organisation capable of assuring her security. France is consciously sacrificing the possibility of rapidly resuming a high standard of living.

In conclusion, let us summarise what I have said. Firstly, no large political movement will be able to make itself known without the support of the totalitarian Communist Party; and if it does make itself known through this party, it cannot fail to fall under its leadership. Secondly, the socially conscious masses of the working class and of the middle class are aware of this fact, and many of their elements are ready to join transitional platforms with the moderates, who include many conservatives, because they fear Stalinist Communism. Thirdly, the French government is therefore attempting to gain time and to heal the worst evils of the present day. It is showing caution and believes that France's destiny is bound to world events whose outcome is not yet in sight. Fourthly, there is a feeling that there is a need for a social transformation, for a revolution, which it is hoped will be achieved at the lowest cost, since the idea of civil war remains very unpopular.

A return to universal suffrage gives hope that a high majority will pronounce itself in favour of a decisive change in the economic structure of the country. But in this case, the moderating influence of women's votes is feared.

If, and everything points in this direction, the German people are finally reduced to complete impotence, France and her Mediterranean neighbours, Italy and Spain, will be called upon to become the vast social laboratories of the continent and the great changes which can be foreseen will probably take place in hitherto unknown forms, completely different from those of the social struggles that followed the First World War.

Postscript

I have received news directly from France, news which shows a rather pessimistic state of mind. Rumour has it that the Allied Powers are opposed to the energetic measures of nationalisation and social planning which might satisfy the claims of social justice, give France a new prestige and facilitate the beginning of reconstruction. One must suppose that the economic reconstruction of France will be the source of many conflicts and strong pressures. Friends write me that: 'This will be the era of the bureaux, of secret services, and of opportunistic careerists who offer themselves to all sides.' I should add that my friends do not belong to the category of the discouraged – on the contrary. The very day of the Yalta Conference, the provisional Government decided to convert Dakar into a 'formidable military, naval and air base'. The issue for the 24th of February of *Pour La Victoire*, which publishes this fact, also contains a remarkable article by Jules Romains declaring that the French who, after the First World War, spoke glibly of the end of all wars, now speak glibly of 'the next war'. The French at the outposts of European civilisation take into account the fact that the end of the war against Nazism and Japan will probably bring no solution to the problems of imperialist rivalries, of totalitarianism, of international security; and they see that under these conditions the necessary social transformations will be infinitely difficult and perilous. ■

Letters

PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

LM libel case

Dear comrades,

As a former supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party and one of the very few of its adherents who has remained a Marxist after its decline and collapse, I feel moved to make a few comments on Nick Davies's article '*LM*, ITN and the Libel Laws' (Workers Action No.9, May-June 2000).

The main problem with *Living Marxism*'s coverage of the Yugoslav collapse was that by the time the Yugoslav state was disintegrating, the RCP's magazine was tending merely to respond to what the liberal press was saying on any particular subject. As the main trend of the liberal press on Yugoslavia was best described as Serbophobia – that is, blaming the whole business on the Serbs, with everyone else being hapless victims, a position then adopted by much of the left – *Living Marxism*, as I pointed out at the time at party meetings, was in danger of appearing as an apologist for the Belgrade regime. The actual position of the RCP, one to which I still hold, was one of neutralism, that is to say, it did not side with any of the warring factions. Unlike what Nick says, the RCP did not have a pro-Serb agenda, nor did it base its stance on a false extrapolation from the Second World War. The problem was the RCP's orientation towards media circles, a course that was part of its drift in the 1990s away from any engagement with the working class, which itself ended up with the magazine becoming the anonymous *LM* and the party quietly dissolving itself.

As for 'The Story that Fooled the World' that landed *LM* in trouble, this stood in the RCP's tradition of trying to make a big splash. The RCP was notorious for making – or trying to make – a lot of noise around its campaigns, each of which, so us supporters were told, would put us on the map. However, we had neither the panache or cash – contrary to what Nick says, the RCP was never reliant on the resources of rich members' families; members and supporters paid in a lot of money in dues – to make more than the odd ripple in a small pond. This story was supposed to be the one that would put the new-look *LM* on the map. I felt that the story was quite unconvincing, and that it added nothing to anyone's understanding of the Yugoslav crisis. When I heard that ITN was suing *LM* for libel, I felt that the magazine was on a hiding for nothing.

It's not any lingering regard for my old chums that makes me unhappy at ITN's heavy-handed action, although I don't like the idea of *LM*'s editor and publisher being lumbered with a massive fine and huge costs. The fact is that a small magazine has been driven into the ground by a big corporation, and the idea that the whole catastrophe in Yugoslavia was due solely to Serb nationalist gangsters, as opposed to nationalist gangsters on all sides, has been reinforced. Neither of these factors can be viewed as a good thing.

Fraternally,

Paul Flewers **London**

Nick Davies replies:

Clearly, Paul has as little sympathy as us for the article that finished off *LM*, or the pro-Serbian posturing which led to it. As for the background behind the positions of the RCP and *LM* on Yugoslavia, if Paul is right, isn't it almost more contemptible to take what amount to objectively pro-Belgrade positions in order to try to outsmart other journalists than because of a mistaken belief that Serbia is in some way socialist? Isn't it bad empiricism, let alone bad Marxism, simply to contradict what the liberal press is saying?

Unfortunately, the case reinforces the belief among many that you can trust the ITN or BBC news (because in this case ITN happened to be right) and that the left, taking the 'Living Marxism' title at face value, are conspiracy mongers or apologists for tyranny. As Paul says, the case also fuels the widespread Serbophobia that exists throughout the media.

Paul's other main point is an important one that we tried to deal with in the original article, although we would be the first to admit that it's a tricky area. Many socialists would have little sympathy for *LM*'s attempts to deny the extent of the rape, torture and killing of Bosnian Muslims by Serb nationalists, but the next independent publication to get up the nose of ITN or the Murdoch press might be Workers Action, or, for that matter, *New Interventions*. Repression in Britain can be very subtle. Who needs open censorship when you can use the threat of libel damages and costs to silence your opponent?

More letters next page

Letters

Continued

Labour not irrelevant

Dear comrades,

The last Workers Action carried an advert for a Network of Campaign Groups meeting discussing the way forward after the London elections. Attendance was disappointing (although I've been to many smaller left meetings!) and this prompted a couple of articles in the far left press about the supposed irrelevance of the labour Left, repeating the 'decline of the Labour Left' thesis.

Since then, two further meetings, both (especially the second) much bigger, have shown just how artificial this conclusion is. The first, called by *Tribune*, London Labour Left and London FBU discussed campaigning for Ken Livingstone's re-admission to the Labour Party. The second was called by a broad alliance of forces, including the Campaign Group of MPs, under the heading 'Democratic Socialism in the 21st Century: Winning for Labour'. Both discussed the collapse in Labour's core vote – a clear contradiction with the election as London mayor of Ken Livingstone, a long-term member of Labour's supposedly unelectable 'loony left'.

A positive feature of both meetings was an ability to link up with left forces in the unions – which remain the key to the situation in the Party. Mick Shaw's support for Ken's re-admission is a central part of that campaign, and Mick Rix spoke at 'Winning for Labour' after de-camping from the SLP. The task of socialists is to develop this co-operation, linking up trade unionists with rank-and-file Labour Party members.

Matthew Willgress **Peterborough**

Livingstone overrated

Dear comrades,

Although Workers Action should be congratulated for attempting non-sectarian yet critical support for Ken Livingstone, I write to take issue with those comrades who, to say the least, are more than overly apologetic for his actions. Whilst it is a tad abstract to debate how left wing programmatically he happens to be, the supposed significance of his election was to be the working class giving a slap in the face – however softly – to the reactionary policies of this government, for him to serve as a platform of working class opposition to the government, and to provide a boost to the Left within the Labour Party. These were the arguments I heard pre-May. They have hardly stood the test of time.

His appointment of Tories and Liberals combined with his cosying up to the City and the government, as well as his total failure to rally the Left, has seriously compromised him as a step forward for the still crippled workers' movement. Unfortunately the attitude of the 'Friends of Ken' appears to be that the only thing that mattered was his becoming mayor. Some self-declared Marxists have even endorsed his class-collaboration by stating that alliances with bourgeois forces are perfectly OK 'on certain issues', completely abandoning all pretence of class independence!

In fact, the position of many of the Friends of Ken is that Livingstone is right to keep quiet now because he has, at all costs, to be readmitted to the Labour Party. This serves to totally handicap him from being of any importance to the workers' movement and just validates him getting even closer to the government and City.

The comrades' position is also that he was right to stand on a bourgeois programme because otherwise he wouldn't have been elected, which is a complete abandonment of a class perspective and hardly a show of confidence in the future prospects for socialism. The fact that he stood on such a programme means his election does not symbolise a working class victory over the government (even though the ballot box is one of the few options open to us in this epoch of working class defeat); the May election was not so much an endorsement of the Left as a meek show of irritation at control-freakery. Even in a period with such low class consciousness, I doubt it is too much to ask for somebody committed to the workers' movement, who would serve as a platform against the reactionary policies of the Millbank Tendency entryists, make the case for socialist alternatives, and help strengthen the diminishing working class Left in the Labour party. This would of course come from an extremely limited left-reformist basis, but only then can I see it proper for the revolutionary Left to commit itself to a united front with Livingstone (yeah, I can imagine him down on his knees begging for the help of all our millions . . .).

As for his position on the Underground, as Livingstone proudly proclaims, his bond solution is another 'market alternative'. As socialists we should either be putting forward a real socialist alternative, or reconsidering where we stand politically.

Comrades who demand his re-admittance at all costs fail to say what the real significance of this would be; his return to the Labour Party would be on Millbank's terms and not his. Despite the limited powers he has as mayor, he could still rally the working class behind a series of demands – as he indeed managed to do to an extent in the 1980s during his reign as leader of the GLC. Although our expectations should never be raised very high with Ken Livingstone, they need to be a whole lot higher than some are happy to see!

Owen Jones **Stockport**

See 'Just one cheer for the mayor of London', p4 by Pete Firmin for another assessment of the Livingstone campaign and mayoralty so far.

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