

1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International"

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Enduring Oppression & Infinite Injustice

Imperialism's Bloody Trail

"Afghanistan is just the beginning," said George W. Bush in the wake of the brutal, high-tech annihilation of the Taliban regime by U.S. air power. Iraq and Somalia are widely thought to top the list of targets for the next round of bloody imperialist aggression in a "war" the administration predicts will last at least a decade.

On 10 December 2001, Marc Herold, an economics professor at the University of New Hampshire, released a study showing that U.S. bombs killed more than 3,500

Afghan civilians during the campaign. This is roughly the same number of people killed in the 11 September terror attack on the World Trade Center, but the Afghan victims are largely ignored by the international capitalist media which, for the most part, has acted as little more than publicists for the Pentagon.

In its "war" on Afghanistan, the U.S. dispensed with the pretense of acting on behalf of the United Nations (as it did in Iraq in 1991) or even NATO (as in Yugoslavia in 1999).



BRENNAN LINSLEY—AP

U.S. soldier in northern Afghanistan

The “world’s only superpower,” which long postured as an opponent of colonialism, today openly asserts its intention to impose its will in every corner of the planet.

Washington’s aggressive plans for militarizing space, its extensive biological weapons program, its dismissal of global environmental accords and abrogation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, are all deeply unpopular abroad. America’s rival imperialists in Japan and the European Union possess little leverage on the U.S. at the moment, but their concern at Washington’s new unilateralism portends a rise in inter-imperialist tension.

At home, the Bush administration (aided by its Democratic “opposition,” the mass media and the trade-union bureaucracy) has succeeded in channeling popular revulsion against the mass murder of innocent civilians on 11 September into a tidal wave of xenophobic reaction. The one-sided military victory in Afghanistan by the U.S. and its “coalition” allies and vassals has, for the time being, dampened domestic opposition to future adventures. But the millions of American working people currently intoxicated with jingoist patriotism will ultimately pay heavily for their illusions.

The key to the rise in productivity that fueled the U.S. “boom” of the 1990s was that ordinary people worked harder and longer for less. Now, as the economic cycle turns down, and hundreds of thousands are thrown on the scrap heap, their arrogant masters are cynically calling for sacrifice and national unity in a purported “war against terrorism.” Hard-won democratic rights are shredded as immigrants and political dissidents are swept up in a “security” witchhunt. Meanwhile Congress is pushing a “stimulus plan” of massive giveaways to millionaires and corpora-

tions, to be paid for by pensioners and the poor. This one-sided class war must, sooner or later, produce an equal and opposite reaction—an explosion of working-class resistance capable of shaking the foundations of the entire imperialist world order.

The following is an edited version of a talk given by Tom Riley at several campuses in the Toronto area in early November 2001.

We are a few weeks into a “war” between one of the poorest, most backward countries on earth and the world’s biggest and most advanced industrial society (which also happens to have ten times the population). And the larger power is backed by a “coalition” that includes every other imperialist country (including “brave, neutral” Canada). The mighty United States Air Force is engaged in systematically “degrading” what little remains standing in Afghanistan after 20 years of continuous civil conflict. Simon Jenkins of the London *Times* (a traditional mouthpiece of Britain’s conservative establishment) described the coalition campaign as follows:

“The current high-intensity bombing of Afghanistan is by no stretch of military imagination simply de-activating air defences or disrupting bin Laden’s networks. It is strategic bombing of whatever passes for the Afghan State, its cities and people. The Pentagon openly calls it ‘psychological bombing’, the targeting of roads, power stations and public buildings (even those with red crosses on them). Since from the air Afghan troops are indistinguishable from civilians, the implication of using aerial gunships is that no ground operation can be risked if any Afghan is alive in the region. To those fleeing Afghanistan in their thousands, this is indeed terror repaying terror.”

—*Times*, 24 October [2001]

So far more than a thousand Afghan civilians have been killed. Like the destruction of the World Trade Center, this is an exercise in monstrous criminality.

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Politics & Economics of Counterrevolution

Russia: A Capitalist Dystopia

The decade since Boris Yeltsin's August 1991 victory over the remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow has been one of unrelieved misery and hopelessness for the vast majority of former Soviet citizens. The only people to experience the "prosperity" glibly promised by capitalist ideologues are those who managed to grab chunks of state property. Today the once-despised queues of the Stalinist era are remembered fondly by millions of impoverished Russians too poor to afford the bare essentials of life.

In introducing "shock therapy" in 1992, Yeltsin promised that the pain would be over in a few months. Four years later, in 1996, after winning his second presidential term, he assured Russians: "Now I am certain that in 2000 Russia will be a rich, democratic country." But today, even the capitalist media acknowledge that the introduction of the free market in the former Soviet Union has resulted in a social catastrophe.

Crime is rampant, corruption endemic and the rich and well-connected do as they please with little regard for the law. The restoration of capitalist rule in Russia has produced the most severe depression ever recorded in an industrialized economy.

"Russia's economy has shrunk almost every year....Output has fallen by about 53% in ten years, according to official (and notoriously dodgy) statistics....The physical infrastructure is decaying: hospitals, roads, prisons, schools and railways, with the exception of a few prestige projects in Moscow...are in a shamefully bad state. Russians are badly fed, badly dressed, badly housed, badly treated.

"The clearest sign of decay is that Russians die young and have so few babies. The population is now smaller by 6m people than it was a decade ago."

—*Economist*, 30 Mar 2000

The Soviet Accomplishment

The Soviet Union was the product of the first, and so far only, successful workers' revolution in history. Led by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the young Russian workers' state defeated the White armies and their imperialist allies in a protracted civil war. The early Bolshevik regime laid the basis for a planned economy by expropriating foreign and domestic capital and imposing a monopoly of foreign trade. The ascendancy in the mid-1920s of an anti-working class caste headed by Joseph Stalin grotesquely distorted the operation of the economy. Nonetheless, the institutions of collectivized property proved dynamic enough to transform the USSR from a predominantly peasant country into a modern industrial state.

Cold War ideologues who used to portray the USSR as a sinister, totalitarian dynamo threatening to overwhelm the "free world," now claim that, for 70 years, the Soviet Union teetered on the brink of collapse. The truth is that despite the bureaucratic deformations, the Soviet economy grew rapidly for a considerable historical period. Between 1928 and 1938, while the imperialist countries were gripped by the Great Depression, manufacturing output expanded 600 percent in the USSR (*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*,



Moscow soup kitchen

Paul Kennedy).

Contrary to Hollywood, the decisive battles of World War II were fought on the Eastern Front, where Hitler's best divisions were ground up by the Red Army and pushed all the way back to Berlin. After recovering from the massive devastation of the war, the USSR resumed its rapid economic growth. The successful launch of Sputnik in 1957, the world's first satellite, alarmed the imperialist general staffs. One of the themes of John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign was the need to catch up with Soviet growth rates. Through the 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviet model was one that many "third-world" rulers sought to emulate.

While various demoralized leftists and bourgeois political science hacks claimed that Stalin's Russia represented some new sort of class society, Trotsky recognized that the rule of the bureaucracy was a historically transitory phenomenon:

"either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."

—*Transitional Program*

Trotsky regarded the Stalinist oligarchy as an obstacle to the survival of the workers' state which must be removed. He explicitly linked his defense of the degenerated Soviet workers' state against capitalist restoration to the call for workers' political revolution to oust the bureaucrats and restore the direct, democratic rule of the working class. Only in this manner could the road to genuinely socialist development be opened.



Bush Sr., Reagan and Gorbachev

For seven decades the degenerated Soviet workers' state posed a global counterweight to the hegemony of Western imperialism. Despite the Soviet bureaucracy's futile search for "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, the USSR provided important material support for the deformed workers' states that resulted from insurrectionary movements in China, Cuba and Vietnam.

Trotsky asserted that the restoration of capitalism in the USSR would be the most serious defeat ever suffered by the international workers' movement, just as the overthrow of capitalism in the former Czarist empire had been its greatest victory. The social disaster that has befallen the peoples of the former Soviet Union has amply confirmed this view.

Perestroika

By the early 1960s Soviet growth had markedly decelerated, as the necessity for quality inputs increasingly conflicted with the attempts of the bureaucratic regime to control every aspect of social and political life. Trotsky had predicted this development in *The Revolution Betrayed*, his brilliant study of the fate of the Russian Revolution, written at the height of the Soviet industrialization drive in the 1930s. Trotsky pointed out that bureaucratic commandism "destroys the creative initiative and the feeling of responsibility without which there is not, and cannot be, qualitative progress." Thus:

"It is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command—although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost. But the farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bu-

reaucracy like a shadow. The Soviet products are as though branded with the gray label of indifference. Under a nationalized economy, *quality* demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative—conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery."

The rate of growth of the Soviet economy fell steadily through the 1960s and 70s and, by the early 1980s, approached zero. During the Brezhnev years, the *nomenklatura* became profoundly pessimistic about the future and deeply cynical about its officially socialist ideology. A substantial "shadow economy" had arisen that provided goods and services not readily available under bureaucratized planning.

Leonid Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov, a former head of the KGB (Soviet secret police), attempted to turn things around by tightening labor discipline. Andropov's efforts, and a few years of good agricultural harvests, produced a brief upturn in growth through the mid-1980s, but the systemic problems of the bureaucratized command economy could not be transcended by simply increasing the level of administrative pressure.

In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev took over as General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). His policy of *perestroika* was advertised as a means to increase efficiency, improve quality and stimulate economic production through market-oriented "reform" of the planned economy. Gorbachev's struggle to overcome the resistance of conservative elements in the *nomenklatura*, particularly in the central planning ministries, provided a medium for the accelerated growth of openly pro-capitalist elements, as we noted at the time:

"The extreme reliance on market mechanisms which Gorbachev proposes and a qualitative reduction in the role of the state planning authorities is not capitalist restoration per se. But the 'reforms' threaten to undermine the remaining strength of an economy already severely weakened by decades of bureaucratic misrule. As such they move Soviet society closer to the danger of a convulsive social counter-revolution..."

—1917 No. 4, Autumn 1987

Gorbachev's first major "reform" was the 1986 legalization of private "cooperatives," which immediately began to appropriate state resources for private use. The next year Gorbachev decreed that factory directors, previously appointed by the apparatus, were to be elected by the employees in each enterprise. This gave managers considerable independence from their nominal superiors in the bureaucratic hierarchy, and many immediately took advantage of their new freedom by privatizing enterprise assets. In many cases they sold raw materials, or finished products, at deep discounts to friendly co-ops. The co-ops, usually run by relatives or friends, then resold the goods to the highest bidders, preferably for hard currency, and split the proceeds with the enterprise directors.

A desire to curb the power of the central bureaucracy led Gorbachev to expand the authority of regional governments in the fields of agriculture, housing and production of consumer goods. This was followed, in 1988, by an announcement that local party units were no longer responsible for enforcing the directives of the center:

"The party committees at enterprise, district and regional level had played a key role in the traditional model, enforcing the priorities of the centre. Once they withdrew from the economy, enterprises were free to follow their



RYSZARD JANOWSKI—CAF

Soviet soldiers in Poland read about August 1991 coup

own interests, (e.g. to reduce their output and raise their prices). The newly powerful republican and municipal authorities began defending the interests of their territory by the simple expedient of reducing deliveries to 'foreign' regions."

—*The Disintegration of the Soviet Economic System*,
M. Ellman and V. Kontorovich

The decision to free the enterprises from centralized control, and simultaneously relax the monopoly of foreign trade, resulted in an immediate decline in national income. In the fourth quarter of 1990, Goskomstat (the USSR State Committee on Statistics) reported that national income had fallen 8.5 percent compared to a year earlier. In the first quarter of 1991 it plunged another ten percent (G. Khanin, "The Soviet Economy—from Crisis to Catastrophe," in *The Post-Soviet Economy*, Anders Aslund, ed.) This was the period in which the first major wave of "privatizations" was taking place:

"Russia in 1988-1992 was in a no-man's-land between two systems. State controls over trade and exports were disintegrating, but domestic prices remain controlled, frequently at absurdly low levels. Anyone who could acquire oil, diamonds, or metals for rubles at controlled domestic prices, and then sell them abroad for dollars, was rich overnight. This required the connivance of state officials, who issued the necessary licenses and smoothed the way to the borders."

—*Capitalism Russian-Style*, Thane Gustafson

The massive transfer of income to offshore accounts produced a rapid fall in export revenues and a soaring foreign debt which quickly consumed Soviet gold and currency reserves. In an attempt to stem the hemorrhaging, the regime cut imports 45 percent from 1990 to 1991, but the resulting shortages further disrupted production and contributed to a

growing sense that everything was spinning out of control.

The collapse of the authority of the central ministries made it impossible for the center to supply the inputs required by the enterprises, compelling them to reorient toward production of goods for barter. Factory managers began accepting IOUs from customers and issuing them to suppliers. Inter-enterprise credits "nearly quadrupled to 15.6 billion" rubles in 1988 alone (*Economist*, 20 October 1990).

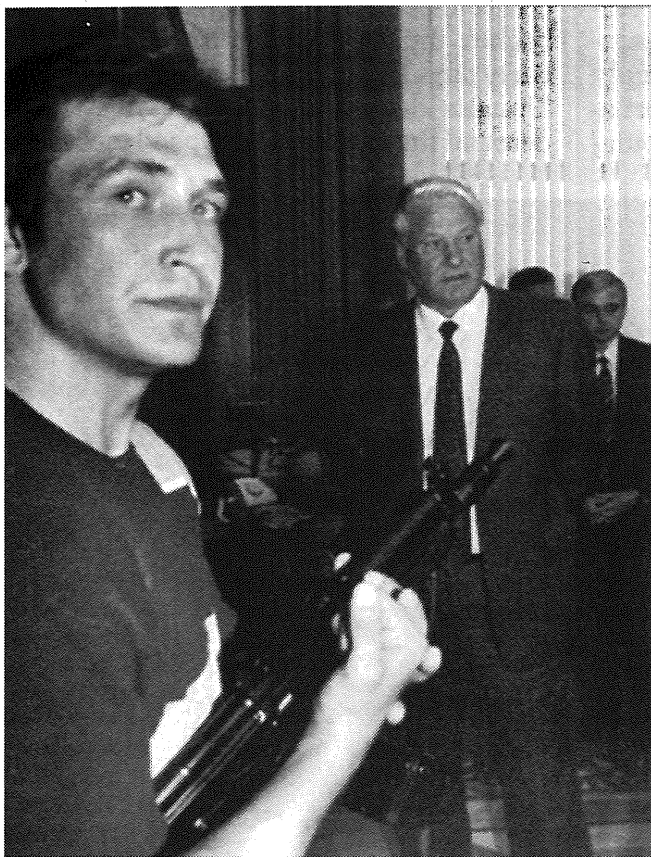
As pressure increased to legalize a chaotic privatization drive already completely out of control, Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev jointly endorsed Stanislav Shatalin's "500 Day" program for a rapid transition to a market economy. Looking back on events, Yevgenii Yasin, one of the more prominent pro-capitalist "radical" economists at the time, recalled:

"In September 1990, the program was considered by the parliaments of the USSR and Russia. The latter, under Yeltsin's pressure, approved it in a week. In the former, the program got tied up by...the entire old Party-government establishment. They realized that things were coming to a head politically: either they, or the '500 Days' program and real reform, would prevail."

—*The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System*,
M. Ellman and V. Kontorovich

At this point Gorbachev was forced to retreat under pressure from the Stalinist conservatives, while Yeltsin pushed ahead and announced that Russia would cut its contribution to the federal budget by two-thirds, while doubling its own expenditures. Other republics quickly followed, and, as Yasin observed:

"With the failure of the '500 Days' program, Gorbachev the reformer missed his last chance. He lost the strategic initiative, which could now end up either with the Com-



GENNADY GALPERIN—REUTERS

August 1991 coup: Yeltsin in Russian White House

munist center, which had quashed Gorbachev as a real leader, or with Yeltsin. The struggle for power between them became the key event of 1991.”

—*Ibid.*

August 1991: The Last Barricade

Yeltsin’s victory over the demoralized Stalinist “hardliners” in August 1991 was the critical moment in the triumph of capitalist counterrevolution. In 1933 Leon Trotsky had observed:

“Every political tendency that waves its hand hopelessly at the Soviet Union, under the pretext of its ‘non-proletarian’ character, runs the risk of becoming the passive instrument of imperialism. And from our standpoint, of course, the tragic possibility is not excluded that the first workers’ state, weakened by its bureaucracy, will fall under the joint blows of its internal and external enemies. But in the event of this worst possible variant, a tremendous significance for the subsequent course of the revolutionary struggle will be borne by the question: *where* are those guilty for the catastrophe? Not the slightest taint of guilt must fall upon the revolutionary internationalists. In the hour of mortal danger, they must remain on the last barricade.”

—“The Class Nature of the Soviet State”

Following Trotsky’s injunction, the International Bolshevik Tendency took a position of military support to the demoralized Stalinist remnants against the Yeltsinites in the August 1991 coup, which proved to be the “last barricade.” This position sharply differentiated us from every other international “Trotskyist” tendency at the time. Some, like James Robertson’s Spartacist League, adopted a posi-

tion of neutrality in this decisive showdown. Others, including the British Workers Power group, Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat and Tony Cliff’s International Socialist Tendency, openly sided with Yeltsin’s counterrevolutionary rabble on the grounds that it was more “democratic” than the Stalinists. The various Communist parties, which for decades had slavishly followed every twist and turn of the CPSU, refused to defend their “Socialist Motherland” when it counted. Trotsky had predicted as much in 1933 after they had failed to resist the seizure of power by the Nazis:

“In the hour of crisis, the Barbussized Comintern will be capable of offering no greater support to the Soviet Union than the opposition it had offered to Hitler.”

—*Ibid.*

Trotsky was absolutely unambiguous about the duty of revolutionaries in the face of counterrevolution:

“The new International will offer the Stalinist bureaucracy a united front against the common foe. And if our International represents a force, the bureaucracy will be unable to evade the united front in the moment of danger. What then will remain of the many years’ encrustation of lies and slander?”

—*Ibid.*

Tragically, the forces of authentic Bolshevism did not “represent a force” in the USSR, so there was no “united front” against the Yeltsinites.

In their valuable book on the fall of the USSR, Ellman and Kontorovich assert that:

“Popular opposition to the regime, clearly demonstrated at the ballot box, in the media, and on the streets in the late 1980s, was a *result*, not the cause of its disintegration. Hence the causes of the collapse have to be sought in elite actions and not in the discontent of the masses.”

—*The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System*

The fact that the relaxation of political repression under Gorbachev immediately produced widespread expressions of popular discontent, which further weakened the regime, suggests that, in fact, opposition to the rule of the CPSU pre-dated *perestroika*. Moreover, the “elite actions” were themselves a product of the regime’s inability to command the active loyalty of the producers, which alone could overcome the “gray label of indifference” described by Trotsky half a century earlier.

Decades of lies and political repression by the Stalinist autocrats have all but eradicated the proud revolutionary tradition of the Russian proletariat. The manifest corruption of the Stalinist autocrats, with their special shops and privileged lifestyles, turned the officially egalitarian ideology into a bitter joke. By identifying socialism with its own rule, the cynical CPSU bureaucrats politically disarmed the Soviet working class. The repeated betrayal of revolutionary opportunities internationally in pursuit of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism, and the reactionary chimera of “socialism in one country,” isolated and undermined the USSR. By atomizing and depoliticizing the Soviet working class, and actively seeking to demobilize revolutionary upsurges abroad, the Stalinists ultimately undermined the foundations of their rule—the recognition by the masses of working people that they had a vital stake in the defense of collectivized property.

The incapacity of the “hardliners” in August 1991, the passive acquiescence of the CPSU to its own dissolution, and the scramble by many former apparatchiks to use their connections to transform themselves into “entrepreneurs,” all reflected the pervasive cynicism of the Stalinist ruling

caste and its indifference to any sort of "socialism." This is confirmed by the alacrity with which the reconstituted Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) entered into the infamous "Red-Brown" coalition with open fascists.

'Robbery of the Commons'

Events in Russia in the 1990s closely paralleled the "primitive accumulation" of capital at the "rosy dawn" of the bourgeois era:

"The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation."

—Marx, *Capital* v. 1

The transition to capitalism requires the transformation of formerly collective assets into the property of individual capitalists—*capital*. For a few years, from 1988 to 1995, the door was open in Russia for the brazen and well-connected to seize state property worth hundreds of billions of dollars. This rapidly transformed the Russian economy into one that business school textbooks recognize as "normal," with a tiny, enormously wealthy elite at the top and a vast mass of desperately poor, marginally employed workers at the bottom.

The "robbery of the commons" never took place so rapidly, so publicly or on such a scale as in the former USSR. Traditional capitalist folklore about how a smart, frugal and industrious minority gradually floats to the top of society through a combination of hard work and foresight in order to provide leadership and employment for their indigent fellows is not well received in contemporary Russia.

The first stage in the primitive accumulation process occurred with the relaxation of state controls over foreign trade. The second stage, a massive wave of financial speculation beginning about 1990, was prepared by Gorbachev's 1987 decision to break the monopoly of the USSR State Bank as part of his campaign to loosen the grip of the central planners. By 1991 some 1,600 private banks had sprung up. For a brief period anyone who could borrow money cheaply, and quickly turn it into real property, could make a killing:

"Traditionally, a Soviet enterprise was automatically paid for its output as soon as it left the factory gate, by a simple transfer of funds from the account of the buyer to that of the producer. As this system shattered in 1990-91, enterprises needed to find new sources of funds to maintain liquidity. One of the main defensive functions of the new private banks was to funnel state credits to cash-starved enterprises.

"But the private banks also enabled their founders to get around the remaining restrictions of the Soviet system and to mobilize short-term capital to take advantage of the new opportunities opening up, mainly in foreign trade. The banks bankrolled commodity trading and import-export operations, or participated directly as players; they helped their clients convert their state-controlled assets into cash; they conducted illegal foreign-currency exchange; they transferred profits abroad...."

—Gustafson *op cit*

The private bankers converted low-interest ruble deposits from state-owned enterprises and municipal authorities



Egor Gaidar: shock therapist

into hard currency which they used to provide short-term financing for export deals. The banks made money at both ends of the transaction—first by charging high interest on the dollar loans, and then again when the dollars were converted back into depreciated rubles, and returned to the accounts of their depositors. After the abolition of price controls in 1992, the annualized rate of inflation hit 2500 percent. In this climate, slowing down financial transfers for even a few days produced huge windfalls. The bureaucrats who provided the low-interest ruble loans to the bankers in the first place were, of course, cut in for a piece of the action.

In 1992, Yeltsin initiated the third stage of the primitive capital accumulation process with the mass privatization of state enterprises. The initial fortunes acquired through commodity trading and banking were used by the emerging "oligarchs" to gain control of most of the privatized assets.

The privatization program was deeply corrupt from the beginning. This was seen by the advocates of the free market as a necessary, if unfortunate, overhead for dismantling the planned economy. After all, you can't have capitalism without capitalists.

The architect of Yeltsin's decollectivization program was Egor Gaidar, who had been appointed as economics editor of *Kommunist*, the CPSU's leading ideological journal under Gorbachev. Gaidar had used his position to promote the notion of a wholesale transition to a market economy. Chrystia Freeland suggests that appointing Gaidar as the Central Committee's leading authority on economics:

"was like asking a crusading atheist to write a new catechism for the Vatican. If anyone still needed a sign that the Soviet nomenklatura no longer believed its own rhetoric, Gaidar's appointment offered precisely that."

—*Sale of the Century*

The reason Gaidar's appointment was not resisted by the conservative wing of the apparatchiks was not so much because he enjoyed Gorbachev's patronage, but rather be-



PETER BLAKELY—SABA

CPRF marches on May Day

cause of his impeccable family pedigree. Freeland describes his grandfather, a Red Army officer who later wrote popular children's stories, as a "Soviet cross between Paul Revere and Dr. Seuss." Che Guevara was a frequent visitor in the Gaidar household while young Egor was growing up in Cuba in the early 1960s, where his father was posted as a journalist.

The Gaidar team's privatization program was one of shock therapy —massive privatizations and an immediate end to price controls. The fact that this resulted in astronomical inflation that wiped out savings, and impoverished pensioners and others on fixed incomes, was of no concern to these capitalist true believers:

"Unemployment wasn't a problem, it was a welcome sign of structural change. The same went for bankruptcy and sharply curtailed social services. Even the hard-hearted number-crunchers at the IMF admitted to me that occasionally they were stunned by the young reformers' ability to dismiss their country's current suffering as the unavoidable price of future prosperity."

—*Ibid.*

Politics & Economics of Counterrevolution

A 1999 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report summarized the "reforms" as follows:

"The most widely advocated reform strategy at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union was known as 'shock therapy' or the 'big bang'....It was recognized that a certain amount of 'pain' would be suffered, but it was believed that the duration of pain would be brief and the subsequent gains would be considerable....

"The big bang strategy thus was reduced to three components. First, state owned enterprises should be privatized, and, in effect, a capitalist class should be created without the prior necessity of the private accumulation of capital. Second, all prices should be completely liberalized...so that price signals could be used to allocate resources and increase

economic efficiency. Third, foreign capital should be used to ease the pain caused by falling output and incomes."

—"Human Development Report For Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS," emphasis added

The ideologues of the "free market" insisted that the transition to a market economy must proceed as rapidly as possible and talked grandly about how opening the Russian economy to global competition would produce a major restructuring, particularly in manufacturing, as Adam Smith's "invisible hand" compelled entrepreneurs to find sectors where Russia enjoyed a "comparative advantage." The emergence of such a "natural" economy was supposed to unleash the creative energies of a population finally free of the tyranny of collectivism. This was the theory, but in the real world things turned out rather differently.

Yeltsin and his imperialist backers regarded the destruction of the centralized economic system and the drastic reduction of the state sector as the *essential* objectives of the "big bang." This was necessary both to make the restoration of some sort of central planning difficult and to create a layer of powerful owners prepared to fight to defend the capitalist counterrevolution:

"For the reformers in 1992 the primary goal was to break the traditional dominance of politicians and bureaucrats in the central government. Their experience had taught them that the greatest enemy was the ministries, and they were determined to cut them out. In contrast, the industrial managers and the local politicians had gained a great deal of influence over the previous decade....

"In 1991-92 the reformers believed they had only a brief window of opportunity, and that they had to use it to make private property legitimate and irreversible."

—Gustafson, *op cit*

The "big bang" resulted in a dramatic collapse of production and widespread poverty and social dislocation. However, the nascent Russian bourgeoisie, and its inter-

national backers, viewed it as a qualified success.

The original plan called for offering employees of firms targeted for privatization 40 percent of the shares in their enterprises, but:

"It was soon clear to the reformers that only foreigners and underground entrepreneurs had the capital to bid for assets in a sell-off. Both of these were politically unacceptable, especially since the assets were undervalued and would have been acquired for very little outlay....in the end most enterprises were virtually given away, mostly to their workers and managers. About 20% of the assets of the state enterprises were handed out in the form of 'vouchers,' distributed free to every Russian citizen."

—*Ibid.*

The voucher system that was supposed to transform every Russian worker into a "stakeholder" turned out to be another mechanism for well-connected insiders and Soviet-era factory managers to enrich themselves. Vouchers could only be converted into shares at special auctions that were deliberately organized to make it difficult for ordinary citizens to participate. Most people ended up selling their vouchers, at a substantial discount, to middlemen. The "red directors" who rigged the auctions undervalued their firms' assets and extorted shares from their employees. Roughly two-thirds of the medium and large-scale enterprises ended up under their control.

The privatization drive was supposed to create a new generation of dynamic entrepreneurs who, by shrewdly forging strategic partnerships with foreign investors, would obtain the investment and technical inputs necessary to make Russian industry competitive internationally. But the chaotic looting of the planned economy produced an entirely different result:

"Before long most Russian businessmen, including the oligarchs, would realise that the surest way to build fortunes was not to waste time and energy on the back-breakingly difficult job of changing the way factories were run. The real money-spinner was to grab a piece of Russia's vast mineral wealth...."

—Freeland, *op cit*

The biggest winners in the privatization sweepstakes were the oil and gas executives of the Soviet era (the *neftyankiki* and *gazoviki*). Unlike the industrial managers, who had to worry not only about production but also marketing, shipping and raw materials, the former bureaucrats who grabbed chunks of the Soviet oil and natural gas industry had ready-made markets and established transportation networks. Their control of Russia's fuel supplies, and the profits they made in export markets, gave them substantial domestic political clout.

The "oligarchs" are not particularly interested in the fate of Russian industry:

"Where 'privatization' has occurred, it has occasioned massive asset stripping by a new, politically powerful class of national and regional 'oligarchs'. Most of these had no interest in or aptitude for industrial management and made no serious attempt at industrial investment or restructuring. Instead they siphoned cash from their enterprises...for transfer abroad. Estimates of capital flight vary from \$80 billion to \$300 billion."

—East West Institute, 2 November 1998

While the oligarchs would be happy to see Russia transformed into a provider of petrochemicals, minerals and other raw materials for the economies of the imperialist West, the "red directors" of former Soviet industrial enter-

prises, advocate a more "patriotic" (i.e., protectionist) trade policy in order to generate capital to upgrade their obsolete and disintegrating plants.

'Sale of the Century'

The initial round of privatization had not included many of the most valuable and strategically important firms (e.g., Norilsk Nickel, the world's biggest nickel producer). These were put up for sale in 1995 in what came to be known as "loans for shares":

"the government had distributed chunks of huge state-owned firms to its favourites, mainly private banking groups, by means of rigged auctions. The shares were classed as security for 'loans', destined never to be repaid."

—*Economist*, 10 July 1997

In exchange for the "loans" of roughly \$1 billion, Yeltsin handed over assets worth many times as much. The oligarchs "devised the scheme among themselves, lobbied the government, even wrote some of the decrees" (*Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2000). Foreign companies were barred from participation. The giveaway took place in the run-up to the 1996 presidential election at a point when it appeared that Yeltsin might be defeated by Gennady Zygunov, leader of the anti-Semitic CPRF, the largest product of the decomposition of Stalinism:

"Loans-for-shares bought Yeltsin the political, financial and strategic support of the future oligarchs in the upcoming presidential elections. It meant pawning Russia's crown jewels, but if that was the price of keeping the communists out of the Kremlin, the young reformers were willing to pay up.

"I understood the loans-for-shares programme perfectly well," Gaidar told me on a rainy afternoon in his office three years later. "The loans-for-shares created a political pact. They helped ensure that Zygunov did not come to the Kremlin. It was a necessary pact."

—Freeland, *op cit*

This is how the "free market" operates in Russia: behind a barrage of talk about democracy, transparency and competition, the entire process has been rigged from the beginning. This does not mean there is not intense rivalry at the top. The financial "oligarchs" managed to grab most of the goodies in the "loans-for-shares" boondoggle, but in some cases, like the reserve-rich Lukoil and Surgutneftegaz oil companies, the "red directors" came out on top:

"They were not shy about using every inch of their local control to ensure that they won: on the day of the Surgutneftegaz auction, the nearest airport was mysteriously shut down and road-blocks manned by armed guards materialised on the main land routes into the remote Siberian city of Surgut, where the sale was held, thus physically preventing one outside bidder from competing."

—*Ibid.*

By the late 1990s Russia's ersatz bourgeoisie had evolved into a dozen clans identified with particular oligarchs that competed among themselves for control of the state and its resources, including foreign "development" loans. The *Economist*, a leading organ of British finance capital, recently disingenuously inquired:

"what actually happened to the money that was lent to the Soviet Union and Russia? In all, it amounted to more than \$150 billion. In theory, it all went to pay for food imports and industrial modernisation, and to prop up pub-



JEREMY NICHOLL—MATRIX

Boris Berezovsky: *nouveau riche*

lic finances. But there is amazingly little to show for the huge sums involved. 'It was stolen,' says one experienced Moscow investment banker."

—*Economist*, 11 January 2001

The "loans" provided by Western financiers pushed Russia's foreign debt to 30 percent of its GDP by 1998. Appropriated by a few dozen well-connected parasites at the top, they remain on the books to be repaid (with interest) by tens of millions of Russia's impoverished working people.

An Ersatz Bourgeois State

The bourgeois state apparatus cobbled together from the personnel inherited from the Soviet Union was sufficient for privatizing formerly collectivized property, but it lacked both the capacity and authority to perform many of the normal functions of a capitalist state. Each oligarch had to rely on his own thugs to enforce contracts, collect debts and provide physical security. This opened the door for the "Don Korleonskis" of the Russian Mafia who soon became an important factor in the fledgling capitalist economy. The 30 January 1994 issue of the *New York Times* reported that few companies, particularly big ones, paid taxes, but 70 to 80 percent paid protection money to gangsters:

"Organized gangs know whom to shake down and how much to demand, because an army of police officers, bank officials, and undercover agents serve as tipsters. Traffic police stopping cars at checkpoints radio ahead to gang accomplices when they discover something valuable in the trunk....

"Extortion is tough to fight because nearly everyone has something to hide. Victims will not report crimes to the police, for fear of revealing their incomes to the tax inspectors.... One Russian source estimates that 80% of robberies and 90% of frauds are never reported."

—Gustafson, *op cit*

Yet Gustafson reports that most businessmen regard the complicated and often conflicting array of regulations and licensing requirements and corrupt officials as the main im-

pediments to commerce: "Crime they say they can handle themselves." Under Yeltsin most big firms found it easier to negotiate pay-offs and bribes to individual officials than to pay for permits and licenses. Many enterprises refused to pay taxes, while others "paid" with unsold goods or IOUs:

"According to the State Tax Service, only 16% of all registered businesses pay their taxes in full and on time; some 50% comply occasionally; while 34% ignore the tax collector altogether."

—*Ibid.*

Tens of thousands of companies evaded taxes by never registering with the government in the first place. Some "entrepreneurs" countered attempts at law enforcement by burning down tax offices to destroy their records, or even hiring contract killers to eliminate particularly troublesome inspectors.

From Nomenklatura to Bourgeoisie

Former members of the *nomenklatura* are much more prominent in the nascent Russian bourgeoisie than in Poland and other East European countries where they comprise an insignificant minority. Gustafson cites a study by Olga Kryshchanovskaia, a Moscow sociologist, which found that roughly two-thirds of Russia's capitalist elite originated in the Soviet *nomenklatura*:

"the richest and most successful of the lot were backed from the beginning by state interests. The founders of the powerful commercial banks of the Nineties...were little more than the 'authorized representatives' (in Russian, 'upolnomochennye') of powerful forces inside the state....

"In short, the *upolnomochennye* were not a true business class; they were the agents of a new financial-political oligarchy that bound state and private interests together."

Yet, with the exception of a few oil and gas barons, most oligarchs did not obtain their positions simply as a result of their rank within the CPSU hierarchy. For example, under the old regime, Vladimir Gusinsky of the Most Group was a theatre director, Boris Berezovsky was a mathematician, and Mikhail Friedman of the Alpha Group was a physicist. Connections within the Stalinist ruling apparatus were a necessary, but entirely insufficient, condition for success in the chaotic and unscripted privatization scramble.

Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Komsomol, the CPSU's youth group, became something of a refuge for the disenfranchised, but with the introduction of *perestroika*, it turned into an incubator for fledgling entrepreneurs. The Komsomol owned its own tourist agencies, construction brigades, stadiums, sports clubs, newspapers and even software companies. Its cadres overwhelmingly sided with Yeltsin in the August 1991 showdown and, as a result, in the aftermath, when the CPSU was outlawed, the Komsomol was not touched:

"Today the alumni of the Komsomol are the most important single group within the Russian business elite. To that extent there is indeed some basis for the charge that today's businessmen are drawn from the *nomenklatura* and benefited from Komsomol connections. But the Komsomol connection provided mainly a means to get started. The rest was a matter of individual talent and energy."

—*Ibid.*

Some leftists grossly exaggerate the continuity between the old *nomenklatura* and the new bourgeoisie. For example, the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP/B), founded by

the late Tony Cliff, which long maintained that the USSR became "state capitalist" in 1928, characterized the victory of the Yeltsinites as simply "a shift from one form of capitalism to another." In one of his last books, Cliff asserted:

"If a counter-revolution had taken place, if a restoration of capitalism had taken place, there should have been a wholesale replacement of one ruling class with another. Instead we witnessed the continuity of the same personnel at the top of society; the members of the *nomenklatura* who ran the economy, society and state under 'socialism' now do the same under the 'market.'"

—*Trotskyism After Trotsky*

There is a grain of truth to Cliff's claim, but only a grain. Yeltsin, for example, the historic leader of capitalist counterrevolution, was of course a former CPSU bureaucrat. It is no more surprising that many Soviet-era managers, economists, engineers and others should have found places in the capitalist new order than it was that thousands of former Czarist officials, administrators, technicians and even military officers, were employed by the early Bolshevik regime.

Most of the upper layers of the *nomenklatura*, particularly those involved in running the central economic ministries, the ideologists, and the CPSU apparatchiks, were simply dismissed. Ellman and Kontorovich flatly reject claims that those who ran "the economy, society and state" in the USSR continued to exercise power after Yeltsin's ascension:

"We found no evidence to support the fashionable theory that the Soviet system was toppled by the Party and state officials in order to turn their power into private wealth. Just as these officials, though loathing Gorbachev, were incapable of collective action to defend the system, they were equally incapable of consciously hastening its demise. If they landed on their feet after the system had crashed, it was due to their individual survival skills, rather than some grand design."

Poisoned Fruits of Counterrevolution

The glib assertion that Russian society has merely "moved sideways" since 1991 overlooks the disastrous impact of capitalist restoration on the lives of working people. The UNDP's 1999 study observed:

"Before the 1990s, countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS were notable for providing their populations with a high degree of basic security.... People's right to full, lifetime employment was guaranteed. Although cash incomes were low, they were stable and secure. Many basic consumption goods and services were subsidized and regularly supplied. People had food security and were adequately clothed and housed. They had free guaranteed access to education and health. They were assured pensions when they retired and regularly benefited from many other forms of social protection."

Mikhail Friedman, an "oligarch" described by Freeland as "one of the biggest winners in the capitalist casino," certainly recognizes the qualitative change since 1991, and even evinces a certain nostalgia for the old days:

"My life was very carefree, just as life was for everyone in the Soviet Union.... Materially, of course, people did not live very well, but no one had to worry about anything. The main thing, what was really intense, was friends, spiritual interests, books. The relations between people were far more open. People did not compete. There was not the same disproportion or envy. People today are far more stressed."

—Freeland, *op cit*



Vladimir Gusinsky: theater director turned media baron

Under capitalism life is both nastier and shorter. Between 1991 and 1995 life expectancy for Russian males dropped precipitously—from 63 to 58 years. The rate of population growth fell from 2.4 percent in 1990 to *negative* 5.4 percent by 1996. (This figure does not reflect the millions of skilled young people who emigrated in this period.)

The near collapse of public healthcare (currently budgeted at a meagre one percent of GDP, a level found only in the poorest neo-colonies) has led to a resurgence of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases that had previously been brought under control:

"Many of the diseases that are re-emerging could be contained by standard immunization programs. For example, polio cases, now rare in industrialized western countries, have begun to re-appear...."

—UNDP, *op cit*

Between 1989 and 1995, the number of AIDS cases soared, while syphilis rates went up 40-fold:

"Many of these problems could be solved, or at least contained, by a well-functioning public health system, including the implementation of standard immunization and reproductive health programs. The seriousness of the problem signals, however, that primary health interventions have been significantly weakened during the transition period."

—*Ibid.*

The destruction of the planned economy deprived millions of working people of the ability to feed themselves and their families. This led to an increase in every sort of social pathology from drug abuse to wife beating. Between 1991 and 1995, the number of suicides almost doubled and homicide rates increased dramatically:

"Under-employed young men took to advertising their eagerness to become assassins in the classified ads, using the blunt code phrase 'willing to take on any dangerous work for a high fee'. Petty criminals began to murder for pathetically small trophies: real-estate shysters killed gullible pensioners in order to inherit their apartments; one crime ring, posing as a car-repair shop, killed and dismembered owners just to steal their vehicles."

—Freeland, *op cit*

The impact of Russia's social counterrevolution hit the disabled, pensioners, children and women particularly hard. The ideological bias of the authors of the UNDP report are evident in their apparent amazement that:

"the advent of more democratic [i.e., capitalist] regimes has led paradoxically to lower percentages of women in [positions of authority]. Women have found themselves progressively pushed out of public life. Simultaneously, their access to paid employment has declined and their total work burden both within the household and outside it has increased...."

"Violence against women has been on the rise with physical abuse from spouses...and a rising number of women becoming victims of crime. Also, many women who have been desperate to find employment and a better life have found themselves forced into prostitution...by organized crime networks."

Freeland cites an infamous survey from the early 1990s which reported that "hard currency prostitute" was the top career choice for female students at Moscow State University, Russia's equivalent of Harvard or Oxford.

Capitalist restoration is estimated to have created more Russian orphans than World War II. According to a 1 June 2001 *BBC News Report*, in Russia today: "More than 2.5 million children live on the streets—many of them abandoned by parents who can no longer afford to bring them up." The BBC also mentioned that:

"Nearly all Russian children suffer from one or more chronic diseases by the time they leave school and many are on the way to alcoholism, according to a report published by Russia's Ministry of Health.

"Only one child in 10, it says, can be considered healthy by the age of 17."

The UNDP report provides the following summary of the results of capitalist restoration:

"There is no longer any secure entitlement to a decent education, a healthy life or adequate nutrition. With rising mortality rates and new and potentially devastating epidemics on the horizon, life itself is increasingly at risk."

"The 'transition' in most of the countries in the former Soviet bloc...is a euphemistic term for what in reality has been a Great Depression. The extent of the collapse in output and the skyrocketing nature of inflation have been historically unprecedented. The consequences for human security have been calamitous. By conservative estimates, over 100 million people have been thrown into poverty, and considerably more hover precariously just above subsistence."

'Democracy' & Counterrevolution

Various ostensibly Soviet defensist "Trotskyist" organizations (including Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat and the British Workers Power group), which backed Yeltsin in August 1991, alibied their betrayal with claims that the capitalist restorationists' "democracy" was worth more than the preservation of collectivized property. Their arguments echoed Karl Kautsky's early polemics against the Bolshevik regime under Lenin and Trotsky, which have been recycled by social democrats and anti-communists ever since.

The "democratic rights" provided by the counterrevolution are worth little to the tens of millions crushed under poverty, homelessness, hunger and disease. At bottom, Russia's "democracy" is only a mechanism for holding down overheads for the squabbling bourgeois clans. It can be dispensed with at any moment, as Yeltsin reveals in the

third volume of his memoirs where he recounts how close he came to cancelling the 1996 presidential elections and outlawing the CPRF when it looked like Zygunov might win:

"There is no point in hiding it: I had always been inclined toward simple, effective decisions. It had always seemed to me that chopping through the Gordian knot was easier than spending years untying it...."

"Korzhakov [Yeltsin's security chief] was also still searching for his election strategy. 'It is senseless to struggle when you have a 3-percent approval rating, Boris Nikolayevich,' he said to me. 'If we lose time with all these electoral games, then what?'"

"I had to take a radical step. I told my staff to prepare the documents. Decrees were written to ban the Communist Party, dissolve the Duma, and postpone the presidential elections. These formulations contained the verdict: I had not been able to manage the crisis within the framework of the current constitution. But this is how I saw the situation at the time: By outlawing the Communist Party, true, I would pay a very heavy price in credibility for going beyond the constitution's limits. But I would fix one of the main problems I'd had since the beginning of my presidential term. After the ban, the Communist Party would be finished forever in Russia."

—*Midnight Diaries*

Yeltsin was eventually persuaded by his daughter and various members of his inner circle that "fixing" his problems in this manner could touch off a civil war. But it was a close call.

The *Economist*, which aptly characterized Russia's last round of parliamentary elections as a "grubby spectacle," observed:

"Mr. Yeltsin and his friends are helped by the state's control of television, which enables the Kremlin to promote allies through fawning coverage and to destroy opponents by defaming them."

—*Economist*, 16 December 1999

Life can be difficult for those who dare oppose the ruling clique:

"Governors who back anti-Kremlin candidates risk finding that their local oil company suddenly gets knocked out of the state-controlled pipeline system. If they switch to the Kremlin's side, their reward can be the jailing or dismissal of a troublesome local opponent, or a lucrative tax break for local industry."

—*Ibid.*

The popular illegitimacy and insecurity of the new ruling elite is a source of considerable concern:

"even the lucky few who made it really big and became oligarchs always felt at risk: maybe the communists would storm back into power....Perhaps a political enemy would take over the Kremlin and arrange for the arrest—and perhaps a jail-cell heart attack?—of an oligarch he hated. Or maybe a rival businessman would have better luck with that car bomb....No amount of money and no number of musclemen were ever enough to make them feel safe."

—Freeland, *op cit*

In the imperialist "democracies," where string-pulling and influence-peddling are more mediated, the stability of the bourgeoisie and the relative autonomy of the political process lends credibility to the institutions of the state. In Russia, where every fortune was recently acquired through the theft of public property via political connections, everything is more transparent:

"Taxes paid by the oligarchs' companies keep the government afloat; their backhanders provide a comfortable life and a secure retirement for those with power and influence. In return, they expect the state and its servants to protect their interests—for example, by keeping foreigners out, loopholes open and competition down."

—*Economist*, 30 March 2000

Contrary to the rosy prognostications of free-market utopians, Russia's parvenu bourgeoisie has shown remarkably little interest in retooling, introducing new efficiencies or expanding production:

"The only people prospering in the New Russia seemed to be a narrow layer of the super-rich...Its fortunes were not based on new technologies, more efficient services or more productive factories. Instead, they were built by capturing pieces of the collapsing Soviet state: the country's oilfields and nickel mines, its television channels and export permits and even the government's bank accounts. And once Russia's home-grown capitalist conquistadors had secured their loot, they whisked it away to safer havens abroad as quickly as they could. Between 1991 and 1999, experts estimated that between \$100bn and \$150bn in flight capital left Russia.

"Russia had created a market economy, but of a distorted kind. With its ten-year economic depression, dying and increasingly deprived underclass and extravagant and parasitic elite, Russia had become a kind of capitalist dystopia, a Soviet ideologue's lurid fantasy of life in what used to be called the 'rotting West'."

—Freeland, *op cit*

A healthy bottom line, brand-name recognition and growing market share is supposed to give a company an advantage over its rivals, but in Russia:

"Size and success attract the attention of gangsters and corrupt bureaucrats, especially local ones. If you try to put a competitor out of business, instead of enjoying a bigger market share you risk a visit from his political or criminal cronies: at best a raid from the arbitrary and rapacious tax police, at worst a car bomb or bullet. That makes the need for political protection, with the costs and compromises it brings, all but irresistible even for the most able managers."

—*Economist*, 30 March 2000

Putin's Project

Even Boris Yeltsin, the historic leader of the counterrevolution, needed guarantees of political protection for himself and his family before handing the reins over to Vladimir Putin. Putin, who cut his teeth in the KGB, was supported by the enterprise managers, the state repressive apparatus and the "patriotic" bourgeoisie as someone who could "normalize" Russian capitalism and restore their country's international position.

Putin has moved to reassert the Kremlin's authority over the regions, increase tax compliance and curb the oligarchs. To attract overseas investment to help rebuild Russia's once formidable industrial capacity, he has ensured that foreign debt payments are made regularly. He has further squeezed subsidies on housing, public transportation and other social services, and pushed through a business-friendly "reform" of labor legislation. Putin has aggressively pursued Moscow's reactionary war against Chechnya, while reasserting Moscow's influence in the "near abroad" (the Caucasus, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics).

Russia's GDP expanded in both 1999 and 2000 after a decade of decline. This was partially attributable to a surge in



VLADIMIR FLONOV—MOSCOW TIMES

Russian miners protest labor legislation

commodity prices (particularly oil), but chiefly resulted from the 75 percent devaluation of the ruble that followed the financial crisis of 1998. The cheaper ruble made Russia's exports more competitive internationally, while increasing demand for domestically produced consumer goods like foodstuffs, automobiles, textiles and electronics. In recent years some of the bigger Russian companies have made some modest domestic investments, while also acquiring factories in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former USSR.

Since the 1998 devaluation, cash has replaced barter in transactions between Russian companies, tax revenues have increased, and the government has posted a series of budgetary surpluses. But the overall picture remains bleak. Wages are only half what they were before the devaluation and the human resources inherited from the Soviet Union are rapidly eroding. Funding for education has been slashed and spending on research and development is barely a third of what it was under Gorbachev. Besides raw materials and some basic chemicals, Russia is internationally competitive in only a few areas: armaments, nuclear power plants and space technology, and even here it is slowly losing ground. This is hardly surprising, as the average age of machinery in Russian plants is triple that of the imperialist economies of the OECD.

Russia's roads, bridges, powerlines, water and sewage systems are disintegrating rapidly. During the past ten years, Russia's "entrepreneurs" have run down the capital stock they seized without replacing or upgrading it:

"As fast as the Russian economy has declined, investment has dropped even faster. Overall, gross fixed investment declined from 45% of GDP in 1989 to 21% in 1996. Since GDP itself declined by over 40% during the same period, capital spending in absolute terms dropped by over three-quarters.



DPA

Putin with police in the Caucasus: reasserting Moscow's influence

"....Net fixed investment has been negative since 1995; in other words, Russia's entire capital base has been shrinking. By 1997 net fixed investment was *minus* 10% of GDP, and has continued to decline since then."

—Gustafson, *op cit*

Updating Russia's technology and rebuilding its infrastructure will require hundreds of billions of dollars; yet roughly half of the estimated \$60 billion trade surplus earned in 2000 is thought to have been siphoned off into offshore accounts by the oligarchs. Even in the oil and natural gas sector, the chief source of foreign earnings, the failure to reinvest has led to a fall in production. The oil pipelines constructed during the Soviet period have almost all exceeded their projected life expectancy, and every year an estimated 20 million tons of oil leaks out to pollute Russia's forests, fields and rivers.

For A New October!

Russia today has attributes of both a great power and a semi-colony, just as it did under the Czar. But there is no political formation that even roughly approximates a revolutionary leadership for working people. Instead of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Putin's left flank is covered by the anti-Semitic, pro-capitalist chauvinists of the CPRF.

The social weight of the Russian working class today is immensely greater than it was in 1917, and its bitter experience with capitalist privatization has dispelled all illusions in the magic of the market:

"Language itself had been turned on its head. 'Reform' and 'market' had gone from being part of the vocabulary of triumph and hope to being, in the ears of many Russians, almost four-letter words. The noun *kapitalizm* came increasingly to be modified with the adjective *dikyj* (sav- age). Accordingly, the 'West' went from being an object of emulation to a target of resentment. In the meantime, another word, 'left', has come back into fashion."

—*Economist*, 19 November 1998

In attempting to arrest the rate of Russia's decline, Putin has already chipped away at the democratic facade under which the counterrevolution has proceeded to date. In their drive to compete internationally, Russia's capitalists will inevitably launch further assaults on political and trade-union rights in the future. The Russian working class has suffered enormously from a decade of capitalist restoration, but it remains a potentially powerful political factor in the world today. A revolutionary organization combining hard class-struggle tactics with political intransigence toward those who would seek to reconcile the oppressed to their tormentors could grow exponentially in the present circumstances.

Despite immense natural wealth and a substantial cadre of skilled workers, scientists and engineers, thus far the re-integration of the former Soviet republics into the capitalist world market has produced mass impoverishment and the destruction of much of the pre-existing educational infrastructure and industrial capacity. Nigeria provides a closer model for Russia's future under capitalism than Sweden or Germany.

The only way forward for Russia's working people lies through the wholesale expropriation of the capitalist parasites and the creation of a planned economy directly controlled by the associated producers. The key task of revolutionaries in this period must be to struggle to cohere the nucleus of a new Bolshevik party based on the political heritage of Lenin and Trotsky and committed to fight for leadership of Russia's powerful workers' movement.

Only through a new October Revolution can Russian workers escape the backwardness and destitution to which the global imperialist order has condemned them. A resurgent Russian proletariat would not seek to restore the hated Stalinist regime, nor would it pursue the autarkic fantasy of building socialism in a single country, but rather it would act as a catalyst for a renewed wave of world socialist revolution. ■

Caste & Class in the USSR

'All Shades of Political Thought'

In analyzing the political and social character of the Stalinist ruling caste in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Leon Trotsky laid great emphasis on the political heterogeneity concealed behind the facade of "monolithic" unity. In the 1938 *Transitional Program*, the founding document of the Fourth International, Trotsky observed: "all shades of political thought are to be found among the [Soviet] bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko)."

Reiss was a Soviet intelligence operative in Western Europe who declared his political allegiance to the Fourth International in July 1937, but was murdered by Stalinist agents only a few weeks later. Butenko was a Soviet diplomat who defected to Mussolini's Italy in early 1938. Trotsky asserted that in any confrontation between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the "fraction of Butenko," i.e., the open agents of capitalist counterrevolution, the tiny handful of "revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy" (the "fraction of Reiss") must be prepared to temporarily bloc with the Stalinists.

Trotsky's assessment of the Soviet bureaucracy was abundantly confirmed by events leading up to the triumph of the counterrevolution in August 1991. While the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the majority of the cadre of Lenin's Bolshevik Party had been eradicated in the course of Stalin's bloody purges in the 1930s, the top layers of the bureaucracy never lost their anxiety about the dangers of mass revolt from below.

The leading elements of the Communist Party (CPSU) were deeply disturbed by the eruption of spontaneous popular opposition to price hikes in June 1962 in Novocherkassk in southern Russia. The protests centered on the city's electric locomotive plant. On 2 June the army opened fire on a rally in the central square, killing dozens. After regaining control, the Stalinists shot seven "instigators" and threw many more into prison. The KGB (Soviet political police) attempted to suppress all information about the events by threatening eyewitnesses with prolonged jail sentences.

Yuri Andropov, who briefly held power in the early 1980s after Leonid Brezhnev's death, was reported by one of his aides to have worried about the possibility of a mass revolt against the regime (see *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System*, M. Ellman and V. Kontorovich). As the architect of the Kremlin's suppression of the 1956 Hungarian workers' political revolution, Andropov was well aware of the precarious nature of the bureaucracy's grip on power in the face of a popular uprising.

Gorbachev & the Butenko Fraction

Mikhail Gorbachev took over as CPSU general secretary in 1985 pledging to reinvigorate the Soviet economy, but soon came to the conclusion that the USSR could only survive by moving toward a system of "market socialism," i.e., the introduction of production for profit. Gorbachev's economic program (*perestroika*) encountered considerable resistance from conservative elements within the state apparatus. Gorbachev countered by breaking the party's ideological monopoly and instituting a policy of *glasnost*, which per-



OTECHESTVO

Alexander Tsipko: a White on the CPSU CC

mitted the expression of all shades of political opinion.

The limits of *glasnost* were tested in late 1988 with the appearance of the first openly anti-Marxist article in the official Soviet press. Its author, Alexander Tsipko, who had earlier worked as a speechwriter for Gorbachev, proudly recalled:

"My articles in *Nauka i zhizn'* [1988-89] were widely regarded as braving the bastion of official ideology. They represented the first attempt to openly challenge Marxism and were written from a White perspective....I managed to get my views published in the official press in a country that just a year earlier had celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution and remained the stronghold of world Communism. I did this while not only being a Party member, but also working as a consultant for the International Affairs Department of the CC [Central Committee]."

—"The Making of an Anti-Communist," in *The Destruction of the Soviet Economic System*, M. Ellman and V. Kontorovich

Unlike many pro-capitalist elements among the *nomenklatura* who underwent an incremental political evolution to the right, Tsipko claims to have been a subjective counterrevolutionary his whole life:

"Ever since I was a child I have experienced awe for everything pre-Revolutionary—books, journals, and even household items such as an old refrigerator with ice, still functional in the 1950s, which my family inherited from my grandfather. These things represented a myth, a paradise lost which captured my imagination....When I



Valery Sablin: working-class hero

watched films about the Civil War I always supported the Whites. I did not like these films, because the side I supported always lost."

—*Ibid.*

In the late 1960s Tsipko was on the central committee of the Komsomol, the CPSU's youth group, but his academic career was sidetracked when party ideologues detected a heretical note in his writings and prevented him from obtaining a doctorate. When Tsipko met Gorbachev in 1983, he was the CPSU agricultural secretary under Andropov. A few years later, Georgi Smirnov, a top Gorbachev aide, approached Tsipko to do some speechwriting for his boss. Smirnov assured Tsipko that despite his public utterances, Gorbachev recognized that the sixty years of "socialist construction" had all been a big mistake:

"By confiding to me (naturally, with Gorbachev's permission) his heretical thoughts, Smirnov realized full well that I would not advertise the fact that the general secretary was saying one thing and thinking something very different. Smirnov did not need to spell it out that the time for coming out with these ideas in public had not yet come and that we needed to exercise caution and support Gorbachev."

—*Ibid.*

In November 1986, Gorbachev secured a position for Tsipko in the Department of Socialist Countries:

"I felt as if I were one of the initiates. I realized then that there was no limit to Gorbachev's ideological flexibility. Still, what prompted me to write the anti-Communist articles published by *Nauka i zhizn'* in late 1988 and early 1989 was...the rapidly changing intellectual climate in the country and the new opportunities to speak and write the truth.

"...I had not realized it at the time, but the November 1988 issue of *Nauka i zhizn'* marked the last test of the ideologi-

cal resolve of the CC. I wrote that faith in Communism is not merely a weakness or a romantic infatuation, but is 'a great sin before man and one's nation'....Our entire social structure is predicated upon false premises. Collectivization and the Bolshevik-inspired self-genocide of the Russian people have their roots in Marxism."

—*Ibid.*

Tsipko had many co-thinkers within the CPSU Central Committee:

"In the CC and its International Department I was surrounded by the graduates of the Moscow State Institute for International Relations who knew that Marx's prognosis had proved wrong and that the entire socialist experiment was a futile endeavor. Only the unhappy late Jan Smeral, the son of a Comintern leader and a founder of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, could not break with Marxism. All the other people who surrounded me in the CC were quite indifferent to the fate of the doctrines of Karl Marx. They were, however, afraid of what subsequently happened, that perestroika might lead to total chaos with unpredictable consequences. This possibility was discussed among my colleague-consultants as early as the beginning of 1987."

—*Ibid.*

'Red October': the True Story

In September 2000, Britain's Channel 4 aired a program telling the story of Valery Sablin, a member of the "fraction of Reiss," the organic enemies of Tsipko and his ilk. The documentary, entitled "Mutiny: The True Story of Red October," revealed the background to the 1975 mutiny aboard the Soviet missile frigate *Storozhevoy* that provided the basis for Tom Clancy's 1984 novel, *The Hunt for Red October*, and the movie of the same name.

In Clancy's version a Russian submarine captain (Marko Raimus) attempted to defect to the West after the death of the ship's political officer. A second, less popular, fictional account entitled *The Red Banner Mutiny*, which claimed to be "more authentic than *The Hunt for Red October*," was published in 1986. Its author, Andrew P. O'Rourke, used Sablin's real name as well as that of his ship, and set his tale in the Baltic rather than the North Atlantic. But apart from these details, his account was just as bogus as Clancy's, as is evident from the backcover blurb:

"Repelled by the tyranny of his government and drawn by the woman he loved—a Bolshoi ballerina who had defected to the West—he [Sablin] steered the renegade ship toward safe harbor in Sweden, weighing the deep moral and political consequences of his act."

Sablin's actions were indeed deep and consequential, unlike the low-brow, Cold War propaganda churned out by O'Rourke and Clancy.

It is true that on 8 November 1975, Valery Sablin, the political officer on board the *Storozhevoy*, locked up the captain and seized control of his ship. But Sablin did not head to Sweden to defect, but rather to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), where he hoped to set off a popular revolt that would topple the corrupt and dictatorial Stalinist bureaucracy and replace it with a genuinely socialist regime.

Valery Sablin, a passionate Marxist who was proud of the revolutionary traditions of Russia's sailors, was particularly inspired by the 1905 mutiny aboard the battleship *Potemkin*. His father and grandfather had been in the Soviet navy, and in 1955, at the age of 16, young Valery enrolled in the Frunze Naval Academy in Leningrad. He was soon

elected head of the Komsomol branch at the academy. One of his classmates, Alexei Lialin, recalled:

"We were all educated to adhere to the spirit of socialist and communist ethics. We all believed in them, but Valery had such integrity he wanted to put these ideals into action."

Sablin was deeply troubled by the chasm that separated the egalitarian ideals of Marxism from the rigid hierarchy and privilege which characterized "actually existing socialism." On the eve of the mutiny, Sablin wrote a letter to his wife in which he explained his decision:

"Why am I doing this? The love of life, and I mean not in the sense of the life of a comfortable bourgeois, but a bright, truthful life which inspires a genuine joy in all honest people. I am convinced that in our nation, just as 58 years ago in 1917, a revolutionary consciousness will alight and we will achieve communism in our society."

In 1959, while still a naval cadet, Sablin had written to Nikita Khrushchev to complain about the inegalitarianism that characterized the Soviet regime. He was sternly reprimanded for this indiscretion, but because he was such an outstanding officer candidate he was eventually allowed to graduate.

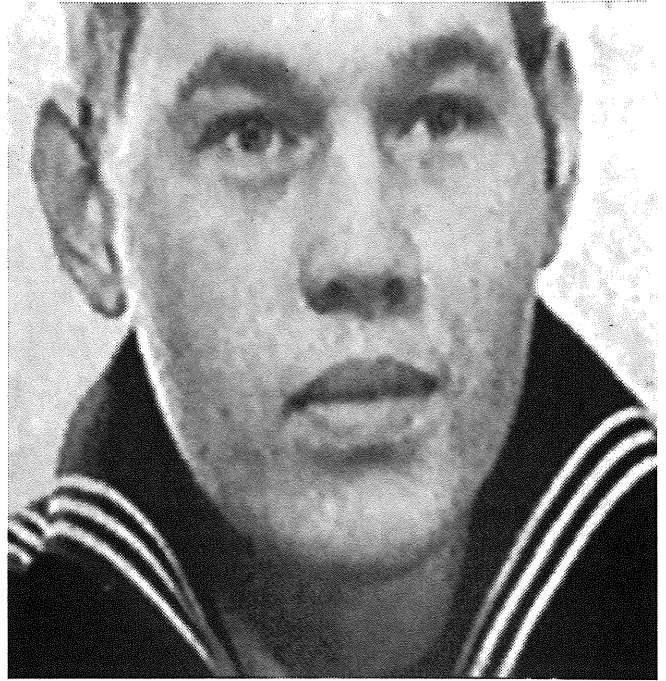
He was offered command of a destroyer in 1969, when he was only 30. His friends and family were shocked when he chose instead to enrol in the Lenin Political Academy for a program of advanced ideological studies. In hindsight his brother Boris speculated that Valery had wanted to understand how the system worked in order to better struggle against it. In studying Marx, Engels and Lenin at the academy, Sablin sought an answer to the riddle of how the workers' revolution of 1917 had somehow produced an anti-working class political dictatorship. Another brother, Nikolai, commented that Valery was very disappointed that even in the elite party school access to information and books was restricted. Noting the enormous discrepancy between the ideas in Lenin's *State and Revolution* and the reality of the CPSU regime, Sablin concluded, "this machine has to be broken from the inside."

In 1973 Sablin was assigned to the *Storozhevoy* as the ship's political officer and second in command, under Captain Anatoly Putorny. One of the duties of the political officer was to deliver lectures on "Marxism-Leninism" to the crew. Sablin's lectures were far better received than most due to his enthusiasm for the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and particularly the role that revolutionary sailors played in them.

On 8 November 1975, the *Storozhevoy* was docked in the Baltic port of Riga, where it had participated in a commemoration of the October Revolution. This was the moment that Sablin chose to make his move. His plan was to sail to Leningrad and use the ship's radio to broadcast an appeal on a civilian frequency for a popular revolt against the CPSU and the creation of a new, genuinely socialist regime.

A few days earlier, Sablin had taken one of the seamen, Alexander Shein, into his confidence. The two began their revolt by locking up the captain and organizing a showing of Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 silent film "Battleship Potemkin." During the screening, Sablin outlined his plan to the ship's 16 officers and asked for their support. Amazingly, eight agreed to throw in their lot with him. The sailors, following Shein, unanimously opted to go along with the mutineers.

One of the junior officers who opposed the revolt managed to escape from the *Storozhevoy* while it was still in Riga



Alexander Shein: Sablin's lieutenant

and went straight to the authorities. Sablin considered abandoning the project at this point, but the crew urged him to carry it through. So, at 1:00 a.m. on 9 November 1975, the *Storozhevoy* set out for Leningrad.

Sablin decided to broadcast his radio appeal to the Soviet working class before reaching Leningrad. Unfortunately the ship's radio operator broadcast the speech in code, thus ensuring that only the naval hierarchy was able to understand it. Leonid Brezhnev was woken in the middle of the night and advised of the revolt. He ordered that the *Storozhevoy* be apprehended, or, if necessary, sunk. Sixty planes and 13 ships were sent out to hunt for the rebels. The KGB initially suspected that the appeal to the workers might have been a blind, and that the real destination of the mutineers was Sweden. By dawn the Soviet coast guard had located the *Storozhevoy*. The KGB offered to pardon the men if they stopped immediately, but Sablin refused, stating that they were not traitors and had no intention of defecting to the West.

The first wave of planes from the Baltic fleet air wing that reached the *Storozhevoy* refused a direct order to fire on it. This infuriated Defense Minister Andrei Grechko who demanded that his instructions be carried out immediately. (In 1953 Grechko had commanded the Soviet troops who suppressed the East German workers' uprising.) The second wave of planes did drop their bombs and managed to crack the hull of the *Storozhevoy*, disabling it.

When they saw that the jig was up, some crew members freed Putorny who immediately grabbed a handgun, ran to the ship's bridge and shot Sablin in the leg. Putorny then alerted the authorities that he had regained control, and a party of KGB officers and paratroopers clambered aboard. Six hours after it had begun, the mutiny was over.

On the trip back to Riga a paratrooper officer guarding the mutineers asked Sasha Shein: "What made you do it? You broke your oath." Shein replied: "Look at the way we live! What sort of a life is that? Do you really think people should have to live like this? It's just one big lie." The officer made



Valery Sablin's wife and son

no reply, but Shein had the impression that he seemed to agree.

When the *Storozhevoy* arrived back in Riga, the KGB arrested the whole crew, even the officers who had opposed the mutiny. The authorities were anxious to suppress news of the dramatic events, but rumours were already circulating in Riga about a "second Potemkin." To counter the potential political danger of even a failed pro-socialist revolt against the "Communist" party, the KGB leaked a story about an attempted defection to Sweden that was duly picked up by Western intelligence agencies and subsequently provided the basis for Clancy's version of events. Sablin, Shein and 14 others were subjected to an intensive grilling by KGB interrogators who were chiefly interested in uncovering the nature of the organization which they presumed stood behind the attempt.

Sablin was questioned every day for nine months. Eventually he was charged with "betrayal of the Motherland" and convicted. Normally such a charge was punishable by a 15-year jail sentence, but Brezhnev intervened personally to demand Sablin's execution. Shein was sentenced to eight years in prison.

Valery Sablin: Working Class Hero

It was not enough to execute Sablin—the Kremlin oligarchs also sought to destroy his good name by slandering him as a pro-imperialist defector. As Russian historian Nikolai Cherkashin explained:

"It was very convenient for the authorities because Sablin could be disowned and treated like a common criminal, or someone who was trying to escape to the West for financial reasons. It was a convenient theory because it reduced the significance of this event. It wasn't a mutiny, it wasn't a riot. It was just a regular criminal act."

Only in 1990, which happened to be the same year Holly-

wood released *The Hunt for Red October* starring Sean Connery, did the Russian public learn the truth. The capitalist movie moguls were no more interested in telling the real story of the mutiny than Brezhnev had been.

Valery Sablin's actions required an extraordinary level of courage and revolutionary will. He was undoubtedly aware that the Stalinist police apparatus devoted enormous resources to locating underground revolutionary organizations in the USSR and he therefore concluded that the only chance lay in surprise.

Sablin's resolve, nurtured over many years, stands as an inspiration for revolutionaries today. But the failure of the *Storozhevoy* mutiny also points to the limitations of individual actions, however heroic. Acting alone—without either a cadre of collaborators or a connection to the valiant struggles against Stalinism by earlier generations of Bolshevik-Leninists—Sablin's isolated action was almost certainly doomed from the outset. This sort of initiative is only likely to spark broader waves of struggle when the normal routines and habits of thought are already disrupted—i.e., during a period of generalized political crisis.

The failed coup by Stalinist "hardliners" in August 1991, which ended with Boris Yeltsin in control, is an example of such a crisis. In drawing the lessons of that experience we observed:

"Even a relatively small revolutionary grouping could have made a great impact during those critical August days, when the weak and vacillating coupists faced Yeltsin's motley rabble. The weakness and disorganization evident on both sides presented an opportunity for a Trotskyist group committed to preserving nationalized property under the direction of democratic organs of workers power. The immediate tactical objective in those first days would have been to organize an assault to disperse the few hundred lightly armed Yeltsinites in and around the Russian White House.

"A determined initiative against the counter-revolutionaries would have won wide support in the working class, who were fed up with perestroika. It would also have been viewed sympathetically by a considerable section of the armed forces, and could have galvanized active support from pro-socialist elements. The floundering grey men running the coup would have had little choice but to accept this 'help' even though, carried out in the name of workers power, it would in the end have threatened their interests too. The scattering of the Yeltsinites could have been followed up by a call for representatives from every factory, barracks and working-class housing estate to gather at the White House to create a real, democratic Moscow soviet."

—1917 No. 11

A recent account of the actions of Major Sergei Yevdokimov, who commanded the ten tanks dispatched by the coupists to take positions in front of Yeltsin's headquarters on 19 August 1991, illustrates how, at critical moments, major historical events can turn on the decisions of individuals. Initially when Yeltsin's supporters asked Yevdokimov what he would do if ordered to move against the Russian president, he affirmed his intent to carry out his orders. After being harangued for three hours, Yevdokimov met General Konstantin Kobets, whom Yeltsin was soon to appoint as defense minister, and Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, a Soviet Afghan War hero, and promised them his support. Yevdokimov's decision to turn his tanks around was a pivotal moment in the defeat of the coup. It

encouraged Yeltsin's supporters and unnerved the sclerotic Stalinist "Emergency Committee."

Many of the hustlers and black marketeers who formed the core of Yeltsin's support went on to enrich themselves. But Yevdokimov, a career army officer, was not so lucky:

"I knew I was in for trouble when my commander greeted me by saying 'Well, you'll soon be the next defence minister,'" he recounted with a wry smile. 'From that time on, I knew my career was doomed.'

"After a few months of dealing with resentment from senior officers, Yevdokimov asked for a transfer. No promotions followed."

—*Toronto Star*, 14 August 2001

Today Yevdokimov is unemployed, but, unlike the tens of millions of other victims of the counterrevolution, he at least was the author of his own misfortune. The resentment which greeted this "hero" of the counterrevolution by the officer corps suggests that many in the Soviet armed forces would have been sympathetic to a serious initiative undertaken against the Yeltsinites. In such a circumstance a pro-socialist mutiny aboard a single ship, or within a single regiment, could have touched off a workers' political revolution that might have swept aside both the Yeltsinite capitalist restor-

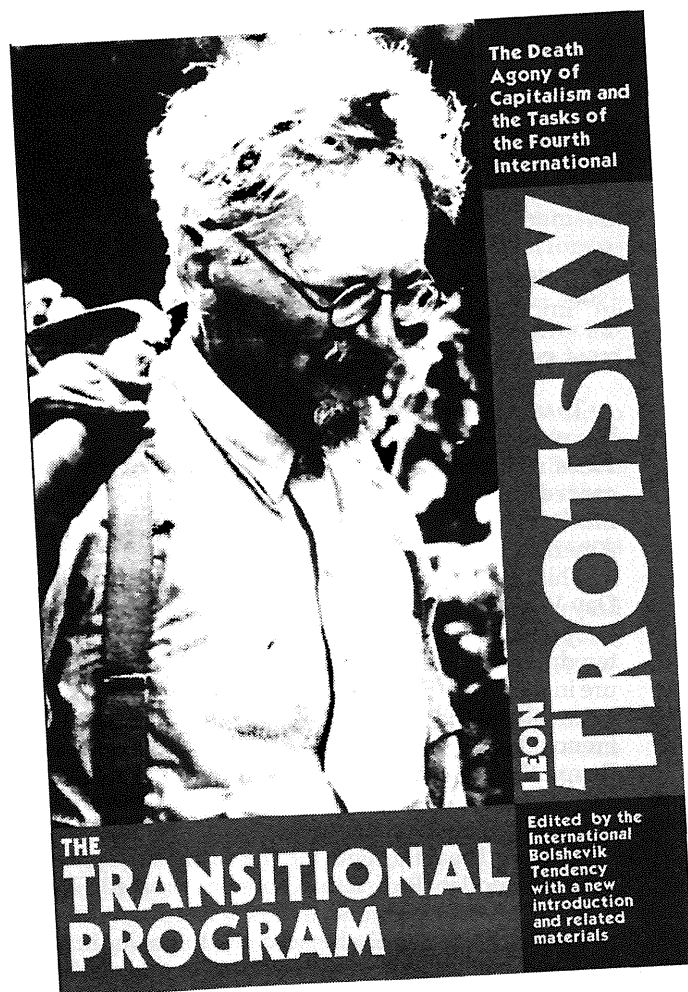
ationists and the Stalinist kleptocracy.

Valery Sablin was an example of what Trotsky meant when he talked of the "Reiss fraction" of the bureaucracy. Most of the Stalinist apparatchiks who slandered him as a pro-capitalist renegade have themselves long since made their peace with the counterrevolution. But Valery Sablin's name will always be revered by revolutionaries as a courageous and incorruptible fighter for the socialist future.

At a reunion on the 25th anniversary of the *Storozhevo* mutiny, Sasha Shein commented: "Every society needs noble spirits, without them, no society can move forward. Sablin was that sort of noble spirit." This spirit shines through in a final letter Sablin was permitted to write to his son prior to his execution:

"Trust the fact that history will judge events honestly and you will never have to be embarrassed for what your father did. On no account ever be one of those people who criticizes but does not follow through his actions. Such people are hypocrites—weak, worthless people who do not have the power to reconcile their beliefs with their own actions. I wish you courage, my dear. Be strong in the belief that life is wonderful. Be positive and believe that the Revolution will always win." ■

New Edition of the Transitional Program



In greeting the founding of the Fourth International in 1938, Leon Trotsky proclaimed the *Transitional Program* the movement's "most important conquest." Today, more than six decades later, the Bolshevik tradition that the Left Opposition carried forward remains as relevant as ever.

The International Bolshevik Tendency has recently published a new edition of Trotsky's *Transitional Program* based on the January 1939 version issued after the founding conference of the Fourth International. Discrepancies between the text approved by the conference and Trotsky's original draft, which appeared in the May/June 1938 *Bulleten Oppozitsii*, are noted, as are some variants in subsequent editions published in the U.S. We have included an introduction and a short essay on the use of transitional demands by the Communist International in Lenin's time, along with a number of valuable articles (chiefly from the then revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1970s) on the history of communist trade-union work in the United States from the 1920s to the 1970s.

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Imperialism...

continued from page 2

The U.S. was clearly going to make somebody pay for the attack on the "homeland"—but killing ten or a hundred thousand Afghans is not going to make the world a safer place for Americans or anyone else. Officially, of course, it is not a war on "Afghanistan," but on "terrorism," which the FBI and the U.S. Department of Defense define as:

"the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

The U.S. has used "force or violence" to coerce and intimidate civilians and overthrow other governments more regularly than any other state: in Guatemala in 1953, Brazil in 1964, Chile in 1973, Nicaragua throughout the 1980s, and there are lots of other examples. But none of them qualify as "terror" according to the FBI, because they were "lawful," that is, authorized by the U.S. government.

On 9 October, two days after the bombing began, U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte announced to the UN Security Council that Washington's "war on terrorism" could be visiting other countries after Afghanistan. Iraq is widely thought to be next on the list, but Syria, Libya and various others have also been mooted as potential targets. John Pilger, writing in London's liberal *Guardian*, pointed out that Negroponte was a particularly grotesque choice as



1992: PDPA soldiers after Soviet withdrawal

America's "anti-terrorist" messenger to the world because: "As US ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s, Negroponte oversaw American funding of the regime's death squads, known as Battalion 316, that wiped out the democratic opposition, while the CIA ran its 'contra' war of terror against neighbouring Nicaragua."

—*Guardian*, 25 October

Global Capitalism: Infinite Injustice

The capitalist world system headed by the U.S. is based on massive, unending violence against the vast majority of humanity in the service of funneling wealth from the poor to the rich within nations and between nations. The World Bank reports that half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day. Now, with economic indicators turning down, we are told to get ready for a period of generalized belt-tightening. For those trying to eke out an existence on \$2 a day or less, things are going to become even more horrific. The impoverishment of billions of unfortunates at one pole is, of course, "balanced" by the enormous accumulation of wealth and power by a tiny elite at the other.

After the attack on 11 September, the U.S. Department of Defense published an outline of current U.S. military doctrine, signed by U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. It proclaims that America has "enduring national interests" in "access to key markets and strategic resources" everywhere on the planet, and asserts a U.S. right to overthrow non-compliant regimes:

"U.S. forces must maintain the capability at the direction of the President to impose the will of the United States and its coalition partners on any adversaries including states or non-state entities. Such a decisive defeat could include changing the regime of an adversary state or occupation of foreign territory until U.S. strategic objectives are met."

—*Quadrennial Defense Review Report*,
30 September 2001

The current "war on terrorism" is, above all, an exercise in "imposing the will of the United States."

The Rise of Radical Islamism

To understand the chain of events that led to 11 September, we have to go back at least a few decades. In the early 1960s radical Islamic fundamentalists were generally regarded as a lunatic fringe by most of the Arab world—much as "creation scientists" are seen today in North America.

This began to change with Israel's victory in the 1967 Six Day War, when the Egyptian airforce was completely destroyed and Israel seized the Sinai peninsula. This shattered the prestige of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leading figure in the "Arab Revolution," who in 1956 had successfully nationalized the Suez Canal and resisted the joint British/French/Israeli invasion. The fundamentalists claimed that Egypt, the cultural and political leader of the Arab world, had been defeated because it had turned away from Allah to embrace secular modernism.

The big breakthrough for the Islamists came in 1979 when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini toppled Shah Reza Pahlavi's Peacock Throne and established an "Islamic Republic" in Iran. The Shah had come to power in 1953 in a CIA-engineered coup that overthrew the modernizing, nationalist regime headed by Mohammed Mosaddeq. To "stabilize" the Pahlavi dynasty, the CIA, with the help of Is-

raeli intelligence, created SAVAK, Iran's notorious political police. SAVAK imprisoned, tortured and killed thousands of opponents of the regime. Iran under the Shah, along with Israel and Saudi Arabia, was one of the pillars of American imperialism in the Middle East.

Islamic fundamentalism must, at bottom, be understood as a reactionary response to imperialist domination—an assertion by a section of the oppressed of their own cultural identity and a rejection of the values of their oppressors. One thing that radical Islamists (including Khomeini, bin Laden and the Taliban) have in common is opposition to social equality. They insist on the total and absolute subordination of women within the family, and their virtual exclusion from society. They are hostile to socialism, as well as Western capitalist ideology.

The “structural adjustment programs” pushed by the International Monetary Fund, and embraced by many domestic rulers in the region, opened the door to foreign capital penetration and cheap imports. Agriculture, indigenous manufacturing and many traditional occupations were dislocated by the sudden introduction of the “efficiencies” of the world market. The result was the growth of urban shantytowns full of impoverished former peasants who are today entirely dependent on the Islamic charities (run out of the local mosques) for healthcare, schooling and other social services. These people constitute the mullahs’ mass base and can be summoned into the streets at any moment. But the cadres of the Islamist movement are chiefly recruited from members of the scientifically trained intelligentsia, who feel that they, not the current gang of corrupt imperialist lackeys, should be in power.

Imperialism & Reaction in Afghanistan

American intervention in Afghanistan dates back to 1978, when the CIA first backed Islamic reaction against the pro-Soviet Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The PDPA was a radical nationalist Stalinist formation, similar to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. In an interview published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (15-21 January 1998), Zbigniew Brezinski, Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser, revealed that CIA support to the *mujahedin* predated the Soviet intervention:

“According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the *mujahedin* began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise: indeed, it was 3 July 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul.”

The interviewer asked Brezinski if, in hindsight, he had come to “regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?” He replied:

“What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?”

The mullahs, the moneylenders and the big landowners opposed the PDPA because of its decrees slashing debts, lowering the bride price (a major source of business for the moneylenders) and giving peasants the land they tilled. The PDPA had also abolished child marriage and initiated schooling for girls. The leaders of the “free world” instinctively sided with the Islamic reactionaries, just as revolutionaries defended the PDPA and their Soviet allies.



OLEG NIKISHIN—GETTY IMAGES

Northern Alliance troops stealing valuables from Taliban soldiers massacred at Qala-i-Jangi fortress

U.S. aid was directed toward the most fanatical of the *mujahedin* factions, on the grounds that they would be the most intransigent opponents of the Soviets. The U.S. also encouraged volunteers for the *jihad* to come to Afghanistan to fight the infidel. One of those who answered the call was a young Saudi millionaire named Osama bin Laden. The CIA armed and trained the cadres of bin Laden’s organization and built the “terrorist training camps” that the U.S. Air Force has been bombing.

When the Kremlin bureaucracy betrayed their Afghan allies and pulled out Soviet troops in 1989, the U.S. lost interest in the conflict. The PDPA regime held out for three years before finally being overwhelmed by the Islamists. But the victorious *mujahedin* warlords, currently gathered together in the “Northern Alliance,” fell out among themselves in a savage power struggle which exacted a terrible toll on the civilian population.

Civil order in Pakistan was threatened by the continuing unrest across its border. The Pakistani intelligence agency, which had been the conduit for CIA support to the *mujahedin* throughout the 1980s, began to provide “active military support” to the Taliban, a fanatical Pashtun Muslim sect based in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province. The Taliban enjoyed spectacular military success, toppling one warlord after another and in 1996 seized Kabul.

After taking power, the Taliban moved quickly to outlaw beard trimming, as well as music and dancing at weddings. They closed down all schools for girls and banned televisions, tape recorders, homing pigeons, and even kites. Under the Taliban, thieves are punished by amputation; adulterers are stoned to death; and political, religious and national minorities are brutally oppressed.

The discovery of major oil and natural gas deposits in Central Asia, immediately north of Afghanistan, in the early 1990s considerably increased Afghanistan’s geo-political significance, as the U.S. Energy Information Administration noted in a December 2000 report:



18 November 2001, London: IBT marches in anti-war demo

"Afghanistan's significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from central Asia to the Arabian Sea."

Initially, Washington welcomed the Taliban as a force for stability in Afghanistan. The State Department was pleased when the Taliban selected a consortium headed by UNOCAL, a major American oil corporation, to build a \$2 billion natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan. There were plans for awarding a similar contract for the construction of an oil pipeline. This would have given the U.S. access to Central Asian gas and oil fields bypassing both Iran and Russia—its two chief rivals in the region. The deal fell through in 1998 after Al Qaeda blew up two U.S. embassies in Africa prompting Bill Clinton to retaliate by launching 20 cruise missiles at Afghanistan.

One objective of the American "war on terrorism," in addition to eradicating a hostile regime, is to increase U.S. leverage in Central Asia. The establishment of U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, both previously considered firmly within the Kremlin's sphere of influence, is a major step in that direction. The Russians have been assured that these installations are only "temporary"—but Putin no doubt recalls the solemn promises made to Gorbachev at the time the Berlin Wall came down that if the Soviets agreed to a united Germany remaining in NATO, no other former Warsaw Pact country would ever be allowed to join. Today Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are all NATO members, and most of the rest of the former Pact countries are on the waiting list.

'Spin Laden'

A source of considerable irritation for the "coalition" partners thus far has been the ease with which bin Laden has been winning the "Spin War" for the hearts and minds

of Muslims in the region. The explanation for this is pretty simple: bin Laden's program is in tune with what most people in the area want. He has pledged to call off Al Qaeda's *jihād* against the U.S. if three conditions are met. First, U.S. forces must leave Saudi Arabia, home to Mecca and Medina, Islam's two most holy sites. The second condition is that the sanctions against Iraq, that have killed over a million people, be ended. Thirdly, bin Laden demands an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and the creation of a Palestinian state in these territories.

Most Americans wouldn't find these demands objectionable, which is why they have been virtually blacked out. Bin Laden's ultimate program is of course to impose fundamentalist Islamic regimes throughout the Middle East, but as a first step his chief concern is to expel the "infidels" from the region.

U.S. attempts to extinguish "terrorism" have certainly elevated the status of Al Qaeda among disaffected Muslims. If tens of thousands of Afghan refugees end up starving or freezing to death this winter, that support seems likely to increase further. The rulers of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (both officially supporters of the U.S. campaign) are concerned that a prolonged conflict may destabilize their regimes. But Washington appears determined to try to break Taliban resistance from the air, regardless of the toll on Afghan civilians, before risking American ground troops.

Taking the War to the Pashtuns

At this point it is difficult to predict the outcome of the conflict. The Taliban are deeply unpopular with many Afghans, but there is some evidence that the coalition terror bombing has solidified their support, just as the attack on the World Trade Center pushed up Bush Jr.'s ratings. The Taliban leadership appears to think their troops are well enough dug in to survive the worst that the U.S. Air Force

can throw at them. The 26 October issue of Britain's *Tory Telegraph* reported that the elite U.S. Delta Force was taken aback by fierce Taliban resistance when they staged a brief raid on an abandoned compound in the Kandahar region on 20 October.

The Taliban strategy apparently involves drawing out the conflict long enough and grinding up enough American soldiers, to force the U.S. to withdraw. This is the lesson they have drawn from Reagan's hasty retreat from Lebanon after the 1983 demolition of the U.S. Marine barracks, and Clinton's withdrawal from Somalia a decade later when 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in a firefight with the forces of a local warlord. However, in the wake of the World Trade Center attack, popular support in the U.S. for the assault on Afghanistan is much deeper than it was for intervention in either Lebanon or Somalia.

If the U.S. is serious about taking out the Taliban and creating a stable client regime in Afghanistan (rather than just providing aerial support for its Northern Alliance proxies or capturing Kabul) it will have to take the fight to the Taliban's base area around Kandahar among the Pashtun population which straddles the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. That could pose a whole new set of problems—as General Pervez Musharraf's government seems likely to be an early casualty of such an assault. Instability in Islamabad conjures up a lot of nightmare scenarios given Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

The War at Home

The U.S. rulers are using the "war against terrorism" to attack the hard-won democratic rights (and living standards) of American workers. More than a thousand people, mostly Arab immigrants, have been locked up indefinitely. The authorities are refusing to release their names or state what (if anything) they are charged with. There has also been talk of legalizing torture to speed up confessions, as they do in Israel. Here in Canada, Jean Chrétien's government, which has backed the U.S. campaign against Afghanistan at every step, is pushing "anti-terrorist" legislation that amounts to a blank check for the government to harass and incarcerate anyone they don't like.

The Bush Administration is using the current wave of xenophobic fervor to shower U.S. corporations with billions of dollars in *retroactive* tax rebates. It has also promised tens of billions in bail-outs for the airlines and insurance companies. This is all going to be paid for by looting the social security "lock box" that was supposed to ensure that American workers don't have to spend their retirements living in cardboard boxes and eating cat food.

When U.S. workers realize that this "war" is being waged on two fronts—against Afghanistan and against *them*—we could see an eruption of class struggle in the American "homeland." It is worth noting that there is much less patriotic hysteria in the black population, which historically tends to be the most politically advanced section of the proletariat.

The job of Marxists in every country of the imperialist "coalition" is to struggle to win working people to see that they have an interest in *defending* Afghanistan against their "own" rulers. A single workers' political strike against the war could have enormous political impact internationally—particularly in the Middle East—and help lay the basis for joint class struggle in the future.

The Taliban are the mortal enemies of the oppressed and must be overthrown—but this task, like the removal of the rest of the reactionary regimes in the region, falls to the oppressed and exploited, *not* to the imperialists. The *worst* outcome of this conflict, from the point of view of working people here and in the Middle East, would be for the U.S.-led "coalition" to score the sort of lop-sided victory it did over Iraq a decade ago. A cheap imperialist victory would set the stage for larger-scale and bloodier campaigns in the future.

Most of the ostensibly socialist left has responded to the imperialist attack on Afghanistan with pacifist, liberal bleating. When Tariq Ali was in Toronto six weeks ago, we asked him if he, as a former "International Marxist," defended Afghanistan against imperialism. He answered with a flat "No!" The self-proclaimed Marxists of the International Socialists refuse to defend Afghanistan, and are instead pushing simple-minded pacifist calls to "Stop the War." But the imperialists themselves want to "end the war" as soon as possible, as the 31 October issue of the *New York Times* reported:

"In the United States, some seem increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of the military campaign, and conservative politicians have begun to talk about escalating it by using ground forces on a larger scale. In Britain and other European countries, however, public opinion seems headed in the other direction. The European public appears more concerned about civilian casualties than *ending the war swiftly*." [emphasis added]

The U.S. rulers want to "end the war swiftly" by *escalating the killing!* We would like to see a swift end to the war as well—but only through the immediate withdrawal of the "coalition" aggressors. Demands to "stop the war" are fine for pacifists—but revolutionaries have a side when imperialist predators attack neo-colonial countries.

Expropriate the Expropriators!

If a protracted imperialist campaign in Afghanistan goes badly, and casualties mount, it will strengthen the capacity of oppressed peoples and workers around the world to resist capitalist attacks. It would also be likely to weaken several of the regimes that have historically been closely identified with the U.S., including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

After two decades in power, Iran's Islamic Republic appears rather brittle. Every major sporting event or other public occasion threatens to turn into a political demonstration against the rule of the mullahs. A successful uprising against the Shiite theocrats based on Iran's powerful working class, led by a hard communist organization armed with a consistently revolutionary program, could touch off a wave of socialist struggle in the region, just as Khomeini's victory in 1979 gave impetus to the Islamists.

Ultimately the cycle of escalating brutality that characterizes imperialist rule will only be ended by eradicating the international system that forces the majority of humanity to live in poverty. This planet can only be cleansed of violence and irrationality through a revolutionary struggle to expropriate the expropriators and create a socialist planned economy on a world scale, in which production is geared to meeting human need, rather than maximizing private profit. Today this may seem a distant goal, but we of the International Bolshevik Tendency believe that not only is it possible, but that there is no other way out for humanity. ■

The Politics of Chicken Revisited

Where is the ICL Going?

This statement, dated 2 December 2001, originally appeared on the IBT website (www.bolshevik.org).

Over the past several weeks we have been asked what the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) makes of *Workers Vanguard's* recent flurry of (sometimes overlapping) polemics against ourselves and the Internationalist Group (IG) concerning the U.S.-led attack on Afghanistan. Many leftists have been puzzled by the Spartacist League's (SL) open and unprecedented rejection of the call for "defeat" of its own imperialist ruling class. This position clearly represents another step in the political degeneration of this formerly Trotskyist organization.

The first polemic in the SL's current campaign, aimed at the IBT, was occasioned by our observation that *Workers Vanguard* (WV), like virtually all of the fake-left, had failed to make any distinction between the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in its treatment of the 11 September attacks. In our 18 September statement, we had tweaked the Spartacist League (leading section of the International Communist League [ICL]) by recalling its social-patriotic response to the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marines' compound in Lebanon:

"Marxists oppose terrorism as a strategy for the liberation of the oppressed because, even in the best case, it substitutes the acts of a tiny handful for the conscious activity of the working class. But revolutionary Marxists differentiate between acts aimed at imperialist military targets and those aimed at innocent civilians. For example, we recognize that the demolition of the U.S. and French garrisons in Lebanon in 1983 by 'Islamic Jihad' were defensible blows against imperialist attempts to establish a military beachhead in the Middle East. Some supposed Marxist organizations flinched, including the left-posturing Spartacist League/U.S., which issued a social-patriotic call for saving the surviving U.S. Marines."

We took the view in 1983 that the central issue was the Marines leaving Lebanon—and we did not much care if they walked out or were carried out in body bags. We feel the same way about the "coalition" forces in Afghanistan today. In contrast, the SL specified that it wanted the Marines out "alive." This represented a significant difference, which is documented in our *Trotskyist Bulletin No. 2*.

While we picked up the SL's apparent dive on the Pentagon, the IG, in a statement dated 27 September, raised another criticism:

"Nowhere does the [12 September] SL statement call to defend the countries (notably Afghanistan and Iraq) which were already targeted by Washington in the first hours after the WTC/Pentagon attack."

This stung the SL, which indignantly replied:

"Indeed, as soon as the U.S. imperialists started raining down bombs on Afghanistan, we raised the call to 'Defend Afghanistan against imperialist attack!' not only on our front page but also on our banners and signs at demonstrations and in our interventions at 'antiwar' meetings."

—WV, 26 October

The IG responded that one hardly needed to wait until the bombs started falling to call for Afghanistan's defense.

But the IG was stretching it to make this criticism in the first place, as the SL's 12 September statement made clear their "opposition to the war aims and military adventures of the American rulers abroad" and included among its demands "U.S. imperialism hands off the world!"

SL & the Democrats

A more substantial criticism was raised by the IG in its 25 October statement:

"*Workers Vanguard* joined the WWP and CPUSA [Workers World Party and Communist Party-USA] in praising black Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee of Oakland, saying that 'to her credit' she was the only Representative to vote against 'giving Bush a blank check for war.' Not only does WV not make a single criticism of Lee, it doesn't mention that even as she voted against the 'use of force' resolution, the Congresswoman voted for the \$40 billion emergency war credits bill that included a blank check for the CIA!"

In the 26 October WV, the SL sniffed that it is "not indifferent" to "cracks in the bourgeois edifice." Fair enough, Leninists should not be indifferent to such things, but neither should they give the left wing of the twin parties of racism and imperialist war a free pass. The 9 November issue of WV finally introduced an orthodox caveat into its previously uncritical treatment of Lee:

"The black Democrats and oppositional trade-union tops are positioning themselves to get ahead of and contain the increasing discontents that the capitalist rulers' war at home and abroad, coming amid a deepening recession and the enduring character of racist oppression, will generate among working people and minorities. Selling themselves as the friends of labor and blacks is the long-standing card played by the Democrats, which is why they are historically the preferred party of the bourgeoisie when it comes to mobilizing the population for war."

—WV, 9 November

The friendly treatment of Barbara Lee is not the first time the Spartacist League has exhibited softness on the Democrats. In 1984, the SL offered to send a dozen defense guards to the Democratic National Convention to protect them against "Reagan reaction" and the entirely imaginary danger of "ultrarightist assault against...the Convention itself." *Workers Vanguard* absurdly claimed that:

"a fitting historical model for Reagan's exploitation of a 'terror scare' to smash political opposition can be found in the 1933 Reichstag...fire, which was...exploited by [the Nazis] to repress political dissidence and consolidate the Third Reich."

—WV No. 358, 6 July 1984

The SL's offer to defend the Democrats against "the real instigators and perpetrators of political disruption and violence, against the Watergaters [i.e., Republicans] and Cold Warriors" echoed the "unite to stop the right" popular-frontist rhetoric of the Communist Party. In an 11 July 1984 letter, the External Tendency of the iSt (forerunner of the IBT) commented:

"The real instigators and perpetrators of political disruption and violence' are just as much a part of the Demo-



PAULA BRONSTEIN—GETTY IMAGES

U.S. Army special forces in Kandahar, December 2001

cratic party as the Republican. (Ever heard of [Democrat and arch-segregationist] Lester Maddox? What about [Ku Klux Klan leader and Democratic Party member] Tom Metzger!) 'Not a dime's worth of difference,' remember?"
—reprinted in *ET Bulletin* No. 4, May 1985

In the 1960s and 70s the SL often used the expression that, from the standpoint of the working class, there is "not a dime's worth of difference" between the Republican and Democratic parties. In its 31 August 1984 issue, *WV* explicitly repudiated this, and wrote: "Anyone but a blind man can see there is more than a 'dime's worth of difference' between Mondale and Reagan...."

'Duck and Cover': SL Abandons Defeatism

In addition to chastising the SL for its softness on the Democrats and for its tardiness in explicitly calling for the defense of Afghanistan and Iraq, the IG's 27 September statement leveled a third criticism, one which we initially regarded as overreaching: "For that matter, it [the SL] doesn't even call to *defeat* the mounting war drive, only to 'oppose' it." We had noticed that the initial statement from the SL Political Bureau proudly recalled how:

"in the face of the U.S.-led NATO onslaught against Serbia two years ago, which destroyed the entire infrastructure of that country, we raised the banner: 'Defeat U.S. imperialism through workers revolution! Defend Serbia!'"
—*WV*, 14 September [2001]

We therefore considered it quibbling to interpret the SL's statement that it "opposed" this latest imperialist military aggression as some sort of rejection of a call to "defeat" it. We were caught by surprise when, instead of brusquely dismissing the IG's criticism, the SL replied:

"From a Marxist perspective, however, there is no way to 'defeat' the inevitable drive toward war by the capitalists short of their being expelled from power through victorious workers revolution...."
—*WV*, 26 October [2001]

This showed that the IG was on to something. The inherent historical tendency for capitalist competition to lead to

war cannot be eradicated, but particular imperialist campaigns *can* be aborted through determined popular resistance—i.e., class struggle. The SL's dismissal of the *possibility* of "defeating" a particular war drive short of socialist revolution is of a piece with its maximalist objections to calling for a "general strike" unless a mass revolutionary party is already in place to lead it. By *counterposing* "building the revolutionary party" to calling for a generalized, working-class response to a generalized attack by the bosses, the SL engages in the sort of "scholastic passivity" it vehemently denounced a quarter of a century ago when it was still a revolutionary organization (see 1917 No. 20, "In Defense of Tactics"). The SL's current counterposition of a hypothetical "workers revolution" to the necessity to stand clearly for the defeat of their own imperialist rulers is cut from the same cloth.

The IG reports:

"We have learned that the ICL had an internal discussion on slogans in which it decided not to call to defeat imperialism in the war. This was no doubt at least partly in response to our special issue of *The Internationalist* (27 September) prominently headlined 'Defeat the U.S./NATO War Drive!'"

—*The Internationalist*, Fall 2001

We suspect the ICL leaders were motivated by something other than a desire to distinguish themselves from the IG. Several times in the past, the SL has exhibited a cowardly reflex in situations where it feared incurring the displeasure of its own ruling class.

The first instance was the call to save the Marines in Lebanon. A few years later, in January 1986, when the destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger* aborted a top-secret military mission, *WV*, taking its cue from the tearful accounts in the bourgeois media, volunteered:

"What we feel toward the astronauts is no more and no less than for any people who die in tragic circumstances such as the nine poor Salvadorans who were killed by a fire in a Washington, D.C. basement apartment two days before."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 14 February 1986



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Mussolini's troops in Ethiopia

As we pointed out at the time, revolutionaries feel a great deal more sympathy for impoverished refugees from a right-wing terrorist regime than for the professional military cadres of imperialism (see 1917 No. 2, "Challenger: No Disaster for the Working Class"). For reasons of personal prestige and organizational equilibrium (see 1917 No. 20, "Willful Blindness"), the IG stands by the SL's earlier flinches, but it is pulling no punches this time:

"The real explanation for their [the SL's] line is 'duck and cover,' and its political content is *economist social pacifism*."
—*op cit*

The IG cites Lenin in "Socialism and War":

"A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, and cannot fail to see that the latter's military reverses must facilitate its overthrow'; and in a war of Morocco against France, or of India against Britain, 'any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory "Great" Powers.'"
—*Ibid.*

The essential issue posed for the left by the attack on Afghanistan is which side to take—should we favor the victory or the defeat of our rulers? Two years ago, when NATO bombs began to fall on Belgrade, the SL answered that question clearly: "Defend Serbia! Defeat U.S./NATO imperialism! For workers revolution!" (WV, 16 April 1999). Why should its answer be different today?

Tactics & Propaganda Groups

The SL leadership is attempting to cover its retreat from openly calling for the defeat of imperialism in Afghanistan by pretending that it is all just a matter of tactics.

"At bottom, the IG deliberately muddles the question of a military defeat in a particular war with the proletarian defeat of one's bourgeoisie through socialist revolution. The latter is the program animating any truly revolutionary party in peacetime as in wartime. The slogans used to proceed toward that end—to lead the working masses from their current level of consciousness to the seizure of state power—are, however, necessarily conjunctural."

—WV, 9 November

This is followed by a discussion of Bolshevik tactics in the months preceding the struggle for power in October 1917. The slogans necessary to mobilize the masses for power are indeed "conjunctural," but for the foreseeable future the SL, as a very small propaganda group (albeit larger than the IBT or IG), is not likely to be confronted with the problem of directing the seizure of power. No left group in the U.S. (or in most other imperialist countries) is currently able to directly influence millions, or even thousands, of working people. It is simply comical to suggest that by dropping the call for the defeat of this imperialist adventure the SL somehow advances a step closer to making a bid for state power.

Then there is the absurdity of calling for the *defense* of Afghanistan while refusing to call for the *defeat* of the U.S. and its allies. One can be defeatist on both sides in a conflict, but to be "defensist" on one side, one must necessarily be "defeatist" on the other.

From Ethiopia to Afghanistan: Defeat Imperialist Aggression!

The IG pointed to the impact of Algeria's long war of independence on the political climate of France.

"The French defeat at the hands of the Algerian independence fighters culminating in 1962 demoralized the French bourgeoisie and helped lead to the worker-student revolt of 1968, which posed the first potentially revolutionary crisis in Europe in years."

—*The Internationalist*, Fall 2001

WV replied: "In reality, the eight-year-long colonial war in Algeria bears no resemblance to what is happening in Afghanistan today." What the two situations have in common is that both involve a struggle between imperialists and the oppressed. In such cases revolutionaries favor the defeat of the imperialists. The SL introduces another analogy: Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia:

"In calling on the working class to defend Afghanistan against U.S. imperialism, we apply the same Leninist principle of siding with backward countries against imperialist attack. That said, the U.S. war against Afghanistan is in important ways different from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which was aimed at realizing Italy's longstanding intention to colonize that country. The U.S. does not aim at an occupation of Afghanistan—at least not at this point—although now that they're in Central Asia the imperialists will grab what they can. In attacking Afghanistan, the U.S. seeks vengeance for the insult to its imperial might."

The question of whether the U.S. intends to occupy some or all of Afghanistan or its neighbors, or how long it intends to remain, or what military tactics it intends to em-

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

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The Comintern and its Critics

The struggle against the degeneration of
the Communist International

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ploy, does not change the fact that revolutionaries want to see the imperialist aggressors *defeated*. WV's assertion that it is "spurious" to make an analogy between colonial wars and neo-colonial ones is entirely illegitimate:

"The IG's spurious analogy with colonial wars notwithstanding, it seems currently unlikely that the U.S. will launch a significant land invasion of Afghanistan...."

"Washington's most likely variant at this time is for continued, incessant and purposeless bombing for which the Taliban has no possible military redress. Again, this was not the case in the 1935 Italo-Ethiopian war. Italy was a second-rate imperialist power riven by sharp class contradictions and constrained in its intentions by its bigger imperialist rivals. Although in the upshot Italy was victorious after a seven-month-long ground war, it was not unreasonable for the then-Trotskyist U.S. Socialist Workers Party to project a possible military victory by Ethiopia."

Instead of a clear and forthright statement of their new revisionist position, the WV scribes employ hints and innuendo, leaving their readers to work it out for themselves. But the implication is clear: in Ethiopia in the 1930s, unlike in Afghanistan today, it was "reasonable" to call for the military defeat of the imperialist aggressor, but today the U.S.-led coalition is so strong that it is "unreasonable" to imagine its defeat. Therefore, the SL suggests, it would be a mistake to advocate a defeatist position. This is the logic that leads down the path to "the left wing of the possible."

WV quotes the Trotskyists of 1935 on the potential impact of an Italian defeat in Ethiopia:

"The whole European system of alliances and states would fall apart. The proletariat in Germany, Austria, Spain, on the Balkans, and not least of all in France, would receive an enormous impulsion; the face of Europe would be altered. That lies in the direct class interests of the international proletariat. But still more. A defeat of Italy in Africa, a victory of Ethiopia, might deliver the imperialist bandits a terrific blow in Africa."

—"Questions of the Italo-Ethiopian War,"
New International, October 1935

But, according to the Spartacist League:

"None of these factors currently constrain the U.S., although, to be sure, the war will exacerbate tensions among the imperialist powers, and its price in misery at home may awaken class combativity in the American proletariat."

—WV, 9 November

In fact, many of the projections made by the *New International* in 1935 are entirely applicable to the current situation. A defeat for the U.S.-led coalition would, as the SL admits, sharpen "tensions among the imperialist powers" while undermining their ability to attack their own workers. The awakening of "class combativity in the American proletariat" could itself be a factor of inestimable importance in world politics. A setback in Afghanistan would certainly also "deliver the imperialist bandits a terrific blow" in the strategically vital Middle East, and potentially destabilize the regimes most closely identified with the U.S., including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Hindsight is of course 20/20. During the same week the WV article was published, we were holding public meetings in Toronto where we speculated that the Taliban might be dug in well enough to survive a prolonged U.S. bombardment. As things turned out, the U.S. aerial attack proved more successful than either we or the SL had anticipated.



AP—AMIR SHAH

Taliban troops headed to the front

If the imperialist coalition is compelled to deploy significant numbers of ground troops to finish off the Taliban and its allies in its Pashtun base area, it seems conceivable that the Islamist guerrillas could prolong the conflict long enough, and inflict enough casualties on the U.S. forces, to dampen domestic support for the campaign. This would be a "best case" outcome, and at this point it cannot be entirely excluded.

In 1927, Leon Trotsky, the great Russian revolutionary, provided a description of how fake-revolutionary organizations act under the pressure of bourgeois war hysteria that accurately captures the ICL's recent behavior:

"Opportunism, or radicalism that is turning to opportunism, always inclines to estimate war as such as an *exceptional* phenomenon that it requires the annulment of revolutionary policy and its basic principles. Centrism reconciles itself to revolutionary methods but does not believe in them. That is why it is always inclined, at critical moments, to refer to the *peculiarity* of the situation, to *exceptional* circumstances, and so on, in order to substitute opportunist methods for revolutionary ones. Such a shift in the policy of centrism or pseudo-radicalism is of course acutely provoked by the war danger."

—"The Struggle for Peace and the Anglo-Russian Committee," 16 May 1927

The responsibility of revolutionaries is to put forward the political program necessary to advance the class struggle. And the necessary and appropriate response for class-conscious workers in every country in the imperialist coalition can only be to work for the defeat of their own rulers. A class-struggle leadership of the workers' movement prepared to actively resist the predatory campaigns of its rulers could be an important factor in bringing about an imperialist defeat. Upholding this, the only revolutionary perspective, is the responsibility of the Trotskyist vanguard.

In Iran, which borders Afghanistan, the mullahs' grip is weakening. There have been reports of spontaneous popular protests against the regime erupting at sporting events. This is usually a symptom of a developing pre-revolutionary situation. Imperialist aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq or other Muslim countries could contribute to the outbreak of explosive social struggles and create fertile conditions for the rapid growth of revolutionary organizations in the

region.

But the demoralized centrists leading the SL see none of this. Their pessimism is only thinly disguised by bombastic talk of "mobilizing" the American working class:

"Thus, the call for a U.S. military defeat is, at this time, illusory and the purest hot air and 'revolutionary' phrasemongering—and one which derives from forsaking the mobilization of the U.S. proletariat with the aim of the conquest of state power.

"Unlike the IG, the SL is committed to breaking the American working class and the oppressed from their class-collaborationist bondage to the Democratic Party and to forging a revolutionary workers party to overthrow American imperialism through socialist revolution. While the IG waxes oh-so-revolutionary in the ether of cyberspace, we actually fight for a proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist perspective on the ground."

—WV, 9 November

The SL's "on the ground" activity amounted to reading a prepared statement to a crowd of 50 people at a public forum in the longshore hall in San Francisco on 10 October. The SL statement included a call for "a political struggle within the unions to forge a revolutionary workers party...." A fine sentiment, but unfortunately more distant today than it was before the once-revolutionary Spartacist League liquidated its trade-union work almost 20 years ago in the course of its political degeneration.

The Fire Last Time...

ICL: 'Save Our Boys' Socialists

One of the reasons that the 1983 call to save the Marines presents such a problem for the SL is that it flatly contradicted both the historical tradition it claims to stand on, and the image it likes to cultivate as a fearlessly revolutionary organization. In 1982, during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, WV ran an article sneeringly entitled "'Save Our Boys' Socialists" which excoriated Sean Matgamna's *Socialist Organiser* for running a sympathetic interview with Reg Race, a Labour Party "left":

"Never has Lenin's characterization of social democrats as 'social imperialists' been more fitting. Race calls for withdrawing the fleet and *sparing the precious blood of Britain's elite forces* because he has another program to bring Argentina to its knees...."

—WV No. 306, 28 May 1982, [emphasis added]

Even after WV revealed that "sparing the precious blood" of the U.S. Marines had somehow suddenly become an important Leninist tactic the same criterion was not applied in Britain. The December 1983/January 1984 issue of *Spartacist Britain* published an auto-critique by A. Gilchrist, a senior cadre of the SL's British group, in which he confessed:

"The position of 'Withdraw the Fleet' was a position of *defending* the imperialist armed forces from destruction by *another anti-Soviet military*. The Falklands war tested every tendency on the British left in the clearest way, because war is the period of greatest nationalist pressures. This Bennite [left Labourite] position was a clear capitulation to the 'socialist' chauvinism of the Labour Party...."

—[emphasis in original]

In the 9 November issue of WV, the SL attempts to get out from under its "Marines Alive" position by claiming that,

In the late 1970s, SL-supported caucuses were nationally recognized as the opposition to the pro-capitalist bureaucracy in both the Communications Workers of America and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. SL supporters also had an important toehold in the United Auto Workers. Since this work was ripped up, the SL has had no influence or real roots in any sector of the American working class. The External Tendency of the iSt, the IBT's predecessor, opposed the SL's turn away from union work at the time (see "Declaration of an external tendency of the iSt," 15 October 1982, "Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work!" 25 June 1983 and "Decline of SL-supported Trade Union Work," *ET Bulletin* No. 3, May 1984).

WV's distinction between the IG "wax[ing] oh-so-revolutionary" on the internet and an SL supporter doing so at a public meeting is ludicrous. A serious "fight for a proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist perspective on the ground" requires more than the odd speech and a few articles. Such a struggle must begin with a correct programmatic orientation. In this regard, a critical distinction must be made between those who take a defeatist position toward their own imperialist rulers, and professional confusionists who advocate the "defense" of the oppressed, but shrink from calling for the "defeat" of their oppressors. ■

"to this day it is still not clear who blew up the Marine barracks." The truth is that it is pretty clear to everyone except the SL (and, presumably, the IG). For example, in the Spring 1993 issue of *Foreign Policy*, the editor, Charles W. Maynes, wrote the following:

"The United States, in the hubris of the Reagan administration, forgot the fundamental nature of peacekeeping. It deployed U.S. Marines in Lebanon without understanding that it was essential for their safety that the United States not take sides in the Lebanese civil war. The Reagan administration decided to back the Christians and soon found its troops under attack by the Muslims and finally driven from Lebanon after the disastrous bombing of the marine barracks in Beirut."

Every serious observer of the Middle East agrees that the suicide truck-bombing of the Marine barracks, carried out by a group calling itself "Islamic Jihad," was a response to U.S. military intervention on the side of the Christian Phalange. The *New York Times* blames Hezbollah, the Lebanese "Party of God," for the attack:

"In recent years the Islamic group has grafted a new image as an above-ground political force onto its 1980's past. Back then, Hezbollah, or groups to which it was closely linked, was notorious for brutal terrorist operations, including destroying the American Embassy in Beirut in 1983 and killing 241 Americans at a Marine compound later the same year."

—*New York Times*, 14 February 2001

If another truck bomb were to go off outside the Marine encampment near Kandahar, would the SL try to hide behind the pretence that the precise identity of the perpetrators was unknown? We rather doubt it. ■

World Trade Center Terror Bombing— U.S. Imperialist Rule: An Endless Horror

The following is an IBT statement issued on 18 September 2001 after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The destruction of the World Trade Center on 11 September is a horrific act which the International Bolshevik Tendency unequivocally condemns. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers had friends or family members who lived, shopped or worked in the area. Unlike the personnel in the Pentagon (the command center of the U.S. military), the thousands of victims trapped in the World Trade Center's twin towers and the hundreds of passengers and crew on board the four hijacked airliners were civilians whose deaths we mourn. As revolutionary socialists we abhor terrorist attacks that identify ordinary citizens with their imperialist rulers.

The record of the U.S. ruling class includes many instances of mass murder, including the firebombing of Dresden and Hamburg, the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the massacre of over a million Vietnamese civilians in the 1960s and 70s. The current U.S. embargo on Iraq has resulted in the death of at least a million Iraqi children. However, the destruction of the World Trade Center is being treated by the imperialist media as an "attack on civilization" because this time American lives were lost.

The patriotic bloodlust whipped up in the U.S. over the past week has already resulted in a couple of murders and hundreds of racist attacks on Muslims, Arab-Americans, Sikhs and others perceived as "foreigners." It has played into the hands of America's pro-Israel lobby, and undercut popular sympathy for the Palestinian victims of the racist Zionist state.

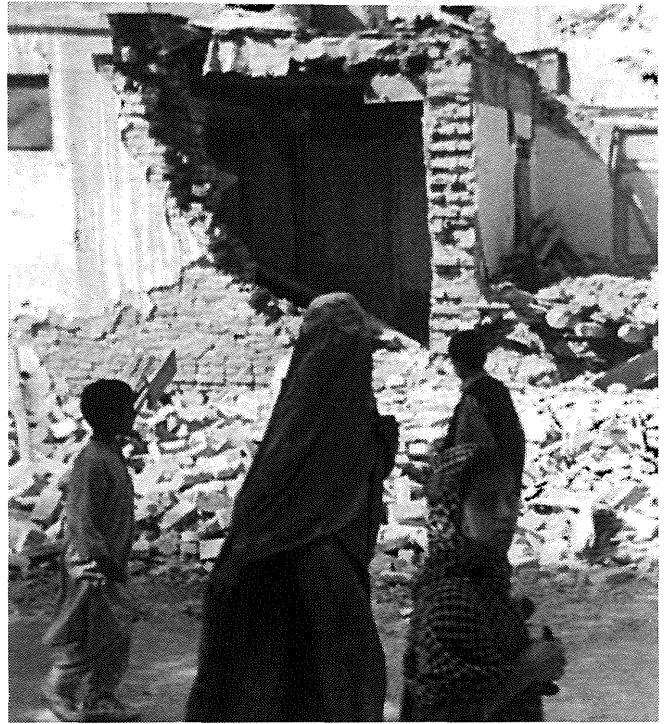
In declaring "war" on as yet unspecified targets, America's rulers hope to achieve several objectives. Firstly, they wish to demonstrate that in a one "superpower" world, other countries better do as they are told:

"The [anticipated] blow [against Afghanistan's Taliban regime] would be intended not only to destroy terrorist bases in Afghanistan but also to demonstrate to other nations that there is a heavy cost to be paid for those who shelter enemies of the United States."

—New York Times, 17 September

The Cheney/Bush administration is openly seeking to channel popular outrage into support for a major (and potentially open-ended) military intervention in the Middle East, which would tighten the U.S. grip on this strategic region. America's most subservient imperialist allies—Britain, Australia and Canada—have given their unlimited support to whatever Washington decides. Support from Germany, France and other EU imperialists has been more qualified, while the Russians have opposed any U.S. military passage through the former Soviet republics bordering Afghanistan.

In the U.S., the "war" psychosis provides a useful pretext to expand police powers to run ID checks, control movements and interfere with private communications. Under the guise of combating terrorism, attempts will be



Civilian house in Kabul destroyed by U.S. bombing

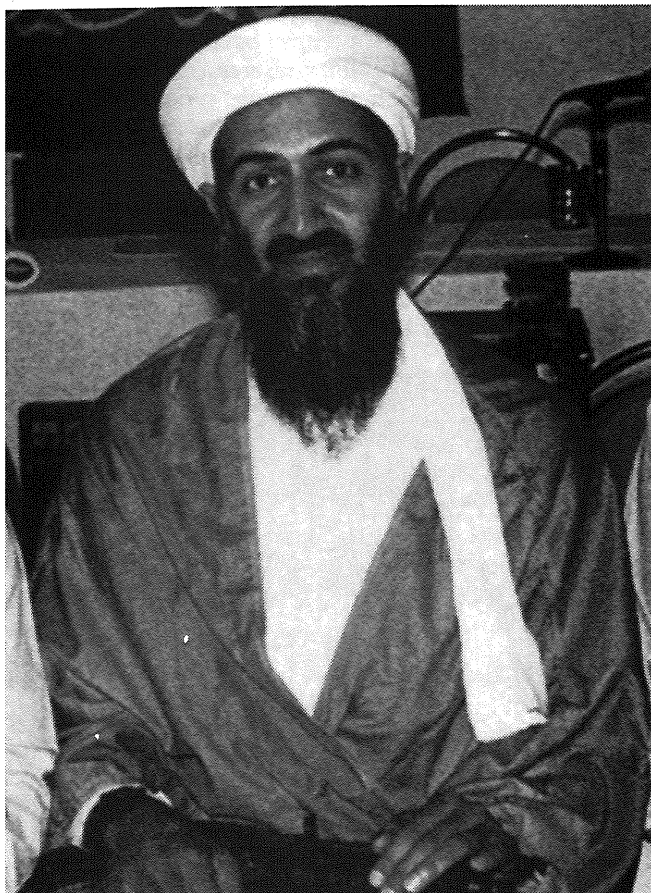
made to limit free speech, free assembly and other civil rights. A sign of the new policy direction is the U.S. government's public declaration that assassination will once more be considered a legitimate tool of foreign policy.

The Real Enemy is at Home

The real enemy of workers, blacks and other minorities in the U.S. is not some shadowy Islamic fanatic in Afghanistan, but their own ruling class. Though U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has been supported passively (and sometimes actively) by a majority of the population, the objective interests of ordinary working people in the U.S. are counterposed to Bush & Co. This may come into focus more clearly as the implications of looting the Social Security and Medicare "lock box" to finance the upcoming military expedition (and bail out airline and insurance company shareholders) become apparent.

The workers' movement in the U.S. should be setting up union-based defense guards to protect Muslim neighborhoods, mosques and shops from attacks by the racist, flag-waving bigots who are being egged on by the chauvinist ranting of the corporate media. But the current pro-capitalist leadership of the unions is jumping on the jingoist bandwagon. In a statement released the day after the attack, AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, bragged:

"I have called President Bush to express the AFL-CIO's



SYGMA

Osama bin Laden: former U.S. asset

full support for him in this time of crisis and offer any and all assistance from the labor movement."

A class-conscious union leadership would be making preparations to launch political strikes in response to military aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq or any other neo-colony. As a step in the struggle to break the grip of the pro-imperialist labor bureaucracy on the unions, revolutionaries must win the advanced elements of the American working class to the recognition that their interests lie in opposing the bloodthirsty military adventures of their rulers.

A revolutionary socialist perspective for the Middle East must combine implacable struggle against Zionist oppression with exposure of the "anti-imperialist" pretensions of the petty-bourgeois leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and flat opposition to the reactionary, misogynist Islamicist fanatics. If the oppressed Arab masses equate American workers with America's rulers (or Jewish workers with their Zionist bosses), this only helps bind American and Hebrew workers more closely to their masters. Conversely, to the extent that Israeli and American workers identify with their "own" exploiters, they help cement the control of the sheiks, generals and mullahs over the Muslim masses.

Marxists oppose terrorism as a strategy for the liberation of the oppressed because, even in the best case, it substitutes the acts of a tiny handful for the conscious activity of the working class. But revolutionary Marxists differentiate between acts aimed at imperialist military targets and those aimed at innocent civilians. For example, we recognize that the demolition of the U.S. and French garrisons in Lebanon in 1983 by "Islamic Jihad" were defensible blows against

imperialist attempts to establish a military beachhead in the Middle East. Some supposed Marxist organizations flinched, including the left-posturing Spartacist League/U.S., which issued a social-patriotic call for saving the surviving U.S. Marines.

Afghan Mujahedin: From 'Freedom Fighters' to 'Terrorists'

Osama bin Laden, the elusive figure the U.S. is blaming for the 11 September attacks, was a long-time CIA asset during the 1980s, when the Islamic fundamentalist *mujahedin* carried out a *jihad* against the Soviet Army and its left-nationalist Afghan allies. The *mujahedin* rebellion began when the modernizing, pro-Soviet government encouraged girls to go to school. The Afghan "freedom fighters" were not only supported by the imperialists, but also by a wide spectrum of the fake-left, including the adherents of Tony Cliff's International Socialist Tendency.

In August 1998, after the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa, Bill Clinton ordered aerial strikes against bin Laden's Afghan bases (which the U.S. had bought and paid for a decade earlier):

"The Afghan resistance was backed by the intelligence services of the United States and Saudi Arabia with nearly \$6 billion worth of weapons. And the territory targeted last week, a set of six encampments around Khost, where the Saudi exile Osama bin Laden has financed a kind of 'terrorist university,' in the words of a senior United States intelligence official, is well known to the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The C.I.A.'s military and financial support for the Afghan rebels indirectly helped build the camps that the United States attacked. And some of the same warriors who fought the Soviets with the C.I.A.'s help are now fighting under Mr. bin Laden's banner."

—*New York Times*, 24 August 1998

The fact that bin Laden and his *mujahedin* friends were trained by the CIA has not featured prominently in the capitalist media during the past week. But it is evidence that the attack on the World Trade Center is only one link in a long chain of events. A massive imperialist military attack on Afghanistan and/or Iraq would be a catastrophe that would produce many thousands of additional innocent victims and ultimately strengthen the forces of Islamic reaction in the region.

For World Socialism!

Revolutionaries must take a position of unconditional military defense of any neo-colony targeted for imperialist attack. It is the duty of class-conscious American workers to stand fast against the tidal wave of chauvinist filth and not lose sight of the historic interests of U.S. working people. The real threat to workers in the imperialist West does not come from bin Laden, Saddam Hussein or the Taliban, but rather from the cynical, racist imperialists whose global economic order created and nurtured them.

As Bolsheviks, we are committed to the struggle to create an internationalist world party capable of organizing the working class to overthrow the entire system of organized imperialist piracy. The only road to a future in which every member of humanity can enjoy a secure, peaceful and productive life lies through replacing the rapacious dog-eat-dog capitalist system with a planned socialist economy in which production is geared to human need. ■

IBT's Third International Conference: A Significant Step



July 2001, Genoa: radical youth vs. capitalist police

A fusion with the Ukrainian Young Revolutionary Marxists (YRM) capped the Third International Conference of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) in early October 2001. This represents a significant step forward politically for the IBT, which had previously been based exclusively in imperialist countries. The inclusion of militants shaped by entirely different political experiences adds an important dimension to our ability to understand the world and, ultimately, to change it.

The YRM derived from a circle of Kiev teenagers who, in 1989, obtained a copy of Leon Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, and discovered that it contained a wealth of political insights profoundly relevant to the events taking place around them, as the forces of capitalist restoration gained momentum in the Soviet degenerated workers' state. From that original grouping, a broad spectrum of leftist organizations, all critical of Stalinism and, in most cases, identifying themselves as Trotskyist, has reappeared in Ukraine.

The youth who formed the YRM were distinguished by their determination to remain politically independent of both Stalinist and liberal-bourgeois forces. They took a defensist stance toward the Soviet Union (while it existed), opposed capitalist counterrevolution, and adopted Trotsky's perspective of proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist ruling caste. After investigating the various international ostensibly Trotskyist currents, in 1998 the YRM provisionally concluded that it stood closest to the IBT. Of particular importance for the YRM was our position of favoring the military victory of the Stalinists over Boris

Yeltsin and the forces of capitalist restoration in the decisive August 1991 showdown in Moscow.

The core cadres of the YRM originated as pro-socialist, anti-Stalinist youth during a period of intense social and political turmoil. They developed in an intellectual milieu in which the serious study of the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin was not uncommon, and in which there were even a few traces of the historical influence of Christian Rakovsky, who headed the Ukrainian Soviet government in Lenin's time, and later became a central figure in Leon Trotsky's Left Opposition. The YRM comrades consciously set out to reestablish the authentic tradition of Bolshevism from the early days of the revolution, before the gray Stalinist *nomenklatura* took over. This proved a difficult task, as there had been no organized expression of revolutionary Marxism in Ukraine for at least half a century. Yet to their considerable credit, the YRM succeeded in closely approximating key elements of the Trotskyist program through their own unaided efforts.

The initial decision to pursue discussions with the IBT was opposed by a minority within the YRM who rejected the view that Yeltsin's victory represented the triumph of counterrevolution. These comrades broke with the YRM and gravitated toward the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) which, at that point, claimed that Russia, Ukraine and the rest of the former Soviet Union remained "workers' states," albeit "moribund" ones. This peculiar nonsense was abandoned by the LRCI not long after the former YRM minority announced that

they had constituted themselves as the LRCI's Ukrainian section. While the LRCI has dropped the "moribund workers' state" theory, it stands on its support to Yeltsin and the forces of counterrevolution in August 1991.

In November 1999, shortly after the pro-LRCI minority split, an IBT representative visited the YRM in Kiev. While the YRM found some of the IBT's terminology, analytical distinctions and methodological approaches unfamiliar, it was clear that both groups were very close in fundamental political conceptions. For example, the YRM immediately embraced the distinction between military and political support as useful in expressing their position of preferring the victory of the Stalinists over the Yeltsinites, while simultaneously upholding the perspective of workers' political revolution against the *nomenklatura*.

The YRM leadership understood the importance of coming to terms with the history of the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky, and seriously studying the issues confronted by revolutionaries during the past six decades. This investigation substantially deepened their political agreement with the IBT.

The YRM comrades adopted the IBT position on interpenetrated peoples, which was originally developed by the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency in the 1970s to address the national question in places like Ireland and Israel/Palestine, where two or more peoples occupy a common territory. In Ukraine, Russian-speakers are oppressed in the west, while Ukrainian-speakers are oppressed in the east. The YRM also noted the parallel between the racist persecution of the Tatar minority in the Crimea and the situation of blacks in America.

The Ukrainian comrades' grasp of the complexities of the national question was evident during a discussion at the conference of the Leninist approach to immigration and the problems with simple-minded, anarcho-utopian demands for "open borders." The YRM delegates used recent examples from post-Soviet Eastern Europe to demonstrate why Marxists must oppose, as a matter of principle, all

bourgeois immigration controls, but also remain sensitive to the ways in which large-scale population transfers can be used by reactionary demagogues to promote chauvinism and undercut class consciousness.

United Fronts vs. Propaganda Blocs

One of the characteristic differences between Trotskyism and centrism lies in their respective attitudes toward blocs for propaganda. This is an issue the YRM was forced to come to grips with during the intra-bourgeois wrangle that erupted in Ukraine in late 2000, when evidence emerged of President Leonid Kuchma's complicity in the murder of a prominent critic (see accompanying article). While most of the left eagerly enlisted in the popular-frontist movement spearheaded by Kuchma's bourgeois rivals, the YRM correctly denounced Kuchma's crimes, while refusing to align itself with any wing of the exploiters.

In March 2001 the YRM joined LRCI supporters and other leftists in launching a bloc on the basis of defending democratic rights and combating the rapidly growing fascist threat. But this attempted united front failed to undertake any concrete actions, while expanding the scope of its political basis of unity to include a call for the "Liberation of Ukraine from the IMF, oligarchs, bourgeoisie and their lackeys, and from betrayers of the working people."

The IBT warned the YRM comrades that participation in a bloc with reformists and centrists on the basis of demands that amounted to a call for socialist revolution implied political confidence in the credentials of their "revolutionary" partners. The YRM had been uneasy about the "leftist" drift of the basis of unity, but had been unsure how to proceed. They quickly grasped the distinction between a genuine united front (a bloc for action in which the participants maintain their own distinctive political identities) and a bloc for propaganda, where participating organizations submerge their differences and present themselves as sharing common political goals and a common strategy.

In fact, the objectives of the LRCI supporters and the YRM in this particular situation were very different: the LRCI wanted to mobilize the working class—"independently," of course—behind Kuchma's capitalist opponents, while the YRM refused all political support to the bourgeois opposition, and called instead for independent working-class mobilizations in defense of democratic rights and against fascism. By promptly and decisively correcting its initial error, the YRM demonstrated its political seriousness, and simultaneously deepened its understanding of the uses (and abuses) of the united-front tactic.

A Great Tradition

The Tasks and Perspectives document recorded that the IBT remains a tiny and widely dispersed sub-propaganda group. Since our last international conference we have recruited some valuable youth, particularly in North America and Germany, but we have also lost a layer of older and more experienced comrades, who had made important contributions in the past. These losses were unavoidable, as the individuals involved had simply worn out as revolutionaries.

While the majority of the IBT's historic core cadre has not lost its revolutionary will, it is simply a fact that the "class of '68" is getting on in years, and, as the conference document noted:

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Toronto Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.
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(416) 461-6864

Wellington Box 9671
Wellington, New Zealand
(04) 382-8408

Ruhr Gruppe Spartakus
Postfach 100601,
47006 Duisburg, Germany

London BCM Box 4771
London WC1N 3XX
Britain
(079) 51 313 236

Kiev contact London

Internet ibt@babeuf.actrix.gen.nz
<http://www.bolshevik.org>

"The number of IBT cadres trained in our predecessor revolutionary organization are now very few and older than is optimal for revolutionary leaders. Comrade Lenin's jest, on the occasion of his 50th birthday, that all revolutionaries over 50 should be shot would create more openings on our leading bodies than we could easily fill at present."

A crucial test of a revolutionary organization lies in its ability to reproduce revolutionaries. This is why it is necessary to imbue young comrades with an awareness that they are the bearers of a great tradition. As James P. Cannon observed in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, revolutionaries are distinguished by their attachment to "the doctrine, the methods and the tradition of Marxism." The struggle for revolutionary continuity remains central to our perspective of building an international propaganda group capable of acting as a pole of attraction for revolutionary regroupment.

In preparation for the conference, a number of important documents from the history of the Trotskyist movement were circulated within the IBT and YRM. Educational sessions organized in conjunction with the conference included talks on the fight against Pabloism in the 1950s, the building of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) and the struggle of the IBT's predecessor, the External Tendency of the iSt, against the degeneration of the Spartacist League (SL) in the early 1980s. Another presentation compared the strengths and weaknesses of the Spartacist League of the 1970s with those of Cannon's Socialist Workers Party in the 1930s and 40s. There were also discussions on the history of revolutionary youth work, legal defense work and revolutionary trade-union work in the United States.

The publication of a new edition of the *Transitional Program* was one of the IBT's major accomplishments between our second and third international conferences. In it we outline how Trotsky's program for the Fourth International was derived from the experiences of the Third—the revolutionary Comintern of Lenin's time. The book also documents one of the most important, but least appreciated, chapters in Trotskyist history: the exemplary work of SL supporters in the 1970s in building caucuses based on the *Transitional Program* in several strategic unions in the U.S.

Anti-Imperialism & 'Anti-Globalization'

The operation of the global capitalist order has created the objective conditions for revolutionary explosions in practically every country on the planet, as the conference resolution noted:

"The underlying economic trend toward increasing polarization between the haves and have-nots of the global economy has deepened considerably since the 'death of Communism.' In the Balkans, the Indian subcontinent, Latin America, the Middle East, Indonesia and many other regions, massive social upheavals could erupt at any moment. In the traditional imperialist neo-colonies and former Soviet bloc countries poverty, disease and ethnic strife are rampant. The precipitous decline in living standards in the former USSR threatens all semblance of social order. The social and economic catastrophe inflicted on the masses of the African continent continues to worsen without any prospect of remission. In China the growth of capitalist production, which threatens to impoverish hundreds of millions of workers and peasants, also is increasingly colliding with the political monopoly exercised by a Stalinist bureaucracy, whose power is rooted

in a system of economic and social organization alien to capitalism."

—Tasks and Perspectives 2001

The U.S.-led attack on Afghanistan began while the conference was in session, and there was considerable discussion of its political impact, particularly on the "anti-globalization" movement. The main conference document observed:

"This new wave of undifferentiated radicalism is still in its infancy. It has experienced no major defeats, and its influence has continued to spread among youth internationally. Political differentiation in this milieu has so far proceeded relatively slowly: protectionism, eco-reformism, third-world localism, liberal utopian internationalism and militant anarchism are all combined, in different proportions, at most major events. This movement has developed independently of the ostensibly Marxist left, and its central cadres are non-revolutionary anarchists and/or ecology and 'human rights' activists. We can anticipate that responses to the opportunities for the ostensibly Marxist left presented by the inevitable process of differentiation in this movement will both parallel old differences and create new ones."

—*Ibid.*

The assault on Afghanistan poses issues that lie outside the framework of the shared assumptions that have permitted the "anti-globalization" mélange to appear relatively politically coherent. The responses have ranged from pacifism and pro-imperialist reformism to a revolutionary impulse to oppose the imperialist aggressors. Those "anti-globalizers" animated by a desire to see the defeat of the U.S.-led coalition constitute a critically important layer of youth which Marxists must seek to politically engage.

For the Rebirth of the Fourth International!

Our objective is to forge the nucleus of a disciplined, international combat party capable of once again making revolutionary Marxism a material factor in world politics. The key task for the IBT today, as a tiny international sub-propaganda group, is to defend the historic program of Trotskyism against revisionist distortions. To this end, we must pay particular attention to those political tendencies that superficially appear closest to the Trotskyist program, in order to engage and regroup the genuinely revolutionary elements within them, while drawing a clear line of demarcation between the historic program of Bolshevism and centrist imitations.

Commenting on the defection of several key leaders of the Left Opposition, Trotsky noted:

"Renegades are always distinguished by short memories or assume that other people have short memories. Revolutionaries, on the contrary, enjoy good memories, which is why it can be truthfully said *the revolutionary party is the memory of the working class*. Learning not to forget the past in order to foresee the future is our first, our most important task."

—"A Wretched Document," 27 July 1929

The Third International Conference of the IBT represented a small, but important, step forward on the long path to the rebirth of the Fourth International. The IBT today remains a minuscule organization, but we stand on the shoulders of the revolutionary giants who have preceded us. We embrace our political heritage and we are proud to participate in the struggle to ensure that Bolshevism not only survives on this planet, but ultimately triumphs. ■

YRM's Intervention in Anti-Kuchma Movement **Centrism & Bolshevism** **in Ukraine**



March 2001: Anti-Kuchma protesters battle police in Kiev

DPA

In early 2001 Ukraine was gripped by an acute political crisis after a former member of the political police, Mykola Melnychenko, leaked tapes implicating President Leonid Kuchma in the grisly murder of Georgy Gongadze, a journalist who had been a thorn in the side of the regime. Melnychenko's tapes, which the government initially dismissed as forgeries, graphically revealed the murderous brutality and venality of Kuchma's administration.

Kuchma was elected in 1994 on a promise of aligning Ukraine closely with Russia, but once in office, he made an abrupt turn and joined Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Georgia and Moldova in a NATO-sponsored alliance aimed at undercutting Russian influence in the region. As a reward for its independence from Moscow, the U.S. has doled out more than \$2 billion to Ukraine. Kuchma won reelection in 1999 pledging to continue to balance between NATO and the Kremlin, but this time his deteriorating domestic position forced him into Vladimir Putin's embrace.

The nascent Ukrainian bourgeoisie is divided between those who favor an orientation to Moscow, and others who

look to the U.S. and the European Union. Despite Russia's economic implosion during the past decade, its per capita GDP is still almost three times that of Ukraine, and Kiev's dependency on Moscow for energy has given Russian oligarchs the leverage to buy up large chunks of the Ukrainian economy.

The spectacular revelations on Melnychenko's tapes galvanized Kuchma's pro-Western bourgeois opposition under the banner of "Ukraine Without Kuchma." In December 2000, a tent city was set up in Kiev's Independence Square where fascists and various reformist leftists huddled together. The participants in this foul lash-up included members of "Workers Resistance" (affiliated with Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers International), "Red Wolves" (a grouping linked to Alain Krivine's United Secretariat of the Fourth International), the Socialist Party, the Social-Democratic Party, the Green Party, several pro-Western bourgeois parties, the right-wing nationalists of the Ukrainian People's Movement and the fascistic Ukrainian National Assembly/Ukrainian National Self-Defense.

Kuchma was supported by pro-Russian elements of Ukraine's proto-bourgeoisie. Also in his camp was the Workers Revolutionary League (formerly known as the Socialist Youth of Ukraine, an affiliate of Sheila Torrence's orthodox Healyite tendency), along with the far-right Social National Party of Ukraine (which is linked to Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front) and the fascist thugs of Stepan Bandera's Trident.

In early February 2001, as anti-Kuchma protests gained momentum, the European Union called for an inquiry into Gongadze's murder. This was a clear signal that Brussels thought it was time for Kuchma to go, but the president refused to budge. On 6 February several dozen masked "anarchists," obviously members of the state security police, attacked the tent city. The same day leftists and fascists clashed at an anti-Kuchma rally. On 10 February, on the eve of a major demonstration, Kuchma fired the heads of the security police and the presidential guard in a desperate attempt to deflect criticism. The next day only 5,000 protesters turned out to march in Kiev.

Kuchma avoided the protest and spent the day in Dnipropetrovsk meeting with Russian President Putin who agreed to allow Ukraine to reunite its energy grid with Russia's, thus significantly lowering energy costs. Putin's backing, and the relatively small turnout for the 11 February protest, emboldened Kuchma to order the immediate removal of the tent city.

Viktor Yushchenko, a former governor of the central bank, who was prime minister during the crisis, was the West's preferred candidate to succeed Kuchma. The call for "Ukraine Without Kuchma" was popularly understood as a demand for Yushchenko to assume the presidency.

Earlier, in January 2001, Kuchma had Yuliya Tymoshenko, the country's deputy prime minister and energy minister, arrested and charged with "corruption." Tymoshenko was one of Yushchenko's closest allies, and her difficulties clearly demonstrated the limits of Western influence in Ukraine. The NATO powers would prefer a strong and "independent" Ukraine on Russia's southern flank, but are unwilling and unable to provide the capital to revive Ukraine's moribund economy.

The following text is a translation of a leaflet, dated 14 March 2001, that was distributed in Kiev by the Young Revolutionary Marxists (YRM—now the Ukrainian section of the IBT).

Tasks of Revolutionary Marxists

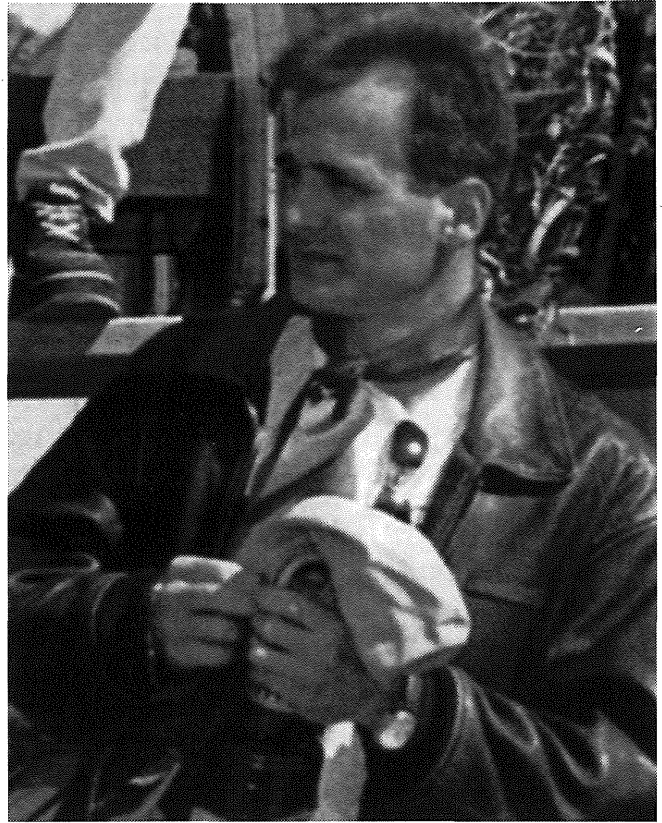
"The greatest honor for a genuine revolutionist today is to remain a 'sectarian' of revolutionary Marxism in the eyes of philistines, whimperers and superficial thinkers....

"We must first entrench ourselves on principled positions, take a correct starting point, and then proceed to move along tactical lines. We are now in the period of principled self-clarification and merciless demarcation from opportunists and muddlers. This is the only avenue to the highway of revolution."

—Leon Trotsky 12 June 1929

Revolutionary Marxists in Ukraine today are confronted with a difficult set of strategic and tactical problems. It is quite clear that revolutionaries cannot be involved in the openly bourgeois (and fascist-infested) "Ukraine Without Kuchma" movement (recently redubbed the "National Salvation Forum").

Yet we are not indifferent to Kuchma's murderous



Gongadze: murdered journalist

bonapartism nor his other attacks on democratic rights, including those of his fellow oligarchs. While we demand the immediate and unconditional release of all leftists and workers imprisoned by the bourgeoisie in the class war, we are only concerned in the case of bourgeois figures charged with corruption, etc. that all proper legal procedures are observed and their democratic rights protected. This is why we support the call for an independent investigation of the Gongadze murder. We recognize that there is a real danger that either Kuchma, or his bourgeois rivals, could attempt to solve their problems through some sort of military coup. The proletariat has a vital interest in taking steps to prepare for such an eventuality. The creation of strike committees and workers' defense squads in each workplace could make the oligarchs think twice about using the police or fascists against the workers.

An item included in the 16 February issue of the LRCI's [League for a Revolutionary Communist International] e-mail newsletter, "Workers Power Global Week," raised similar concerns:

"In the near future a coup d'état by Kuchma or Yushchenko is possible or at least sharp confrontations on the street with the police and/or the fascists."

This is quite correct. Yet comrades of the YRM have found in discussions with RV-MRM [LRCI supporters in Kiev], that the LRCI considers us "sectarian" for failing to side with the supposedly "more democratic" Yushchenko/Tymoshenko wing of the bourgeoisie against Kuchma's wing. This attempt to find a "lesser evil" element among the capitalists can only disorient the Ukrainian workers in the present situation. And the LRCI is only one of many organizations making this mistake.

The current situation presents real opportunities for



A. KLYMENKO

Tymoshenko

strengthening revolutionary influence within the workers' movement, but a political prerequisite is that we maintain fidelity to the fundamentals of Marxism, and never lose sight of the historic irreconcilability of the interests of workers and capitalists. We must also recognize that the victory of the counterrevolutionaries in Moscow in 1991, and the destruction of the bureaucratized Soviet economy, has led directly to our present impasse. Under capitalist restoration the Kuchmas, Tymoshenkos, Yushchenkos and their ilk have all enriched themselves at the expense of working people.

Capitalist restoration has been a complete social catastrophe for most people in Ukraine and throughout the former Soviet bloc. Today there can be no illusions in the prospects of life under capitalism. The workers' movement, which has now had a decade of experience with the ravages of capitalist restoration, confronts a deeply discredited and increasingly unpopular administration, which sits atop an unstable and seriously divided ruling class. Neither wing of the bourgeoisie—those oriented toward the West or toward Moscow—currently appears capable of mobilizing substantial popular support.

While the workers are hostile to the regime and the rival blocs of bourgeois exploiters and thieves, they have not, to date, been particularly combative. This is partly a product of the desperate economic conditions that require ordinary people to concentrate on mere survival. But it largely reflects the fact that the main organizations of the workers' movement, particularly the CPU [Communist Party of Ukraine], have pursued a policy of inactivity and petty parliamentary maneuvers. Their hostility to Kuchma has abated as he has warmed to Putin, who the former Stalinists

in the CPU leadership apparently view as some sort of friend.

'Ukraine Without Bourgeoisie and Fascists': A Balance Sheet

In addition to establishing a clear political demarcation from revisionists, revolutionaries seek to unite with others who may have very different political programs in common struggles for shared practical objectives. In the language of Leninism this is the policy of a "united front."

The recent activity of the YRM and its involvement in the "For Ukraine Without Bourgeoisie and Fascists" initiative has had both strengths and weaknesses and only through making a frank assessment of this experience, and of what we have learned from it, can we learn from our mistakes to better equip ourselves for revolutionary activity in the future.

Let us begin by acknowledging the correct criticism raised by the LRCI comrades of the demand in the 23 February text initiating the bloc which called for "Condemnation of neo-fascist terror attacks on workers and leftist activists, and prohibition of nazi parties and organizations." The call for the "prohibition" of fascist groups fails to make clear that the fascists must be physically driven off the streets through aggressive united action by workers and the oppressed. We do not know of any of the groups signing the common text that would waste their breath calling on Kuchma to ban the fascists (some of whom are among his few remaining supporters). However the way this demand is formulated is clearly open to this interpretation and so it must be rejected.

There is also a more general problem with the presentation of the issues in the statement of the bloc. The Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky drew an important distinction between a bloc for action (a united front) and a bloc of politically disparate groups to issue common propaganda. A "bloc for propaganda" between organizations that are not preparing to fuse can only confuse people who will naturally tend to conclude that the participants cannot have any very serious differences among themselves. It can be fatal for Marxists to confuse their banner in this fashion with those of their reformist or centrist bloc partners. In signing the declaration "For Ukraine Without Bourgeoisie and Fascists" the YRM failed to make this important distinction.

The YRM played an important role in initiating this bloc, and in the concrete circumstances that confront society today, it was necessary and correct to attempt to group together those who oppose Kuchma *and* his capitalist opponents for common action—particularly for active self-defense against the fascists who inhabit both camps. But we were mistaken to sign a statement that suggests that the participants in this bloc share a strategy for achieving, "Liberation of Ukraine from the IMF, oligarchs, bourgeois and their lackeys, and from betrayers of the working people."

If all the participants had such a level of agreement then it would be irresponsible in the extreme to maintain our separate organizations. The only reason we are not in a common organization today is because we do *not* have such a far-reaching level of agreement. Thus a slogan that obscures this fact is not appropriate for a united front and can only serve to blur the very important distinctions that separate the various political tendencies.

To illustrate this, we shall use the comrades of the LRCI as an example. While we both oppose any moves by Kuchma to use the state authorities to restrict the democratic rights of his opponents, including, for example, the dispersion of the inhabitants of the tent city on Independence Square, we disagree fundamentally with the LRCI's conception that in a confrontation between the Kuchma and Yushchenko/Tymoshenko bourgeois gangs, the workers have an interest in the victory of the latter. Similarly, we disagree with the LRCI's decision in Moscow in 1993 to support the Rutsloi/Khasbulatov wing of the capitalist restorationists against their erstwhile ally Yeltsin. In that situation, as in this one, the working class had no interest in the victory of either side in the struggle for power between qualitatively similar groups of capitalists.

Kuchma versus Yushchenko/Tymoshenko: No 'Lesser Evil'

There are points in history where elements of the exploiters may come to blows and the workers' movement *does* have an interest in the victory of one side over another. One such example was in 1917 when General Kornilov sought to crush the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky and potentially open the way for a restoration of the monarchy. The LRCI comrades have argued that this conflict is analogous to our situation today. But this is mistaken.

The Bolsheviks understood that a victory for Kornilov would lead directly to military dictatorship, the crushing of the workers' movement and the eradication of the democratic gains won through the February Revolution. Kerensky had thrown Trotsky into jail, was hunting for Lenin, and sought to crush the Bolsheviks and their proletarian supporters. Yet Kerensky depended on support from the Mensheviks and other reformist elements in the workers' movement who Kornilov would also have destroyed along with the Bolsheviks. Therefore when Kornilov attacked Kerensky, the Bolsheviks militarily defended him against the counterrevolutionaries. The defeat of Kornilov laid the basis for the overthrow of Kerensky and the victory of the October Revolution a few weeks later.

The lesson of this experience is not that, in general, Marxists should look for a "lesser evil" in conflicts among capitalist factions, but rather that we must judge each situation on the basis of the overall interests of the workers' movement. In the United States, for example, genuine Marxists have long been distinguished from Stalinists and reformists by their refusal to support either of the twin parties of imperialist rule—Democrats or Republicans. This, not the Kerensky-Kornilov episode, is an appropriate analogy for the current wrangle between the Kuchma and Yushchenko/Tymoshenko bourgeois gangs. There is no lesser evil and therefore workers have no interest in the victory of either.

In the August 1991 coup in Moscow, conversely, workers across the USSR had a vital interest in the defeat of Boris Yeltsin and the forces of capitalist restoration. Without giving any political support to the treacherous and incompetent Stalinist bureaucrats it was necessary to militarily support the last-ditch attempt by Yanayev/Pugo who, however incompetently, attempted to preserve the status quo against the openly pro-imperialist, capitalist-restorationist forces led by Yeltsin. In that instance, to their shame, comrades of the LRCI mounted the barricades alongside the Yeltsinites

and proclaimed the triumph of the counterrevolutionary restorationists a victory for "democracy."

The Basis for United Action Today

A united front should have a simple, *action-oriented* program based on common objectives shared by the participants. At the same time there must be "freedom of criticism" for all participants. This permits revolutionaries to unite in action with reformists and others around concrete issues, while also criticizing the political inconsistencies or contradictions of their partners. It is obviously urgently necessary to prepare for united action against the sinister bands of fascists.

Given the current precarious situation and the danger of repression, the fight against the fascists must be linked to the needs of the workers' movement to defend itself. This is why we call "For workers' defense squads to smash the fascists and defend democratic rights." The fight to crush the fascist scourge is closely linked to the necessity to protect and expand the rights of working people against the exploiters and their thugs. Workers with very different political orientations also have a common interest in creating strike committees, which could prove vital in carrying out coordinated actions. As such committees spread from one enterprise to another, they will naturally require some sort of organizational framework for coordinating their activities, on a local and, ultimately, a national scale, as the workers' councils of 1905 and 1917 did throughout the Czar's empire.

For Revolutionary Regroupment!

The YRM is only one of a number of ostensibly Leninist groups currently active in Kiev. We believe that it is vitally important to engage in political struggle with other left currents as part of the process of clarifying areas of agreement while clearly demarcating genuine Marxism from every shade of revisionism, reformism and muddleheaded centrism. Only in this way will it be possible to lay the basis to unite revolutionaries from very different backgrounds into a disciplined party.

The critical task posed at this moment is to regroup serious subjectively revolutionary militants and create an organization with sufficient social weight to effectively intervene in the struggles of the working masses. This can only be done on the basis of clear programmatic agreement and an authentically Marxist strategic line, based on the recognition of the fundamental historical incompatibility of the interests of the workers and all wings of the exploiters.

The only solution to the profound social and economic crisis that grips Ukraine today lies through a struggle to reappropriate the factories, mines, transportation and distribution facilities and organize production on the basis of human need, not profit. This requires the creation of an authentically Bolshevik Party, modeled on that of Lenin and Trotsky, capable of leading the struggle for proletarian power.

- ***Down with Kuchma/Yushchenko! Break with the Bourgeoisie!***
- ***Defend Democratic Rights! For United Action to Smash Fascist Terror! For Workers' Self-Defense Squads!***
- ***For Strike Committees in Every Workplace! Return to the Road of Lenin and Trotsky!***

Open Letter: 'To All Revolutionaries in the Komsomol'



Kuchma and Yushchenko DPA

The following statement by the Young Revolutionary Marxists (YRM—now the Ukrainian section of the IBT) dated 18 March 2001, was issued in response to an "Open Letter" by six members of the Komsomol (the youth wing of the Communist Party of Ukraine—CPU) sympathetic to the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

Comrades:

On Friday 16 March [2001] we received an "Open Letter to all Komsomol members" signed by six Komsomol members. This letter contains a series of political points, many of which are unobjectionable for any socialist. Yet in our view, it is a statement that, in its totality, genuine Marxists cannot endorse.

The "Open Letter" begins with the observation that the new bourgeois exploiters are constructing a capitalist social order which is qualitatively worse than bureaucratic "socialism" under the CPSU prior to 1991. This is very true, as is the observation that the new ruling class is "split now on the question to which Great power it should subordinate: the USA and EU or Russia." We of course also agree that "the Kuchma regime does not hesitate to attack democratic rights, [and employ] police violence, repression and even murder" to cling to power.

The letter correctly observes "the bourgeois leaders of the National Salvation Forum try to exploit the justified democratic outrage of many citizens about the murder of Gongadze for their own pro-Western goals" and that they

are in league with "the fascist hooligans of UNA-UMSO." It rightly notes that Kuchma's current anti-fascist rhetoric is worthless as "his regime financed the fascists for a long time." We would add that in the current crisis Kuchma has enjoyed support from Bandera's Trident and other ultra-rightists.

But the central proposition in the "Open Letter" is mistaken: its denial that the main issue posed by the "Ukraine Without Kuchma" movement is who should hold power, but rather, "what is at stake are the democratic rights of any political opposition." "Any political opposition" clearly refers to the National Salvation Forum which, if it succeeds in building a sufficiently large movement and gains support from essential layers of the bourgeoisie and particularly the officer corps, clearly intends to take power and rule in essentially the same manner as Kuchma. This is no mass plebeian popular democratic movement.

While Marxists defend the democratic rights of the pro-imperialist NSF, and thus oppose every attempt by Kuchma to impose arbitrary and undemocratic restrictions upon it, this is *not* the critical issue facing the workers' movement today and it is *not* what leftists in the Komsomol should be focusing on. Yet this is clearly the orientation of the "Open Letter": "the workers' movement and particularly Komsomol must mobilize for mass actions to defend the democratic rights to protest on the street against the Kuchma regime." The authors of the "Open Letter" seek to give a left cover to their policy of winning the CPU to tail the bourgeois opposition:

"One could have thought that the CPU as the biggest party in the country would do its duty and mobilize its members and supporters against the regime but independent of the bourgeois National Salvation Front."

This talk of "independence" from the bourgeois NSF has a very Marxist tone, but when you look carefully, it amounts to no more than a proposal to organize a separate contingent, alongside the NSF, in a movement aimed *solely* against Kuchma. But the job of Marxists is not to "independently" mobilize the working class to support one wing of the exploiters against the other, but rather to imbue them with the recognition that they can only be free by overthrowing *both* wings! This represents a major regression from the 22 February [2001] statement, "Ukraine Without Bourgeoisie and Fascists," that the RV-MRM [the LRCI's Ukrainian affiliate] signed, along with many other groups. The RV-MRM's support for this latest "Open Letter," shows that its adaptationist political orientation to Kuchma's bourgeois opposition has not changed fundamentally.

This was signaled in an earlier Internet message, dated 2 March [2001], from M. Proebsting, of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, with which the RV-MRM is in sympathy, commenting:

"one of the main weaknesses of this united front is that it does not unambiguously defend the bourgeois opposition against Kuchma drive for a full blown bonapartism.

Instead it takes a neutral position—i.e., ‘these are only two bourgeois camps fighting for power’.”

Revolutionaries defend democratic rights for the NSF today, as we would for Kuchma’s supporters tomorrow if the positions of these rival gangs were to be suddenly reversed. We do so not because we think the program of one is superior to the other, but solely because in defending democratic rights in general we defend the conditions which permit the easiest and fastest development of mass revolutionary consciousness within the workers’ movement. Defending the democratic rights of the bourgeois opposition does not change the fact that in the current conflict ‘*these are only two bourgeois camps fighting for power*’. What sort of Marxist could fail to see that?

While the “Open Letter” is correct that “what is at stake today in the first line is not the pro-Western orientation or the danger of a fascist *coup d’etat* by UNA-UMSO,” it does not follow that the main objective for socialists should be to organize support (“independently” or otherwise) for a campaign which everyone knows is aimed at replacing Kuchma’s gang with Yushchenko/Tymoshenko’s.

The RV-MRM is on record calling the NSF campaign “progressive,” thereby clearly solidarizing with it, even if not uncritically:

“We Trotskyists of RV-MRM consider the protests against Kuchma as progressive. We support the demands of freedom of press and the investigation of Gongadze case as general democratic demands.

“However, we think it is impermissible for Marxists to organize a tent camp together with fascists — particularly since they were a significant force there. Such a policy only confuses the working class and democratic students and misleads them about the deeply reactionary character of these forces. Groups like the CWI make a very serious mistake by participating with fascists in this camp. Therefore RV-MRM did not participate in the protest camp. Instead we call for kicking out the fascists of the anti-Kuchma movement.”

—statement by Konstantin Y., posted on Internet by LRCL, 20 February [2001]

This spells it out very clearly. The RV-MRM would love to participate in the NSF’s campaign, rather than just support it from afar, but, unlike the ultra-opportunists of the CWI, they drew the line at cooperation with fascists. Instead of congratulating themselves for being so principled it might be better if the RV-MRM comrades were to ask themselves why they should be so eager to support a campaign that attracts fascists in the first place.

The main duty of Marxists in Ukraine today is not to advertise the fact that Kuchma is running a corrupt and vicious regime and deserves to be ousted. That is already well known. The critical task for revolutionaries at this point is to alert the masses to the danger of allowing their anger at Kuchma to be channeled by the NSF into a campaign that, if it succeeds, will only mean that one reactionary regime is replaced by another. The comrades of the RV-MRM, as well as the authors of the “Open Letter,” must surely recognize that a regime headed by Yushchenko will be no less dangerous for working people than Kuchma is today.

Marxists within the Komsomol, and outside it, must seek to win the most politically conscious elements of the working class to understand that while it is necessary to defend democratic rights in general (including those of the NSF) there is no “lesser evil” between the pro-Russian and

pro-Western wings of the ruling class—the Kuchmas and the Yushchenko/Tymoshenkos.

The problem with the “Open Letter” is that, while it talks of “fighting for socialism and workers’ power” and correctly observes that this “can not be done with this party but against the CPU bureaucracy,” all the talk of “independence” and “democracy” boils down to a “left” cover for supporting one set of reactionaries (those behind Yushchenko/Tymoshenko) against the other.

In its essentials the struggle in Kiev today between the rival bourgeois factions parallels that which erupted in Moscow in October 1993 between two gangs of counter-revolutionaries led by Yeltsin and Rutskoi (the latter who was backed by various Russian fascists). In that sordid struggle, as in the current one here, the key issue was not “democracy” but rather which wing of the fledgling bourgeoisie would give the orders and reap the rewards of privatization. Such situations, where the oppressors are split into two qualitatively similar factions and the workers’ movement has nothing essential at stake in the victory of either, can present the revolutionary proletariat with major opportunities to take advantage of the paralysis of our class enemies.

We must reject illusions that a policy of tailing the “mass movement” generated by the NSF wing of the bourgeoisie will somehow turn into a “first step” toward socialism. In fact it represents nothing other than the political subordination of the workers to a wing of the capitalists. The orientation of revolutionaries must be to seek to direct popular anger at the whole project of capitalist restoration, and to sharpen workers’ political awareness that there is nothing to choose between the two gangs of bandits. The “Open Letter” says “We need a new workers’ party, a workers’ party truly committed to the goals of working class revolution and authentic socialism (not the bureaucratic caricature we had before 1990!).” In the abstract this is quite true, but the axis of political intervention proposed—to rally support on a “left-wing” basis for a section of the exploiters—represents an obstacle to the creation of a genuinely revolutionary workers’ party.

Any organization which is “truly committed to the goals of working-class revolution and authentic socialism” had best start with hard opposition to Yeltsin and his counter-revolutionary backers in August 1991. In that confrontation the workers *did* have a side—and it was with Pugo, Yanayev and the remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy who, for their own reasons, sought to preserve the status quo. The CPSU bureaucrats may have administered a “bureaucratic caricature” of socialism, but it was qualitatively better than what has resulted from the victory of Yeltsin and his capitalist restorationists. The great tragedy of our generation is that it was the Yeltsinites, rather than an insurgent working class, that destroyed the Stalinists’ political monopoly.

Yet there are some so-called revolutionaries, including the comrades of the LRCL and RV-MRM, who have endorsed the “Open Letter,” who have not yet grasped this simple historical fact. Indeed they have yet to repudiate the shameful behavior of their own comrades who mounted Yeltsin’s barricades during the coup in August 1991 and thus physically aided in the defense of the counterrevolution! It seems to us that people with this sort of political record might be well advised to spend a bit of time getting a few things straight before lecturing others on “working class revolution and authentic socialism.” ■

British Election 2001: Vote SA/SLP/SSP! No Vote to Labour!



Blair clowning at election campaign launch, 10 Downing Street

The following statement was distributed during Britain's 2001 general election campaign.

Labour's bid for a second term on 7 June pits it against a divided and demoralised Tory party, whose xenophobia over Europe and attempts to play the race card have failed to give it significant traction. Labour's hostility to asylum seekers, its commitment to privatisation, and its antagonism to anti-capitalist youth, trade unionists, poor people and racial minorities, have made it difficult for William Hague to distinguish his party from Tony Blair's. Under Labour, Britain's army of occupation has remained in Northern Ireland, British bombers have continued to attack Iraq, and British soldiers are still deployed as neo-colonial gendarmes from Bosnia to Sierra Leone.

Blair has described Labour's 'third way' as a 'centre-left' response to the destruction of the USSR (*Guardian*, 20 February [2001]). For three generations the Soviet Union provided a living, if bureaucratically deformed, demonstration of the possibility of organising a modern industrial economy on a basis other than the pursuit of profit. With the supposed 'death of communism', social democracy lost much of its value to the bosses as a hedge against the growth of more radical currents within the working class. Blair's 'third way', premised on the permanence of capital-

ist ascendancy, is designed to reinvent the Labour Party as the most efficient social manager for the monied elites.

Big Brother's Little Helpers

Rather than repealing the Tories' repressive anti-union legislation, as 'Old Labour' might have, Blair's government has pushed things further and turned Britain into one of the most tightly controlled societies on the planet. In an infamous May 1999 speech, Home Secretary Jack Straw bragged that the government now has a million cameras in public spaces across the country. On an average day most individuals in Britain's major urban centres are videoed several hundred times. Straw concedes that Big Brother's omnipresent eye means a loss of privacy, but considers it 'a price worth paying' for heightened security. To complement state surveillance there has also been an explosion of private networks which now monitor roughly half the workforce, and routinely track company vehicles with satellite systems originally developed by British intelligence for use against the IRA.

At the pinnacle of this edifice of high-tech repression sits Labour's new 'anti-terrorism' legislation, which defines terrorism as 'serious damage to property' or interference

with 'an electronic system'. Anyone committing or encouraging such acts, or even associating with those who do, can be jailed. In Labour's Brave New World it is illegal not to report *suspicious* of prohibited activity, or to wear a T-shirt or badge that might 'arouse reasonable suspicion' of sympathy for 'terrorist' causes. Under this legislation, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and other suffragettes whose protests occasionally resulted in property damage 'for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause', could be jailed for life as 'terrorists'.

Terrorist activities have not been on the rise in Britain in recent years, but there *has* been a wave of anti-capitalist protest, and this is Blair's real target. Under Labour's draconian legislation, the police can make arrests even when no offence has been committed. They are also empowered to cordon off any area in which they suspect an 'illegal' action is about to occur and to arrest those who do not immediately disperse. The law eliminates the necessity for companies to go before a judge to get injunctions to limit pickets or demonstrations — the police are now free to impose whatever limitations they see fit without judicial oversight. The outrage on Mayday, when heavily armed riot cops trapped thousands of peaceful protesters in Oxford Circus for hours, photographing and videotaping them and making selective arrests, is just the latest instance of the intrusive 'in your face' style of policing promoted by Labour.

Labour: Still a Right-Wing Bourgeois Workers' Party

Labour's connection to the TUC has thus far enabled Blair to get away with anti-democratic outrages without serious resistance from the trade unions. Blair also found the union bloc vote handy during the squabble over the selection of Labour's candidate for mayor of London. 'New Labour' is a very right-wing bourgeois workers' party with a leadership that clearly aspires to break its links to the union movement, but has not (yet) been able to do so.

Blair's sometimes hidden reliance on the union bureaucracy was illustrated during last year's fuel tax crisis when a spontaneous bloc of farmers, self-employed truckers, oil company executives, Tories and working-class motorists briefly challenged the government. The protest was derailed when the TGWU leadership ordered drivers to break the blockades around the petrol depots.

A majority of British trade unionists may still vote Labour, but they do so either out of habit or with clenched teeth. Many who voted Labour in 1997 did so *despite* Blair's neo-conservative programme, in order to end 18 years of Tory rule. Increasing numbers of working people (particularly youth) are not bothering to vote at all.

The task for revolutionaries in this election is to channel plebeian discontent into a conscious political break with Labourism. This can best be expressed through votes for the slates to Labour's left. The Socialist Alliance (SA), an electoral bloc of various ostensibly revolutionary organisations — including the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the International Socialist Group, the Socialist Party (SP), the Communist Party of Great Britain and Workers Power (WP) — is running close to one hundred candidates in England and Wales. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) is contesting all 72 constituencies north of the border. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) has announced plans to stand in 'more than 100 constituencies', including Blair's and those of Labour 'lefts' Jeremy Corbyn

and Diane Abbott. The Socialist Party, in addition to having several candidates on the Socialist Alliance slate, is also fielding candidates in two seats under a 'Socialist Alternative' banner.

The SA/SSP campaigns, taken together, represent Labour's most significant left-wing electoral challenge for many years. Yet Blair's claim that leftists who criticise his government are engaging in 'a curious form of self-mutilation' (*Guardian*, 20 February [2001]) can only be interpreted as a macabre joke. The problem with the Socialist Alliance is that it represents only a very partial break, even in organisational terms, from the abject Labour loyalism that has hobbled the British left for so long.

Most of the constituencies contested by the SA are considered 'safe' for Labour, seats in which a few thousand votes are unlikely to affect the outcome. While standing candidates against prominent Blairites and cabinet ministers, the SA is steering clear of Labour Party 'lefts'. The SA's electoral manifesto also carefully avoids the question of who workers in England and Wales should vote for if they live in any of the 400-odd constituencies where the SA is not standing.

Voting for Blair 'With a Heavy Heart'

The SWP, the SA's majority shareholder, welcomed Labour's 1997 election victory. While striking a more critical posture toward the Blairites today, the SWP still advises workers to vote Labour where the SA and SSP are not standing:

'we still prefer a Labour victory to a Tory (or for that matter Liberal Democrat) one, and in marginal seats make it clear that we want to see the Tories beaten.

'Our central slogan should be "Vote socialist — build a left alternative to Blair", and we should use the slogan "Keep the Tories out" only as a subordinate slogan.'

—*Socialist Worker*, 3 March [2001]

John Rees, a leading SWPer, explained:

'we must be able to say, "We only called for workers not to vote Labour where there was a socialist alternative." Where none existed we, with a heavy heart, said, "Don't let the Tory in — vote Labour but build the socialist alternative so that next time we don't face the same lousy choice."

—*Socialist Review*, March [2001]

Rees postpones a full-scale break with Labour to some point in the indefinite future when the construction of a 'socialist alternative' is complete. But if the SA were running a full slate of 'socialist' candidates in this election, it would *increase* the 'danger' of Tories picking up marginal seats. The SWP shrinks from telling the simple truth: workers have no more interest in enduring another four years of attacks from Blair than from the Tories. Those who call for a vote to any candidates running on Labour's ticket must, to quote the April issue of *Workers Power* (WP),

'justify doubling the prison population; the most repressive anti-union laws in Europe; racist asylum laws; attacks on civil liberties.'

We fully agree. Yet, strange to say, *Workers Power*, which like the SWP supported Blair in 1997, is once again following the SWP in (very quietly) advocating votes to Labour where the SA and SSP are not running. While the SWP at least attempted to provide a political rationalisation for its craven Labourism, the special election issue of *Workers Power* (May) simply proposed:



JOHN HARRIS—REPORT DIGITAL

Pensions shrinking under Labour

'If you live in a place where the SA/SSP is not standing we recommend you cast your for Labour [sic]. But get involved in your nearest SA/SSP campaign.'

In typically centrist fashion this right-wing policy is concealed behind slogans advising workers to 'Break with Labour'.

Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party correctly observes:

'To call for a Labour vote at this election... would confuse and disorientate workers and youth who are looking for an alternative to New Labour and delay the important task of building a new workers' party in the future.'

Yet this is based on a false premise:

'In the last decade Labour has been qualitatively and decisively transformed from a party with a pro-capitalist leadership and working-class base into an open, "unashamed" capitalist party.'

—*Socialism Today*, April [2001]

In place of Lenin's view of critical support as a *tactic* which revolutionaries can use to split the pro-capitalist leadership of mass reformist parties from their proletarian base, the SP (like the SWP, WP *et al*) treats electoral support to Labour as obligatory as long as it retains an organic connection to the workers' movement through the labour aristocracy. Because Taaffe and the SP leaders can no longer bring themselves to vote for Blair, they conclude that Labour must be a capitalist party.

Sometimes it is necessary for revolutionaries to critically support Labour. In 1974, for example, when the election was in effect a referendum on the Tories' assault on the miners, Marxists called for workers to vote Labour while warning that the social-democrats would inevitably betray once in office. Labour won the election and then proceeded to impose the infamous 'Social Contract' which pushed down working-class living standards by almost 20 percent. In the 1979 election Labour campaigned on its strikebreaking record and its ability to control trade union militancy more

effectively than the Tories, yet the SWP and the other 'revolutionary' Labour loyalists dutifully called on workers to re-elect the Callaghan government in order to 'Keep the Tories Out'.

In 1997 we called for votes to the Socialist Labour Party, and within the SLP our comrades fought hard against proposals for voting Labour in any constituency. The Socialist Alliance suffers by comparison with the early SLP in several respects. Firstly, most of its components are advocating votes for Blair. Secondly, unlike the SLP, which was a left split from Labour, the Socialist Alliance is a reformist electoral umbrella created by a variety of ostensibly revolutionary organisations. Arthur Scargill and his immediate coterie at least believed in the reformist programme they espoused, unlike the 'Leninists' of the Socialist Alliance who are putting forward an explicitly non-revolutionary programme.

Last year we voted for the Socialist Alliance candidates in the elections for the London Assembly despite their overtly reformist programme, and their abject support to Ken Livingstone's popular frontist mayoral campaign. We did so because the SA campaign provided an opportunity for workers to cast a ballot against the Blairite union-bashers. This time, for the same reason, we are again calling for votes to the Socialist Alliance, as well as to candidates of the SLP, SSP and Socialist Alternative, despite the fact that none of them are campaigning on a programme that even roughly approximates a socialist option for workers.

Reformist Tinkering vs. Socialist Programme

Labour cynically claims to champion the interests of poor and working people, but even columnist Polly Toynbee, who is generally supportive of Blair's social policies, admits: 'the gap between the rich and poor has still widened under Labour. It always happens in prosperous times, but Labour made no attempt to claw back any of the extra income flowing in to top earners — let alone taxing their

growing capital wealth.... The big picture is still that the rich are getting richer faster than the rest and the poor are still being left behind.'

—*Guardian*, 8 March [2001]

Toynbee mocks the Socialist Alliance as impractical ideologues who: 'think blue sky and green field and dream of a world that is a better place than this' (*Guardian*, 2 March [2001]). But the SA's election manifesto is really just standard issue left Labourism. It calls for increased public spending and higher corporate taxation, the repeal of anti-union legislation, reduced military spending and the renationalisation of rail and utility companies. The manifesto also proposes the takeover of 'all companies threatening closure and redundancies', and 'the major transport, construction and manufacturing industries, as well as banking and financial institutions'. Why only the financial giants and the duds? While calling for 'no compensation to the fat cats' and for public services to be 'democratically controlled by those who work in and use them', the manifesto gives no hints about how to counter the inevitably violent bourgeois reaction to such measures.

The capitalists would only concede the sorts of utopian reformist demands proposed in the Socialist Alliance programme in order to play for time to defuse a social crisis and/or assemble the forces necessary to reassert control through naked repression. In such circumstances, with the possibility of a socialist breakthrough acutely posed, the half-measures of the SA programme would be *counterposed* to the urgent necessity to disperse the capitalists' armed gangs and proceed with the wholesale expropriation of industry, transport and communication. 'A world that is a better place than this' can only be created if the working class is won to a programme that decisively breaks with left Labourist reformism.

At the SA conference in Birmingham on 10 March [2001] where the election manifesto was finalised, attempts to introduce left-wing amendments were rebuffed. Chris Harman, Lindsey German and other SWP leaders argued that only an overtly reformist programme could provide the 'possibility of drawing together wide numbers of people rebelling against New Labour'. An East London nun, who would be offended by excessive radicalism, was used as an example of the kind of person the SA should be seeking to attract. The implications, if any, for the SA's pro-choice position on abortion were not spelled out by the SWP.

Rejecting a Workers Power proposal 'for disbanding of the police', the SWP-led majority instead called for the SA to:

'support all reforms that make the police accountable to democratically elected bodies and stop their use against workers in struggle, black people, progressive demonstrations and young people'.

This is pure, unadulterated, social-democratic reformism. It has absolutely nothing in common with the Marxist tradition the SWP claims to represent. The job of revolutionaries is not to promote illusions that the capitalists' armed thugs can be reformed, but rather to uphold the necessity for organised self-defence by the working people and the oppressed against strikebreaking, racist attacks and every other sort of capitalist violence.

Another Workers Power amendment addressed the class character of the state:

'We would have to break up the bosses' state, abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, dismiss the generals and the police chiefs, break up its machinery of power and

repression, its undemocratic institutions and its armed forces and police. To do this [we] would have to base our government on the mass democratic organisations of the working class, on elected councils of workers in every workplace and community, on the armed power of the defence organisations of the working class.'

—'Agenda and order paper for National Network of Socialist Alliances policy conference'

This motion was roundly rejected by the SWP and most of the other assembled 'revolutionaries' because it was not likely to go down well with voters who retained illusions in a parliamentary road to socialism. Workers Power was hardly surprised by this rejection:

'the Socialist Alliance's two largest components the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) have already indicated that they favour advancing a programme that falls well short of being revolutionary. In a bid to capture the votes of discontented Labour supporters they argue that we cannot go "too far" and should limit our programme to a series of radical reforms, combined with vague platitudes about socialism in the future.'

'We are certain that the longer we keep quiet about the revolutionary programme — in the false hope of coaxing people to our side and then trying to convince them by stages — the less likely we are to break reformism's ideological hold. In short, we will not make lasting gains for socialism.'

'At best, we will create a sort of permanent non-aggression pact between disparate forces of the socialist movement that is incapable of advancing a united and decisive solution when faced with crises in the class struggle.'

—*Workers Power*, February [2001]

Despite the fact that Workers Power knew in advance that its attempts to provide the SA with a more left-wing facade would be rebuffed, they dared not flatly reject the classically social-democratic programme and meekly abstained on the vote to approve the final manifesto.

SSP: Taking the Low Road

The SA in England and Wales is in an informal electoral alliance with the left-reformist nationalists of the Scottish Socialist Party. While revolutionaries recognise the right of the Welsh and the Scots to form their own independent states, at this point we do not advocate that they exercise this right. Scottish, Welsh and English workers face an integrated British ruling class and, unless national antagonisms become so bitter that they seriously impede joint class struggle, dividing the workers' organisations along national lines can only strengthen the hand of the exploiters. The SSP advocates an 'independent socialist Scotland', but ignores the fact that a seizure of power by the Scottish proletariat can only be secured by spreading the struggle south. Otherwise, the full weight of the British state, backed by its US and European imperialist allies, deployed against an isolated Scottish insurrection would likely result in a bloody replay of the crushing of the Paris Commune.

There is little reason to think that Tommy Sheridan (who now sits as a member of the devolved Scottish parliament) or the other leaders of the SSP intend anything so heroic. Their idea of an 'independent socialist Scotland' seems to chiefly involve the SSP making it to the government benches in Edinburgh. Sheridan's speculations about future manoeuvres with the bourgeois Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) were recently reported in the SSP's paper:



KAYTE BRIMACOMBE—NETWORK

National Health Service: underfunded by Labour

'In the 2003 elections [to the Scottish parliament], we can expect to win six or eight seats, which will give us a platform to spread our socialist ideas, so that by 2007 you could not rule us out on taking 20 to 25 seats. On that basis the SNP would be looking for a group to form a coalition with. We would not enter a coalition government, but that does not mean we cannot support a referendum on independence, policies for progressive taxation and proposals designed to tackle poverty.'

—*Scottish Socialist Voice*, 2 March [2001]

This is the SSP's 'left' face. In an earlier interview, Sheridan refused to rule out a coalition with the SNP after the next Scottish election in 2003:

'The SNP, I think, will gain and Labour will lose, the Liberal Democrats will lose. You might have the SNP then looking to form an administration with some of the smaller parties. If that happened then our demand would be that our redistributive policies are on the agenda. That's a price the SNP would have to pay. Whether they'd be willing to pay it I don't know but we wouldn't be easy negotiators.'

—*Observer*, 13 August 2000

The reform of 'redistributive policies' by an SNP/SSP coalition is as close to 'socialism' as these aspiring parliamentarians are likely to get. Yet in this election the SSP, by standing against the bourgeois parties and Labour, at least provides Scottish workers with the opportunity to vote against Blair's anti-working class agenda.

Four Years of 'Hard Labour' is Enough!

The recent defection of Liz Davies, a former member of Labour's NEC who was de-selected as a parliamentary candidate in 1997 by the Millbank machine, provided the SA with some favourable media coverage. In an interview published in *Socialist Worker* on 31 March [2001], she explained her decision:

'I have concluded that there is absolutely no possibility of bringing the Labour Party back to values of redistribution

of wealth and of civil liberties. These are values that most Labour Party members believe in, but New Labour doesn't.'

For Davies, joining the SA does not mean cutting ties with 'Old' Labour; she has openly declared her support for several 'lefts' on Blair's slate including Diane Abbott in her own Hackney North constituency.

If enough disgruntled Labour members follow Davies' example and join the Socialist Alliance, the influence of the 'revolutionary' groups would be significantly diluted. This, paradoxically enough, would be likely to push the SA to the left, particularly on the question of re-electing Blair, which is what voting for Labour where the SA or SSP are not running amounts to. Ordinary working people who finally decide to break with Labour are not likely to be impressed by the sophistic rationalisations of Blair's various 'Leninist' backers.

Why should socialists want to see Labour re-elected, when, in the words of the SWP's Lindsey German:

'We already know what the second term will look like.... There will be the same privatisation even in hospitals, schools and housing which attacks the very heart of the welfare state. There will be the same attacks on workers.... There will be the same trend towards authoritarianism, with the attacks on civil liberties such as the right to jury trial. There will be the same scapegoating of refugees and asylum seekers.'

—*Socialist Review*, April [2001]

The main headline of the March issue of *Workers Power* characterised Blair's government as 'Empty, corrupt and capitalist'. In February, *WP* observed, 'After four years in government Labour has dashed the hopes of the millions who voted for it in 1997' and predicted: 'it will launch many more attacks on the working class in a second term government'. So why tell workers to give Blair a second mandate?

The traditional Labour loyalism of the British 'far left' is a form of political adaptation to the existing (bourgeois) consciousness of the working class. The Labour Party has always functioned as an ideological agency of the capitalists within the proletariat, but under Blair it no longer makes any pretence of representing working-class interests. This has forced Millbank's most craven 'revolutionary' apologists to strike a more critical posture, yet the strength of social-democratic sentiment within the SA is evident in its formal programme (which is a facsimile of the Labour lefts' muddled reformism), as well as the insistence on voting for Blair's nominees in the majority of constituencies.

In this election, class-conscious workers should vote for candidates of the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Alternative and even the desiccated Socialist Labour Party, *despite* their reformist programmes. The larger the aggregate vote for the candidates of the left, the greater the impetus for sections of Labour's working-class base to move to the left.

The realignment of a sizeable number of traditional Labour supporters could initiate a period of debate and regroupment through which the most advanced layers of the British working class are able to connect to the Marxist heritage of the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky. This would lay the basis for the emergence of a mass workers' party prepared to fight the bosses, rather than collaborate with them.

**Break with Labour—Vote SA/SLP/SSP!
Forward to a Revolutionary Workers' Party!**

Globalization...

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(CUPE) to leave the official march and head back to the summit. No other unions participated, and when the CUPE contingent and a few thousand young militants reached the fence the police responded with a barrage of tear gas, setting off a confrontation that lasted long into the night.

While the bourgeois media issued routine denunciations of the supposed "violence" of the demonstrators, they dared not characterize the events as simply an orgy of destruction. By playing up distinctions between the "violent" protesters at the fence and the far more numerous "peaceful" ones in the official march, the media sought to marginalize the young radicals who stood up to the cops. Sinclair Stevens, Brian Mulroney's industry minister [in the former Conservative government] and a well-known "free-trade" booster, created some ripples when he denounced the police violence:

"Some will say that a handful of demonstrators got out of hand and forced the police to take collective action. I can't agree. The police action in Quebec City, under orders from our government, was a provocation itself—an assault on all our freedoms."

—*Globe and Mail*, 24 April

The Canadian government, which likes to portray itself as a paragon of democratic rights and humanitarianism, had authorized its thugs to gun down demonstrators for even picking up a stick:

"Lethal force, the instructions read, could be used if it was believed 'the subject could commit an aggressive act with an object such as a stick....'"

—*Globe and Mail*, 23 April

Many of those arrested were abused in jail:

"Some of the more than 400 arrested during the weekend complained Monday they were stripped, sprayed with cold water and deprived of food. Pierre Morneau said he was among a group who were stripped and hosed down. When they asked what they were contaminated with that prompted police to hose them down, 'They told us, "You're contaminated with the scum that you are"....'"

—*Toronto Star*, 23 April

The Canadian Labour Congress posted bail for those arrested, while the spineless NDP, which is trying to climb aboard the "anti-globalization" bandwagon, dumped on the demonstrators, not the cops. Alexa McDonough complained "the images in people's minds are based on the tiny number of very, very violent, irresponsible, anti-social protesters" (*Ibid.*). Svend Robinson, the federal party's left winger, claims that the cops shot him in the leg with a rubber bullet as he was marching away from the fence. Yet he joined McDonough in denouncing those who fought back: "We condemn in the strongest possible terms the violent attacks by a small number of protesters on police officers, this was senseless, destructive violence" (*Ibid.*). NDPers, television "personalities" and academic hacks all unanimously denounced the youth who ripped down the fence and stood off the police, but tens of millions of people around the world cheered them.

Leftward Political Shift

Like the November 1999 protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, the real story in Quebec is



KURT JENSEN

Police filling breach in wall

the loss of confidence by a growing portion of "civil society" in the infallibility of the market. This was reflected in a poll published in the 16 April *National Post* that reported 47 percent in agreement with a statement that the protesters "should be praised" compared to only 33 percent who disagreed.

This is a potentially significant political development. What most disturbed corporate America about Seattle was the depth of popular support for the protesters. These sentiments are of course a very mixed bag. The Seattle demonstration featured a good deal of reactionary flag-waving protectionism and racist anti-communist China-bashing by AFL-CIO bureaucrats. While nationalist/protectionist sentiments were in evidence in Quebec, they were considerably more subdued.

A decision by Canadian immigration authorities to refuse entry to several Mexican activists the week prior to the FTAA confab provoked a storm of protest. This convinced Chrétien that it would be more trouble to turn away busloads of U.S. demonstrators than to allow them to proceed to Quebec.

Many of the protesters naively imagine that the capitalist offensive against labor, which the FTAA is one aspect of, can be "fixed" through voting, lobbying and other "proper channels." The majority of protesters, even among the youthful militants, are still operating within the political framework of what is "realistic" under capitalism. Yet alongside the expressions of protectionism and economic nationalism, a more generalized, if inchoate, anti-capitalist sentiment is growing—a recognition that the fates of ordinary people throughout the hemisphere are linked, and an increasing hostility toward transnational corporations. The imposition of the FTAA will have negative consequences for *all* working people in the Americas (not only those in the neo-colonies) and as consciousness of this diffuses within the population in Canada and the U.S., the ruling elites may find it difficult to maintain political support for their project.

One notable feature of the demonstration was the solidarity between francophones and anglophones. Concordia, one



Protester returns tear gas canister

of Montreal's two English-language universities, sent 88 buses to the demonstration. The tens of thousands of youth and unionists who attended from all over Quebec were joined by thousands more from English Canada and the U.S.

The Left on the FTAA Demo

Some self-proclaimed Marxists, e.g., the International Socialists (IS), uncritically applaud the recent wave of heterogeneous mobilizations against the WTO, FTAA, etc. Abbie Bakkan, a senior IS leader, appeared on a panel at a 6 April meeting in Toronto where she stressed the importance of keeping this burgeoning "movement" together. She warned that nefarious corporate interests are trying to detach the thoroughly bourgeois Sierra Club from the anti-globalization camp.

Marxists welcome the prospect of political differentiation along class lines within the ranks of the protesters. The recognition that working people and their capitalist masters have counterposed interests has always distinguished revolutionaries from reformists. Marxists do not seek to provide formulas to paper over the class contradictions like the social democrats and union bureaucrats do. Rather, we point to the connection between particular ugly manifestations of capitalism—sweatshops, environmental degradation, etc.—and the historic necessity for socialist revolution. The task of revolutionaries is to help militants see through the nationalism and protectionism pushed by the reformists and understand that the problem goes deeper than bad trade deals and excessive corporate political influence.

Not every ostensibly socialist organization shares the IS's enthusiasm for the anti-FTAA protest. The Communist League (CL—affiliated with the American Socialist Workers Party headed by Jack Barnes) denounced Quebec, just as it denounced the 1999 Seattle protest. In an ad for a

CL meeting in Vancouver on 27 April to discuss the issue, the CL shrieked:

"The Canadian economic nationalism of the anti-free trade demonstrations in Quebec City is a reactionary trap for working people and youth."

The Trotskyist League (TL), Canadian affiliate of James Robertson's Spartacist League/U.S., boycotted the Seattle demonstrations, which they denounced as "dominated by national chauvinism, racist protectionism and counterrevolutionary attacks on the Chinese deformed workers state" (*Workers Vanguard*, 10 December 1999). While they did send a sales team to the recent anti-FTAA protest, the Robertsonites appear to be almost as disoriented as the Barnesites. An SL leaflet announcing a 28 April forum in New York that featured an "eyewitness report from Quebec" also pronounced: "From Seattle to Quebec: Anti-Globalization Protests Push Illusions in Rapacious U.S. Imperialism." If this brainless sectarianism were projected back to the 1960s, the SL could have come up with lots of reasons not to participate in either the civil-rights movement or the Vietnam anti-war movement, as both were led by people who regularly pushed illusions in imperialism.

The Robertsonians who sold papers at the Quebec demonstration seemed at a loss to explain how tens of thousands of Quebecois and anglophones were able to join together in common struggle against the cops and the corporations when, according to their theory:

"The recognition by the workers of each nation that their respective capitalist rulers—not each other—are the enemy can come only through an independent Quebec."

—*Spartacist Canada*, September/October 1995

For Revolutionary Leadership!

The growing wave of resistance to "globalization" indicates that the imperialist New World Order is not quite as stable as investors once presumed. While these protests are far from posing a serious challenge to capitalist rule, growing hostility to the agencies of international capital has compelled the master class to resort to rhetorical expressions of concern for democracy, the environment and the living standards of working people.

The demonstrators in Quebec still have plenty of illusions, but many of them have become deeply suspicious of their own rulers and are hardening in their determination to fight for a more just social order at home and abroad. One must be wilfully blind not to see that, in their aggregate, the youth who travelled to Quebec to confront the FTAA are in the process of losing their illusions in "democratic" imperialism. The job of revolutionaries is to accelerate this process by explaining why the imperialist predators must act as they do. Our comrades at the FTAA protest marched under the following slogans: "Down With the FTAA! Down With U.S./Canadian Imperialism!", "Neither Free Trade Nor Protectionism—For Socialist Globalization!" and "For Workers Revolution to Smash Global Capitalism!"

While the mood of a growing layer of young people in North America is moving to the left, only a tiny minority have yet arrived at the conclusion that the problem must be attacked at its root—that is, the international capitalist system—and fewer still have any idea about how to go about building a revolutionary party capable of providing the leadership necessary to replace it with an egalitarian socialist society. It is to this task that the International Bolshevik Tendency is dedicated—join us! ■

Letter: ISO's Campaign for Nader Recycled Browderism

5 May 2001

To the Editor:

In introducing James P. Cannon's remarks on Henry Wallace's 1948 Progressive Party presidential campaign (1917 No. 23), you quite accurately state: "Wallace's campaign posed many of the same political issues for leftists as Ralph Nader's recent presidential bid." The arguments used by the ISO [International Socialist Organization] and other supposedly Marxist groups to justify voting for an openly capitalist third-party candidate echo those used a half century earlier by the Stalinists. I know, because in 1948, as a member of the Communist Party in California, I spent about 18 hours a day campaigning for Wallace's slate in the run-up to the election.

The CP's support to Wallace represented an apparent "left" turn from the previous election [1944] when they simply voted for FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and the Democrats. In fact, it was a continuation of the policy of choosing among capitalist "lesser evils." The CP's overt support to the Democrats dated from the abandonment of the sectarian "Third Period" policy during FDR's first term. Leading party cadres from that period told me that during the 1930s, three members of the Communist Party were elected to the California state legislature as Democrats. It was not public knowledge, although widely suspected.

The Stalinists in those days were far more sophisticated than the "Trotskyists" who are tailing the Greens today. Even at the height of the popular front, the CP maintained a pretense of political class independence, and ran its own candidate, Earl Browder, for president. The ISO's attempt to act as the best builders of Nader and the Greens is only a cruder version of the same "tactic."

In his autobiography, Steve Nelson, the CP cadre who had been political commissar of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain, explained how nominal independence was combined with actual subordination to the Democrats:

"The fact that the Party [CP] continued to run its own candidates during the early New Deal may give the wrong impression of our attitude toward the Democratic Party. We supported pro-New Deal candidates and ran our own people largely for propaganda purposes...."

"Earl Browder's campaign that same year [1936] demonstrates how we ran our own candidates but still supported the New Deal. His motto and the whole tone of his campaign was 'Defeat Landon [the Republican] at All Costs.' In this way he sought to give critical support to FDR. We wanted to work with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and to achieve a certain amount of legitimacy as a party of the Left. We held a rally for Browder in the Wilkes-Barre [Pennsylvania] armory, which held over three thousand people, and the place was jammed. Many in the audience were rank and file Democrats. We didn't get their votes on election day, but that's not what counted to us. They were coming to recognize us as friends.

"For years there had been essentially no difference be-



WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

tween Democrats and Republicans: both had represented the interests of the coal companies. Now there was a feeling that Roosevelt was doing something to relieve the problem of unemployment, and that signified a real change. People identified with the government as basically pro-labor. We had no illusions. The Democrats were still a capitalist party, but they were an alternative to the Republicans and were delivering the Wagner Act, Social Security, unemployment insurance, public works, and other badly needed reforms."

—Steve Nelson: *American Radical*

I bought this line fifty-odd years ago. But James P. Cannon and the Trotskyists knew better. Probably the greatest crime of American Stalinism was undermining what had previously been a bedrock principle of the radical workers' movement that, in the words of the 1905 preamble to the constitution of the Wobblies [Industrial Workers of the World]: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." The ISO and all the others who claim to stand in the Trotskyist tradition, while advocating votes to capitalist candidates at election time, are, in reality, standing in the class-collaborationist tradition of Browder's Communist Party.

Comradely,
Howard Keylor

FTAA Demonstration in Quebec: For Socialist Globalization!



The following is a May 2001 IBT leaflet issued after the 20-21 April demonstration in Quebec City against the FTAA.

For all the pious talk of development, democracy and raising living standards, the "Free Trade Area of the Americas" (FTAA—an extension of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]) is essentially a mechanism for Canadian and American capitalists to gain effective control over public policy in their neo-colonial hinterland.

Princeton economist Paul Krugman ridicules FTAA protesters as spoiled brats who are indifferent to the fact that millions of desperately poor people in Latin America and the Caribbean eagerly welcome any chance to work in a sweatshop for a few dollars a day. But increasing numbers of youth are drawing an entirely different conclusion. If low pay, hellish working conditions and destitution are all that global capitalism can offer to billions of human beings, then it is obviously necessary to look for a radically new way of organizing the global economy.

The ongoing bourgeois offensive within the imperialist countries is leading to an increased awareness among millions of working people that the "efficient" accumulation of capital by the private sector translates into lower living standards, shrinking public services and a degraded and increasingly toxic environment. This recognition is an essential pre-condition for future revolutionary explosions. Of course, growing popular unease with the plans of the

ruling class can also find reactionary, xenophobic expressions. But so far the recent wave of "anti-globalization" protests has had a generally leftist character.

In Quebec City the government created a four-kilometre long, three-metre high, chain-link fence, guarded by some 8,000 cops and other security personnel, within which the leaders of the 34 countries of the Americas (with the exception of Fidel Castro) assembled for photos, handshakes and speeches. Outside the wall, thousands of trade unionists and young militants gathered to express their opposition to the plans of the imperialists.

'Fortress Quebec Breached'

Despite all the elaborate security preparations and a concerted campaign of harassment of known activists by Canada's political police, protesters managed to delay the summit's official opening on Friday 20 April when they ripped down a big section of the fence. The *Globe and Mail* headline the next day said it all: "Fortress Quebec Breached." Unlike in Seattle, where the demonstrators had the element of surprise, the tactical victory in Quebec was achieved despite massive preparations by the police.

The mood at the big trade-union demonstration the next day was festive. Friday's symbolic victory emboldened the leadership of the Canadian Union of Public Employees

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