

Workers ACTION

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NATO out of Balkans! Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians!

'Ethnic cleansing' – mass racist murder

National questions in the Balkans

Political repression under Tito

Welsh Assembly election

London bombings

GM foods

The London Socialist Alliance debacle

Productive forces and 'stagnation'

Workers **ACTION**

No.7 - June / July 1999

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NATO's dirty war

NATO has won its war against Yugoslavia, and it has won it using air power only. It wasn't even necessary for its pilots to put themselves at serious risk from ground fire. This was a high-altitude, push-button war in which the only NATO casualties occurred during training flights. On the evening of June 9, the Serbian delegation to the peace talks on the Kosova-Macedonia border finally signed the agreement, setting in motion the much argued-over sequence of events to wind down the war – the start of the withdrawal of all Serbian forces from Kosova, the verification of this by NATO, a halt in the bombing, the resolution of the UN security council, and the occupation of Kosova by an 'international security force with NATO at its core'.

We welcome the ending of the bombing. Every day for 11 weeks since March 24, the people of Serbia, Kosova and Montenegro were subjected to a murderous assault from the air by the armed forces of the most powerful nations on earth. The oft-repeated claim of the Western coalition that it was only aiming at 'military targets' was a lie. The purpose of the bombing was two-fold – to demoralise the Yugoslav army by inflicting heavy casualties on it, and to terrorise the civilian population into bringing pressure to bear on Milosevic to end the war. If anything, there was a greater emphasis on the second objective, with the systematic destruction of Serbia's infrastructure, industry and public utilities intended to make life as difficult as possible for the general popu-

lation. Civilian casualties, while officially regretted, were useful to NATO in that they increased the level of tension by dispelling the illusion that this was a war of 'surgical strikes' in which only the military and its equipment would be at risk.

In fact, the war was dirty and dishonest from beginning to end. It was a war with little or no risk to the NATO participants, a war that masqueraded as a humanitarian intervention to save the Kosovars from persecution but whose real aim was to curb Serbian expansionism, crush the Kosovar rebellion, and extend NATO's control over the Balkans. Indeed, the end of the bombing was the only good thing about the agreement. With a NATO-led army occupying Kosova for the foreseeable future, the 'reconstruction' of the region will begin in earnest, with the West in a powerful position to insist on neo-liberal political and economic reforms. For example, Tony Blair has made it clear that Serbia will not be in line for economic aid unless Milosevic is removed from power.

There are now UN/NATO troops stationed in Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia and Kosova – in effect, the West has come round to the view that the only way to cure what it regards as the endemic instability of the central Balkans is to set up a permanent police force in the region.

Two major concessions have been made to Milosevic in order to end the war. The Rambouillet proposals, the rejection of which by the Serbs led to the start of the bombing, included a provision for NATO troops to enter Serbia,

Elsewhere in this issue of Workers Action, there are articles that examine the situation in the Balkans in more detail and explain why we not only opposed NATO's war against Serbia, but also supported the Kosova Albanians' right to fight for their independence. There is also an informative article about the history of the Balkans by Al Richardson, in which he argues against self-determination, maintaining that the distribution of peoples in the region means that the only solution is a Balkan Socialist Federation. While we agree strategically with this latter demand, we also think that socialists have to take sides with the oppressed – in this case the Kosovar Albanians. Support for the self-determination of oppressed nationalities is not dependent on the viability of such a scheme but is an elementary act of solidarity and a necessity if socialists are to win the ear of the masses. **WA**

as well as what appeared to be a timetable for achieving the independence of Kosova. After remaining for three years as a nominal part of the Yugoslav Federation, the status of Kosova would have been decided at an international conference, with the possibility of a referendum on independence. The joint European Union/Russian peace plan dropped both of these points, indicating that Kosova would remain in Yugoslavia but remaining silent on its future. This has allowed Milosevic to portray the settlement as a victory for Serbia, which will help him fend off any challenge to his leadership.

In practice, the likelihood is that Kosova will become some form of United Nations protectorate for years to come. Formally, it may be part of Yu-

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NATO out of the Balkans!

Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians!

Open the borders to Kosova refugees!

Editorial: NATO's dirty war*From previous page*

Yugoslavia, but NATO's rule will run. However, the willingness of the West to negotiate away the right of the Kosovar people to a referendum on independence reinforces the view that the primary purpose of the military intervention was to stabilise a strategic region on the borders of the European Union, not provide humanitarian assistance. At some point in the future, if Serbia puts on a suitably contrite face, or demonstrates a commitment to 'democracy' and the EU, or just proves itself a useful ally of the West, it will be in the gift of NATO to hand Kosova back.

From the start, the West's major concern has been that the more the Serb attacks on the Kosova Albanians intensified, the more likely it was to fan the flames of Albanian nationalism. Anything that might have provoked a struggle for a Greater Albania had to be stamped out, since this would risk bringing Albania, Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria into the conflict. This also explains why the Western powers are so anxious to disarm and demobilise the KLA – the last thing they want in the area is a Kosova Albanian standing army, especially one that has rapidly grown in strength and that now has considerable battle experience.

As for the refugees, the end of the war offers them the chance to return to Kosova. But it is a Kosova littered with minefields and unexploded bombs, its towns and villages destroyed by the combined efforts of NATO and the Serbian army and paramilitary groups. It is likely that Kosova will now become an Albanian enclave, that NATO forces will assist in expelling the Serbian population and that the UN will give legitimacy to this 'reverse ethnic cleansing', as it has done in Bosnia. Any political administration will be set up under the eye of the UN, which will favour pro-Western moderates and veto any attempt by the Kosovars to chart an independent course.

The air war may be over, but socialists and trade unionists, in or out of the Labour Party, must continue their opposition to Western intervention in the Balkans, particularly since Tony Blair emerged as the leading 'hawk' in the NATO alliance. **WA**

As the bombing comes to an end**NATO moves in to prevent an independent Kosova****by Nick Davies**

The relentless 11-week blitzkrieg on Yugoslavia had absolutely nothing to do with the welfare of the Kosova Albanians and everything to do with NATO imposing its dominance in the Balkans. This is the same 'humanitarian' NATO that counts Turkey among its number, and whose member countries (especially Britain) sell arms to Indonesia. Where are the 'humanitarian' wars against Turkey on behalf of the Kurds or against Indonesia for the people of East Timor? Air strikes in Kosova and Serbia have not saved the life or the home of a single Kosova Albanian. Nor did they stop, or even slow down, the murderous ethnic cleansing of Kosova by the Serbian army, police, and paramilitary goonsquads. In some villages all the men were marched off to certain execution. Hundreds of thousands eke out a miserable existence in squalid refugee camps in Albania or Macedonia, where they are harassed by the local police.

As the war progressed, NATO's growing list of 'military' targets – Albanian refugees, Yugoslavian hospitals and TV stations, the Chinese Embassy, the homes of the Swiss and Swedish Ambassadors, and even Bulgaria – made it difficult to tell where its cynicism ended and its incompetence began. The spillages caused by the bombing of chemical works, the miles-long oil slicks on the Danube and the use by NATO of depleted uranium on its missile tips spell ecological disaster for years to come. And the very first effect of the bombing was to marginalise completely the small Serbian peace movement as many of Milosevic's former critics stood by him in the face of the NATO attack.

NATO's war aims

We can tell how much the West really cares about Kosova. Milosevic was told that in return for his co-operation at the Dayton Agreement of 1995 (which partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina and thus gave the seal of approval to the previous round of ethnic cleansing) Kosova was his to keep. 'No more than terrorists' was how Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, described the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) at that time. In contrast, the Milosevic regime has been pampered and indulged by Western, and particularly British, politicians and bankers throughout the decade. The Western powers do not want an independent Kosova. Further adjustment of international frontiers in the southern Balkans would be an unwelcome precedent, would be bad for the stability which is the prerequisite for the reconstruction of a fully-fledged market economy, and would threaten NATO's southern flank. The trouble was, the stripping by Serbian authorities of all the rights previously enjoyed by the Kosova Albanians provoked opposition and unrest, to which the Serbs responded by imposing what was effectively martial law. This in turn provoked the insurrection that erupted last year.

So the Western governments had a dilemma. They had allowed Serbia to retain virtually all the territory it had seized in the Bosnian war in the hope that this would satisfy its ambitions, and that stability would now return to the region. Unfortunately, this strategy had blown up in their faces, and it was now going to be necessary for them to intervene again to calm the situation down before the conflict engulfed Macedonia, Alba-

nia proper, and even Greece.

The Rambouillet proposals, the solution sought by the Western powers at the talks in Paris in February/March, sought only to give Kosova autonomy within Serbia, not full independence, and specified that the KLA should be disbanded within 120 days. Nevertheless, Milosevic refused the deal and the latest evidence suggests that his refusal was provoked by a provision allowing NATO troops access to the whole of Yugoslavia. So Milosevic became the latest in a long line of former Western favourites to be transformed into the 'new Hitler'. He must be wondering where he went wrong – if he'd joined NATO, the West would be selling him the weapons to wipe out the Albanians, not bombing Belgrade!

Rifts in the NATO camp

New Labour's nauseating attempt to equate its bombing of Serbian civilians with, for example, the struggle against fascism in Spain, insults even the meanest intelligence. This has been an old-fashioned imperialist police operation, pure and simple. However, with every evasion from NATO spokesman Jamie Shea, and with every week that passed without a Serbian surrender, Blair and Clinton found it harder and harder to keep NATO together. Some governments – Italy, Greece, Germany and Hungary for example – publicly more or less ruled out in advance their support for a ground invasion. The pressure grew for acceptance of a revised plan agreed by the G8 countries in early May, which gave greater emphasis to the presence of a non-NATO element in a NATO-dominated Kosova occupation force. It was a version of this plan which Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari and Russian envoy to the Balkans Viktor Chernomyrdin carried to Belgrade on June 2.

Our opposition to NATO bombs does not mean that we support Serbia or the murderous Milosevic regime. On the contrary, we support the military struggle of the KLA to defeat the Serbian armed forces and drive them out of Kosova. We reject with contempt Belgrade's 'explanation' that the Kosova Albanians left their homes and their country of their

own accord.

Milosevic has been using the air strikes to pose as the defender of Serbia, but he has brought Serbian workers nothing but war, repression and economic collapse, and they should kick him out. The spate of anti-war demonstrations in Serbian towns, and the reports of desertions and draft-dodging, suggest that Milosevic's disguise is rapidly wearing thin, and will undoubtedly have been a factor in persuading him to approve the joint European Union-Russian peace plan.

However, we must be wary of some of the born-again oppositionists. Both the Serbian Renewal Party of the recently-sacked deputy prime minister Vuk Draskovic and the Democratic Party were happy to be in the government while the ethnic cleansing was in full swing. These opportunists clearly believed that the war would be lost, and they wanted to be able to emerge from the wreckage and do business with NATO.

It was not enough just to oppose

the war. It was necessary to combine opposition to the war with support for the principal victims of the Kosova conflict, the Kosova Albanians. Some anti-war activists did not do this, either because they were Serb nationalists themselves, or because they mistakenly believed that it would have detracted from their opposition to the war. Despite the spontaneous support of many of its members for the Kosovars, the Socialist Workers Party has been noticeably reluctant to support them in its public statements, quibbling over definitions of genocide, denying the KLA the right to arm itself, and refusing to defend Kosova's right to independence. In an article entitled 'Thinking it through' (no irony intended, presumably) in *Socialist Review* (May 1999), Chris Harman equates the defensive violence of the KLA with the violence of the Serbian oppressors and decries the KLA's nationalism, while conceding that a final, peaceful outcome for the region must involve self-determination for Kosova. It is difficult to disentangle this ball of wool and thistles

Serbian national myths

Kosova occupies a central place in Serbian national mythology because of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, when the Serb army was defeated by the army of the Ottomans. Having lost the battle, the Serb king, according to legend, chose death rather than political compromise. The site of the battlefield outside Pristina is a place of pilgrimage for modern Serbs, and it was the place chosen by Slobodan Milosevic, on the 600th anniversary of the battle on June 28, 1989, to threaten the Kosova Albanians with violence if they continued to protest against Serbian rule. 'We are again engaged in battles and quarrels, he said to over a million Serbs that had been mobilised from all over Yugoslavia. 'They are not armed battles yet, but this cannot be excluded.' John Reed, the American socialist, author of *Ten Days that shook the World*, wrote the following about Serb nationalism, having witnessed it at first hand while reporting from the region.

'The secret dream of every Serb is the uniting of all Serbian people in one great empire: Hungarian Croatia, identical in race and spoken language – Dalmatia, home of Serbian literature – Bosnia, fountain-head of Serbian poetry and song – Montenegro, Herzegovina, and Slovenia. An empire fifteen millions strong, reaching from Bulgaria to the Adriatic, and from Trieste, east and north, far into the plains of Hungary, which will liberate the energies of the fighting, administrative people of the kingdom of Serbia, penned in their narrow mountain valleys, to the exploitation of the rich plains country, and the powerful life of ships at sea.

'Every peasant soldier knows what he is fighting for. When he was a baby, his mother greeted him, "Hail, little avenger of Kossovo!" (At the battle of Kossovo, in the fourteenth century, Serbia fell under the Turks.) When he had done something wrong, his mother reproved him thus: "Not that way will you deliver Macedonia!"' John Reed, *The War in Eastern Europe* (1916)

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which passes for an argument, except to say that it can be boiled down to this: when everything has been sorted out the SWP will allow the Kosovars their self-determination, but now, when they are fighting for their lives, it won't.

It appears that the SWP does not believe that its members and the working class have the intellectual capability to defend Serbia against NATO while simultaneously supporting Kosovan self-determination. This is an extremely worrying view from an organisation dedicated to establishing working class control of society since a socialist revolution will throw up far more complex issues than this. Fortunately, workers have more intelligence than the SWP gives them credit for. The SWP leaders should to follow their own advice and 'think it through'; if NATO's claim that this has been a 'humanitarian' war to protect the Kosovars is indeed hypocritical eyewash, then there is no difficulty in combining both positions.

Should Kosova secede?

Support for the right of a people to self-determination must include support for the right of that people to secede from a nation-state that they regard as a prison, if that is what they wish. We support the right to secession without necessarily advocating it. In Tito's Yugoslavia, Kosovan self-determination was expressed in the demand for republic status within Yugoslavia, not just autonomy within Serbia. The past ten years' repression may have finished off that demand for a generation; the overwhelming demand being raised by the Kosovars now is for independence. For those of us who see the break-up of Yugoslavia as a disaster for the working class of the region, and who advocate a socialist federation in the Balkans, this is undoubtedly a huge set-back. But in order for there to be an eventual, voluntary federation, it may be necessary for certain peoples to win the right to separate first. In the case of Montenegro, under the pro-Western government of Djukanovic and desperate to stay out of the war, we would not necessarily advocate separation from the Yugoslav Federation. But at the moment, being part of Yugoslavia must feel less like being part of a voluntary federation

and more like being chained to a lunatic.

We would distinguish the demand for self-determination in Kosova from that in Bosnia. In Bosnia, 'self-determination' for the Bosnian Serbs or Croats could not have been achieved without ethnic cleansing and murder. Events all too horrifying proved this to be true. In Kosova, the population is 90 per cent Albanian, and, unlike in Bosnia, they inhabit a compact, definable area.

Of course, in raising the demand for self-determination, we have to recognise two problems. The first is that 'independence' is a utopia. The reality will be an impoverished bantustan under the baleful influence of Western military occupation. However, our vision of a voluntary socialist federation will only find favour with the Kosovars if they have our unstinting solidarity. The second problem is that most Kosovars have not only supported the NATO attacks but have been cheering them on. This is not surprising. Their backs are to the wall and NATO seems to be fighting on their side. At Rambouillet, their representatives were caught in a pincer movement between the Serbs and the USA, with the latter putting pressure on them to sign an agreement that would disarm them and put their defence in the hands of the Western powers. Tragically, from the point of view of someone living in Pristina or Drenica the notion of a third force, the international working class, must have seemed a fantasy. While maintaining support for Kosovar self-determination, socialists must point out that NATO is using the Kosovars, and will betray them, and that therefore the KLA must retain its political and military independence from NATO. We should point out how much Western 'protection' was worth to the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica, where the UN force stood aside as the Serbs captured 8,000 of them, none of whom have been seen again. We also need to point out that NATO may partition Kosova, as it did Bosnia.

In fact, the Rambouillet deal caused a bitter dispute within the KLA. Adem Demaci refused to go to Rambouillet, and denounced the KLA's acceptance of the plan. He was sacked as the KLA's political representative and

replaced by Hashim Thaci, who led the delegation at Rambouillet. Demaci's ally as KLA chief-of-staff, Suleiman Selimi, has also been sacked and replaced with Croatian army veteran Agim Ceku. Whether or not to collaborate with NATO is still not a settled question within the KLA. If the working class of Europe turns its back on the KLA, this will only reinforce its illusions that NATO is its only friend.

Defending Kosovar refugees

Isn't it strange that Milosevic is enough of a tyrant for Blair and Clinton to drop bombs on, but when those escaping from his terror turn up in Britain they are portrayed as 'bogus asylum-seekers', to be kept in camps? The same newspapers that today shed crocodile tears at the plight of Kosova refugees in Macedonia and Albania will tomorrow smear them as benefit fraudsters and shoplifters if they set foot in Britain. The government's new asylum bill, under which refugees will be detained, dispersed, and forced to live on a pittance while the authorities decide whether or not to deport them, could have been dreamed up by Norman Tebbit.

New Labour was shamed into increasing its commitment to take in Kosovan refugees, although the total admitted to date still falls far short of that of other Western countries. Jack Straw claimed that taking in refugees was 'what Milosevic wanted' because it would have assisted him in permanently removing the Albanian population from Kosova. This is repulsive hypocrisy! The fact that New Labour's crusade in the Balkans doesn't include the offer of resettling refugees proves that the real purpose of the war is not humanitarian at all, but an attempt to stabilise the region by brute force and prevent the spread of unrest – and displaced populations – to other parts of Fortress Europe.

Even if the peace process goes ahead, the damage to homes by the Serbs, and to the infrastructure by NATO, means that thousands of refugees will be unable to return to Kosova for months. We say: Open all borders – for the right of asylum for all those who ask for it! Down with the Labour government's new asylum laws!

What is 'ethnic cleansing'?

When the Serbs originated the term 'ethnic cleansing' to rationalise their land-grab tactics, originally against the Bosnians and Croatians, it was repeated with an element of irony in the world's press. **Charli Langford** examines a politically loaded phrase

As time and the Balkan wars have moved on, the words 'ethnic cleansing' have remained while the ironic loading has diminished. The phrase has been applied to conflicts in the Six Counties of British-occupied Ireland and between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, among others. This is not surprising – it is a convenient shorthand for a complex phenomenon.

Stalinists described the trial and the execution of most of the central leadership of the 1917 Russian revolution as 'the cleansing of the party' and 'cleansing' was also the word used by the Nazis to describe the deportation and systematic killing of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, Blacks and others they considered to be of 'inferior race'. The metaphor employed is not accidental and has a long pedigree in the history of national and racial oppression. First, the unwanted people are defined as 'dirt', 'filth', 'vermin', etc; then, of course, it becomes necessary to 'clean them out'. Using a positive term such as 'cleanse' makes murder, rape, torture and forcible relocation sound like progressive acts.

The use of the word 'cleanse' rather than 'clean' is also significant. In modern English, you 'clean' a house, but you 'cleanse' a body of evil. The word 'cleanse' comes from religious thought and implies some mystical, higher purpose – in this case, the 'spiritual quest' for racial purity.

'Ethnic' means basically the same as 'race', though it is seen as a less offensive term (and sometimes as a term that discriminates more finely than 'race' does).

So when Milosevic and his generals talk about 'ethnic cleansing', what they really mean is mass racist murder. But they don't call it that because they need to sanitise it, make it less offensive, make it seem like a good thing to do.

In the Balkan context there is also a second level of duplicity in the term, because with the exception of the Albanians (who claim descent from the Illyrians and are therefore probably indigenous), all the various present-day nations of the southern Balkans arrived at about the same time having migrated from present-day Iran. They encompass less ethnic difference between themselves than exists between, for example, Celtic Scots, Welsh or Irish and the Norman / Anglo-Saxon English. To find an ethnic difference you have to go as far north as Bulgaria, which was peopled at a later date by immigrants from modern-day Turkey. Language differences support this analysis – the Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian languages are effectively dialects of a common tongue while Albanian is different. The differences of religion that have developed have done so largely as a result of external influences – of Rome in the west, of Islam in the south, and of Russia in the north. Language and religion do not determine ethnicity; they are only secondary indicators because a group of people who have migrated from the same place are likely to have the same language and religion. If ethnicity were determined by language or religion, then a religious conversion or an extensive language course would change a person's race.

Therefore, in much of the 'ethnic cleansing', the 'cleansers' have been of the same ethnicity as the 'cleansed'. It is only now with Serb attacks on Kosova that this is changing. The Serb leadership has been trying to create a false perception that racial differences do exist in the southern Balkans, purely to drum up Serb racial hatred of the other nationalities as a means of prosecuting their war with less internal opposition.

What has been developing within the Balkans, primarily due to Serb oppression, is an accelerating tendency for culturally (and ethnically, in the case of the Kosovars) distinct groups of people to define themselves as nationalities. The break-up of the Yugoslav state and the dominant and oppressive stance taken by Serbia has massively increased the desire for self-determination, independence and secession. Serbia's war has been one of national expansion at the expense of the other republics, and the particular circumstances of Balkan history have ensured that there have been pockets of people identifying as Serbs rather than as part of the oppressed nationality scattered throughout the region. Serbia has used these pockets as justification for land-grabs on the republics of former Yugoslavia.

'Ethnic cleansing' is a racist concept because it implies that it is legitimate to kill members of supposedly inferior races. This is one reason why it should not be used uncritically in describing the policies of the Serbian leadership. However, its use also promotes an incorrect analysis of what is taking place in the Balkans – it suggests that racism is the prime cause of the wars, when the driving force is actually Serbian expansionism. With the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation, the restorationist leadership in Belgrade embarked on a series of wars with the aim of grabbing the largest possible territory on which to construct the new Serbian capitalist state. The seizure of Kosova and the killing or expulsion of the Kosova Albanians is the continuation of that campaign.

Unfortunately, the term 'ethnic cleansing' is now part of the language. We cannot uninvent it, but we should only use it in a context that explains what it really entails.

Nation and class in the Balkans

Revolutionary History editor **Al Richardson** argues that the history of the Balkans contains lessons for socialists today

I fear that no "Integral Nationalist" of any Eastern European country would concede me the merit of "objectivity", for to such men "objectivity" means the total acceptance of their opinions.¹

Although the last thing we need amid the clash of territorial claims and counter-claims in the Balkans is a history lesson, a certain amount of background information is necessary to understand why the superficially attractive slogan of 'national self-determination' is actually inapplicable there. For not only do we have to identify and account for so many areas of mixed nationality, we also have to understand how religion, class, legend and past politics intermesh to produce such different concepts of national identity.

As far back as historical investigation allows, the geography of the Balkan peninsula has always encouraged a mixture of peoples, but the broad lines of the pattern today were basically set during the folk movements at the time of the decline of the Byzantine empire. The Albanians alone may be an exception, if they are really the descendants of the ancient Illyrians of classical times, though there is evidence of a considerable population spread over a wider area in the Middle Ages, even as far south as the Peloponnese. The secondary expansion of Albanians into what had once been Serbian land in Kosovo is much more recent, and is probably due to Turkish encouragement following the acceptance of Islam by one of the Albanian tribes. We shall return to this phenomenon of the spread of peoples in particular areas of the Balkans for strategic or political motives, since it is one of many reasons for the linguistic and cultural mix. Why and how the Romanians (Vlachs) boast a Romance language is still little understood, though it is unlikely that it is because they are the descendants of Trajan's legions, as their national myth has it.

Apart from these two, the arrival of all the other Balkan peoples can be fairly accurately pinned down in historical time. The southern Slavic peoples appeared during the sixth century and the Bulgars a hundred years later. When the Khazar empire of the steppes collapsed one of its sub-tribes moved west at the end of the ninth century and raided extensively over the whole of Europe. After its defeat at the Battle of the Lech in 955 it settled down on the Hungarian plain to form the Magyar nation. Hungary gave its allegiance to the Pope in Rome, and because it managed to subject Croatia, to this day the Latin script and the Roman Catholic Church remain determining characteristics of the Croatian nation, as well as of the Slovenes. The other Slavic peoples and the Bulgars received their Christianity from Byzantium, and mainly use a variant of the script originally devised for

the Moravians by Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius. So the Greek Orthodox religion and a script derived from late Greek uncials became distinguishing marks of the Serbs, as opposed to their Croatian neighbours. The official religion of Bosnia may have been the mitigated Christian dualism of the Bogomils, though some dispute this. Needless to relate, a state structure could not be erected anywhere during the Dark Ages without a literate caste, which in the case of southern Europe meant the acceptance of one or other variety of Christianity. The only fresh religious element to enter this melting pot was Sunni Islam, brought in by the Turks at the end of the Middle Ages, which spread rapidly among the Albanians, deeply penetrated Bulgaria and came to dominate the religious life of Bosnia. Bosnians can henceforth be identified as those Serb speakers who accepted Islam, as opposed to those others who profess Orthodox Christianity.² The further complication whereby the Magyar gentry, particularly in Transylvania, embraced Calvinism during the Reformation is out-



The Balkans. Serbia claims that Kosova and Vojvodina are parts of Serbia. Modern day Yugoslavia comprises these three areas with Montenegro. Pre-1989 Yugoslavia also included Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

side our area and need not concern us, except to point out that this, too, was the result of a great power political decision.

It should be stressed, however, as against the national claims of all these peoples today, that none of the states erected during the Middle Ages in the Balkans in any way resembled a bourgeois nation state. Imitating Byzantium, and aspiring to supplant it, the first Serbian and Bulgarian states aimed at becoming empires, whilst those with Hungary as a neighbour or overlord aped the feudal institutions of western Europe. But all were multi-national confederations, and linguistic identity barely functioned as a factor, either then or for centuries afterwards. In Bulgaria the ruling tribal groups largely assimilated Slavic language and culture, but as an aristocratic warrior class kept themselves separate from the original Slavic peasantry. In Hungary and Transylvania this same difference expressed itself in the Magyar language of the aristocratic and gentry classes as against the Slovak or Vlach speech of the peasantry. Reading national myths backwards produces laughable results. Most of Skanderbeg's army were probably Serbs, and his family was of Serbian descent. John Hunyadi regarded himself as a Magyar, but it is likely that he was born a Vlach. The landowners in Romania were mainly Phanariot Greeks, and most of the towns in Bulgaria were Greek, whereas those in Croatian Dalmatia were Italian. So little was speech a determining factor of nation that Magyar only replaced Latin as the official language in Hungary itself in 1844, and Ljubljana still had a German majority as late as 1848. And whereas everybody knows that the founder of Czech nationalism, Masaryk, had to learn his national language from his stable boy, few are equally aware that the Hungarian national poet Petöfi had a Serb father and a Slovak mother, that Gaj, who fixed the classical form of the Croat language, had a German mother, or that Strossmayer, the founder of Yugoslav nationalism, was a descendant of German colonists.

In the course of the fourteenth and following centuries Turkish power came to dominate the entire area once ruled by Byzantium. The Serbs were defeated at Kosovo Polje in 1389, Bulgaria followed

four years later, Constantinople itself fell in 1453, Albania was overrun by 1468, Moldavia and Wallachia (Romania) by the beginning of the next century, and most of Hungary after the battle of Mohacs in 1526. But after the Habsburg power had surmounted its crisis during the Thirty Years' War it began to dispute the control of the northern part of the area with the Turks. Enormous population displacements took place in the course of this confrontation, which went on for the best part of three hundred years. For example, the central Hungarian plain appears to have been greatly depopulated under Turkish rule, whilst some of the subject peasant peoples seem to have spread over wider areas than they had previously inhabited. Russian pressure towards the end of the period produced a similar displacement in the north east, if on a smaller scale.

Other complications were introduced into this mixture by the logic of economic or political developments. Saxons were planted in Transylvania by the king of Hungary to exploit its mineral wealth, and Swabians as a garrison in the Voivodina by the Habsburgs when they conquered it from the Turks in the eighteenth century. Similar national groups established to defend frontier zones are those Serbs settled in the Banat in 1690, the Krajina Serbs, and the mixed population introduced by the Turks into Dobruja as a barrier against the further expansion of Russia. A similar situation developed in Bessarabia.³ When the frontiers fell back these areas of mixed speech were left like sandcastles half demolished by a receding tide. The phenomenon of the people class analysed by Abram Leon also helps us to identify social reasons behind the extraordinary linguistic diversity.⁴ In the countryside some peoples lost whatever élites they may once have had and survived Turkish and Habsburg rule almost entirely as peasants – the Slovenes, Slovaks and Vlachs, for example. Others were a gentry caste (the Magyars), whilst the language of bourgeois, proletarians and artisans in the cities could be Italian, German, Greek, or even Yiddish, depending on where they were in the zone. This is the origin of the much misunderstood phenomenon of the 'historic' and 'non-historic' peoples, basically defined by whether enough of an élite class remained

to maintain the memory of an independent state in former times. The Habsburgs in particular became quite adroit at playing on this distinction by inciting the peasant peoples against the national aspirations of the gentry or the aristocracy, such as in their use of the Ruthenes against the Polish uprising or of Jelacic's 'Croats'⁵ and Iancu's Vlachs against the Magyars.

Independent states began to arise again with the decay of Turkish power in the nineteenth century. This came too late to liberate either the Croats or the Slovenes, for until then the Habsburgs had been the main beneficiary of it, but when both Austria and Turkey began to be checked by the growing power of Russia, the Balkan peoples gained space and opportunity to recreate state systems. It was a slow process, for national feeling was very uneven across the area, and only came to penetrate some of the language groups at the very end of the century. First the Karageorgevic revolt produced an autonomous Serbia (1821), and then Russia acted as midwife to Romania (1856) and Bulgaria (1885), as did Italy for Albania. But it all happened too late to produce coherent nation states, for in the absence of a bourgeois class national feeling took a long time to develop, and each of these countries contained massive areas of mixed population or minorities that by then could no longer be assimilated. Outside the core areas of the major language groups remained extensive areas in which the nationalities were mixed, and there was the further complication that all too often religion served as a defining feature of nationality. This situation, basically a result of uneven and combined development, afforded an ideal situation for internecine conflict in the atmosphere of the mushroom growth of European nationalism in the lead-up to the First World War.

More importantly, it also provided an ideal arena for outside powers to pursue their interests, export their surplus weapons, and generally manipulate latent conflicts for global aims, giving rise to the unpleasant phenomenon known as 'Balkanisation'. Until Gladstone decided to use it for a general election Britain tried to bolster up Turkey against the spread of Russian influence. Romania on the whole responded to Russian prompting. Bulgaria wavered between Russia and

Germany, as did Serbia between Russia and Austria-Hungary, generally depending on which of the two royal families, the Karageorgevics or the Obrenovics, happened to be uppermost. Hardly had the Bulgarian state been founded than conflict arose with Serbia, behind which stood Austria, Bulgaria herself was backed by Russia. Aehrenthal's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 sharpened the antagonism between Austria and Russia in the Balkans, leading to a rising tide of violence, which Russian Pan-Slavism was ideally placed to exploit. The two Balkan Wars (1912-3) were messy squabbles involving Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, Turkey and Romania in a heavy loss of life, bewildering changes of sides, and an irrational apportioning of territory. The bloody climax to all this came on St Vitus' day in 1914, when Apis (Dragutin Dimitriyevich), the head of Serbian military intelligence, who was in the pay of the Russians, trained and sent Gavrilo Princip to assassinate the

Archduke Francis Ferdinand, so triggering off the First World War. A peninsula once described by Bismarck as not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier now provided Europe with a great heap of them.

The great powers continued with the same game during the inter-war years. When the Stavisky scandal hit France it transpired that the currencies of entire Balkan countries had been bought and sold from a pawnshop in Bayonne. Italian manipulation of Austria and the arming and financing of revisionist Hungary, the Croatian Ustasha and the Macedonian IMRO prevented the states system established by the treaties at the end of the First World War in the Balkans from settling down. But although the policy produced some spectacular results, such as the assassination of the Yugoslav king Alexander and the French foreign minister Barthou in Marseilles in 1934, Italy simply did not have the weight to exploit the trouble it caused. All it

achieved in the end was to keep the pot boiling for Hitler's Germany.

In the meantime the mistaken attempts to create homogenous nation states were leading to ever more drastic ways of dealing with the problem of unassimilated minorities. The first steps were taken by the Magyars to the north during the nineteenth century. For many years the nation had existed as a gentry class, with its peasantry uniformly speaking a different language. To prevent complete Habsburg domination via the dual system they literally recreated their nation from the top down by a vigorous policy of Magyarisation, using the compulsory teaching of the language through the school system. But this was not a viable option for the new Balkan nations, which had lost their élites centuries before, so the pattern here tended to be population displacement. The brutalities during the Balkan wars had at least the justification that they were taking place while the fighting was still going on.⁶ But the same could hardly be said of the way the inter-war Yugoslav state coolly replaced the Voivvodina Magyars with Serbs under the thin disguise of a land reform, or drove out thousands of Albanians from Kosovo between 1918 and 1925.⁷ Still less was it true of the racial and religious massacres of the Ustasha during the Second World War, when the sinister policy of 'ethnic cleansing' first came to be practised.

In this context the multi-ethnic partisan struggle led by Tito, himself the son of a Croat and a Slovene, was a bright demonstration of the way out for the Balkan peoples. It is true that as a Balkan federal republic post-war Yugoslavia left much to be desired, though we should never forget that it was the opposition of Stalin that prevented it from assuming a more universal character.⁸ But it did put a brake on national conflicts for a while, and it did enable the southern Slavs to avoid being the victims of the intrigues of outsiders and become a factor of importance in the wider affairs of Europe for the first time in centuries. Its collapse has set back the southern European peoples immeasurably, and those left groups who celebrated it bear a heavy responsibility before history. For since both were multi-national confederations, the counter-revolution in Yugoslavia was a similar

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process to that in the Soviet Union, the secession of bourgeois nation states initiating a decade of bloody conflict.

A full discussion of the development of the Marxist understanding of the Balkan problem would take a whole book, and cannot be attempted here. Suffice it to say that the simplistic repetition of the slogan of national self-determination on its own, whether applied to Croatia, Bosnia or Kosovo, on which the left groups seem to be agreed today, was abandoned by the international socialist movement long ago. The most intransigent of the Balkan socialist parties had already informed the eighth congress of the Second International in 1910 that the matter could only be resolved through a class struggle to establish 'a free federation of all the Balkan republics', and even before the Balkan Wars broke out the Belgrade conference of the Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Turkish and Romanian Social Democratic parties agreed on this view, which was formally accepted by the Bureau of the Second International in October 1911. It was fully endorsed by Lenin and Trotsky at the time,⁹ and a Balkan Socialist Federation headed by Rakovsky was founded at an illegal conference in Bucharest at the height of the First World War.¹⁰ The Balkan Communist Federation subsequently founded under the auspices of the Third International in January 1920 agitated for the creation of a Balkan Soviet Socialist Republic until Stalin closed it down in 1932.¹¹

For if there is one thing that stands out from this little sketch, it is that the only states that have ruled the Balkans with any success for any length of time have denied the national principle, either as pre-capitalist empires (Byzantium, Turkey, Austria-Hungary) or a post-capitalist international state (Tito's Yugoslavia). The complexity of the national, religious and cultural mixture means that there is not, and cannot be, a solution to the problems of the Balkan peoples along the simple lines of bourgeois nation states. To pose it in this way means to condemn these peoples to perpetual conflict, apart from the obvious fact that if bourgeois principles can provide lasting solutions to the problems of our age, there is not much point in having socialists around. Only in a federation can the mixed and minority peoples enjoy

constitutional guarantees of their existence, or be assured of defenders elsewhere. And a precondition for a return to this happy state of affairs is the total exclusion of all outside interests from the conflicts going on there. For given the stricken state of the economies of these countries, there can be no doubt that the present wars could only have been sustained with such ferocity for so long by outside interests supplying, financing, fanning and encouraging them. As Lenin pointed out as long ago as 1911, 'it is "Europe" that is hindering the establish-

ment of a federal republic in the Balkans',¹² to which we must now add the USA as well. For the NATO intervention in Kosovo is only the latest, most blatant, and most outrageous example of Balkanisation.

In the meantime, is it too much to ask the left in Britain to stop parroting slogans about the national self-determination of one area or another at particular points in the conflict, to stop promoting and even taking part in outside interference, and to start applying itself to a solution for the problem as a whole?

1. Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars*, Cambridge University Press, 1945, p.x.
2. Cf Walter Kolarz, *Myths and Realities in Eastern Europe*, London, 1946, p.20. 'The Mohammedan Bosnians have certainly become patriotic Serbs, or Croats, but if a man is asked what his religion is the answer will frequently be: "I am a Turk", showing that nationality and religion are not yet clearly distinguished.'
3. Cf Christian Rakovsky, *Roumania and Bessarabia*, WIL pamphlet, 1990, pp.10-21.
4. Leon was, of course, by no means the first, nor the only thinker to come upon this phenomenon. Already during the Balkan wars Lenin noted that 'the landlords in Macedonia (known as sphahijas) are Turks and Mohammedans, while the peasants are Slavs and Christians. The class antagonism is therefore aggravated by a religious and national antagonism' ('The Social Significance of the Serbo-Bulgarian Victories', November 7, 1912, *Collected Works*, Vol.18, Moscow, 1963, p.397). The classic example of this mix was of course Transylvania, where the landlords spoke Magyar, the peasants Vlach (Romanian) and the bourgeoisie and the workers German. Fortunately by modern times religion had ceased to matter there, for at one time the landowners had been Calvinist, the towns Lutheran and the peasantry Orthodox. Cf also Rakovsky's analysis of Dobrudja and Bessarabia, n.3 above.
5. The loose description of Jelacic's forces as 'Croats' is probably a misnomer. Many authorities believe that they were of mixed extraction, even including Swabians; Richard West notes ironically that 'Grenzer Croats were almost all Orthodox Christians, and therefore what they would now call "Serbs"' (*Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*, London, 1994, p.370).
6. Cf L.D. Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, New York, 1980, pp.120-1, 266-72.
7. Robert Bideleux, 'Kosovo's Conflicts', in *History Today*, November 1998, p.31.
8. It was the agreement of Tito and Dimitrov in 1947-8 over the need for a Balkan Socialist Federation that led to the Stalin-Tito split, for it would have brought Russian domination over the Balkans to an end.
9. E.g., V.I. Lenin, 'A Disgraceful Resolution', October 18, 1912, *Collected Works*, Vol.18, Moscow, 1963, p.353; 'A New Chapter of World History', October 21, 1912, p.368; 'The Balkan War and Bourgeois Chauvinism', March 29, 1913, *Collected Works*, Vol.19, Moscow, 1963, p.39; L.D. Trotsky, op. cit., n.6 above, pp.39-41, 321, etc.
10. 'Christian Georgievich Rakovsky: An Autobiography', in Gus Fagan (ed.), *Christian Rakovsky: Selected Writings on Opposition in the USSR*, London, 1980, p.74.
11. *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!*: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Comintern, New York, 1991, p.84. Trotsky's support for this decision can be most easily consulted in his 'Letter to Yugoslav Comrades', October 10, 1920, in *What Next?*, No.6, 1997, pp.37-8.
12. V.I. Lenin, 'The Balkan Peoples and European Diplomacy', October 16, 1912, op. cit., n.4 above, p.349. ■

Political repression in Tito's Yugoslavia

For several decades after the split with Moscow in 1948, Yugoslavia was looked upon by a broad strand of leftist liberal opinion in the west, and among 'non-aligned' forces in the rest of the world, as the most liberal society in eastern Europe. The Fourth International had a brief unrequited passion for Tito until Yugoslavia backed the UN intervention in Korea.¹ Despite the repression meted out to early left dissidents such as Milovan Djilas, Yugoslavia's reputation for tolerance persisted. Because it lay outside the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia had to manoeuvre between west and east and retain a degree of popular support for a regime not dependant upon Russian tanks. The by-products of this balancing act included the self-management system introduced 'from above' in 1950, the greater freedom to work abroad and the opening up of the country to tourism. Within the country, the bureaucracy was obliged to carry out another a delicate balancing act between the national groups and bureaucracies of the different republics. It nonetheless fostered the view embraced by many on the left that Yugoslavia had largely resolved the national antagonisms which had beset the Balkans for decades, if not centuries.

The relative liberalism of the 1960s encouraged a growing questioning of the regime, particularly among intellectuals. The stormy events of 1968 in Paris and Prague found an echo in among students in Belgrade who wrote that 'in Yugoslavia the workers self-manage the factories - but the bankers self-manage the banks, the bureaucrats self-manage the bureaucracy, and the party self-manages the party'.² Economic development was heavily mortgaged as the foreign debt escalated rapidly in the 1970s, reaching \$8 billion by 1978, and Yugoslavia was increasingly dependant on the IMF. The unevenness of development served to fuel the rivalry between the various 'national' bureaucracies.

Growing tensions throughout the Balkans in the early 1970s were mirrored by growing separatism between the Yugoslav republics.³ The response of the Titoite bureaucracy was to manoeuvre. On the one hand it revised the constitution to decentralise the power of the federation among the republics; on the other it launched a new wave of repression in a series of high profile political trials. These events form the background to the dossier published below.

Repression in Yugoslavia was originally published in France by the International Committee Against Repression and published in an English translation by the Committee in Defence of Soviet Political Prisoners in 1977. Apart from its documentation of the broad scope of political repression carried out by the Yugoslav bureaucracy in the 1970s, its contents are particularly striking from this vantage

point. Many of the defendants were workers or fairly lowly intellectuals. Many were accused of 'nationalism', 'separatism' and 'irredentism', while others were tried as 'cominformists' or 'dogmatists' - i.e. agents of the Soviet Union or Albania.

Although emigré activity by Kosovars,⁴ Serbs⁵ and Croats⁶ is well documented, it is highly likely that these trials used the classic Stalinist technique of amalgam - bracketing worker and peasant opponents of the regime with reactionary nationalists and sympathisers of other Stalinist regimes. At any rate, this dossier suggests not only that the Titoite bureaucracy was alarmed at where the logic of its own adaptation to various nationalisms was leading, but also that those challenging Serb domination of the Yugoslav federation were singled out for particularly harsh treatment.

Richard Price

1. See 'The Fourth International and Yugoslavia' (1948-50), *Workers News* supplement, July 1991; T. Grant and J. Haston, *Behind the Stalin-Tito Clash*, RCP, 1948
2. M. Raptis, *Socialism, Democracy and Self-Management*, Allison and Busby, 1980, p.10
3. See *Workers Vanguard* (Greece), 'The Balkans: Ingredients of an Explosion', (1971), reprinted in *Workers News*, Mar-Apr 1993
4. See N. Brauns, 'Kosova and the KLA', *What Next?* No 13, 1999
5. See footnote 4 of the extract below
6. See N. Beams, 'Australian revisionists back pro-Nazi Croatian group', *Labour Review*, Vol 7 No 1, August 1983.

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Human rights in the People's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The problem of human rights in the People's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia can be considered from a strictly judicial and political point of view. From the judicial point of view, these rights are being violated on three levels:

- a) on the level of legislation
- b) on the level of practical application of the law, that is, on the level of legal proceedings
- c) on the level of the application of sanctions passed by the courts and on the level of actual events.

From the political point of view, one might mention the ways that human rights are being violated by means of active repression of free thought and creativity in the press, by means of public intervention of political functionaries and the Party's influence on the bodies of self-management, in other words, the imposition of the Party line on decisions taken by self-management enterprises.

The press, broadly speaking, stubbornly asserts that 'there is no freedom for all,' that 'there is no democracy for those who do not follow the mainstream of the Party,' and so on: it thus flaunts the class concept of democracy, which historically has always led to dictatorship.

In certain cases, for instance, the press will denounce people still on trial as enemies of our Socialist Republic. By doing so, it influences the court and lays the groundwork for the arguments which anticipate the verdict. Indeed, this is a customary procedure in all political trials, but it is contrary to the law by which 'each is innocent until proved guilty by the court.' When covering these trials the press generally does not mention the issues involved, nor how the case develops, and never does it take up the defence of the accused.

A whole series of journals of a politically critical orientation, tolerated up to a certain point in the years 1968-1971, have now been stifled: certain issues have been seized, financial resources have been suppressed, such as donations - donations without which a journal cannot be pub-

lished in our country because of paper and printing costs.

A striking example of this case is *Praxis*, a Marxist-oriented magazine of critical Yugoslav philosophers. The effective curtailment of press freedom involves the application of unconstitutional articles to the press laws which forbid the disclosure of news 'which disturbs public order'. A deposition was submitted to the Yugoslav Constitutional Court asking that these articles which enable the Party to monopolise the press be proclaimed unconstitutional.

With the most recent press law (that of 1974), the article which previously allowed a group of citizens to publish a journal was suppressed; now this is possible only for existing political and social organisations.

Similarly, foreign journals and magazines can be banned, thanks to the article which prohibits 'the disturbance of public order'. This article has been applied extensively. In 1976 alone close to one hundred foreign journals and magazines were banned from the People's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia because of articles they contained concerning our country.

Political officials give the executive departments the signal to act by using the press to make public interventions. Any political attack in a publication will be accompanied systematically by the opening of legal proceedings, loss of employment, or the banning of a book or an exhibition and the like.

In short, the suppression of human rights is the most blatant and probably the main activity of Party members in labour organisations. According to Yugoslav law, every economic and cultural institution and organisation enjoys a fairly wide freedom of decide its own activities. Nevertheless, the law limits this right of self-management to a certain degree. Moreover, this fact is of only practical concern to the Communist Party, the only organised political force in the land.

In any major political decision, it is the Party members who win the day

in the collective process. The mechanism of decision-making is as follows: Party members receive instructions; they form a cell in the heart of the collective; they then report the conclusion of the Party organisation. When the members of the collective meet to make a decision, they are confronted with a ready-made decision from the Party and any opposition is labelled a hostile act against the Socialist Republic. Even if the number of Party members in a collective does not exceed twenty or thirty per cent, there is no difficulty in imposing any Party decision.

There are plenty of examples of this. The collective of the Belgrade theatre, Workshop 212, withdrew from its repertoire the play of the Yugoslav writer Alexander Popovic, *Hat in Hand*; similarly the theatre collective withdrew Dragoslav Mihailovic's play *When Pumpkins Flourish*. In the same way, 'the workers' of the BGZ printing firm refused to print the magazine *Savremennik* (*The Contemporary*) because of an article written by one considered to be 'an enemy of the Republic' (though there was no attack in the text).

Then there is the case of the writer Zivorad Stojkovic, relieved of his post as editor in the Prosveta printing works. This same establishment printed a public confession of its political error in printing the novel of Yugoslav writer Tasic Visnjic. Seven days later, legal proceedings were brought against this writer. And so on and so forth...

The fundamental mechanism underlying these manipulations lies in the fact that the Communist Party, by use of the penal code, has protected its monopoly over political organisations. There are no longer any possibilities open to institutions and decentralised organisations for decision-making. The organised political minority has easily outmanoeuvred the majority.

Another consequence is the complete absence of any sense of responsibility among the decision-makers; that is to say, in the highest ranks of the Party. This means that their decisions

are passed automatically by the self-management collectives; consequently, all moral, political and indeed penal responsibility is shifted downwards from above. Thus, while the Croatian nationalist students Budise, Cicka and others were given prison sentences of five to seven years after carrying out the Croatian Central Committee decisions, the Central Committee itself was simply compelled to resign.

On the level of legislation, human rights are violated by laws contrary to the Constitution of the People's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and contrary to the minimal rights guaranteed by international agreements which Yugoslavia has accepted by signing numerous documents and conventions; these rights are also guaranteed by the moral and social achievements of civilised humanity.

Here are some examples culled from the law:

The passport law allows for any Yugoslav citizen's passport to be seized, on police recommendation, for reasons connected with state security; yet the constitution has in no way provided for the limitation on the freedom to travel. This same law authorises the police to take away a citizen's passport without giving any reason or offering any opportunity to complain; yet the constitution upholds the citizen's right to protest and complain. The press laws of the Yugoslav Republic provide for the suppression of a newspaper on the grounds that it 'disturbs the public order'; yet the constitution allows no such restrictions on the freedom of the press for such reasons.

These laws are similarly contrary to the internationally binding obligations adopted by the People's Socialist Federal Republic in the final act of the 1975 Helsinki conference on European Security. These oblige the Yugoslav Republic to encourage the free movement of people and ideas.

The new penal code, already adopted but not yet fully operational, states that the family (for example, a mother or father) of a political terrorist can be arrested if it provides food and shelter, even for one night, to a member. This law forces citizens to put their attachment to the state before that to the family. This is indeed an immoral and unreasonable demand, one that is impos-

sible for anyone to take seriously.

The laws on the defence of state security are formulated in an intentionally dense style which easily lends them to flexible interpretation. For instance, there is the condemnation of any act 'aimed at violating the security of the Socialist Republic'. This leaves the court quite free to appraise every new situation as it wishes; every verbal criticism becomes an act of high treason, an attempt at subversion because it is 'aimed at transforming the State's form of government'.

Numerous items in the penal code are referable only to subjective factors. For example the act on enemy propaganda for which political oppositionists in Yugoslavia are frequently sentenced is defined as 'maliciously spreading false reports about Yugoslavia'. What does 'maliciously mean here? That is left to the court to settle as it sees fit. What constitutes truth or falsehood? One can hardly go in to that sort of thing during the trial: the Belgrade lawyer, Srdja Popovic was arrested for having attempted to do so while defending the Yugoslav writer Dragoljub Ignjatovic.

The element of intent, found in the penal procedure, appears equally very often. It is applicable under Article 292a of the penal code which lays down a sentence of up to five years' prison for anyone propagating false information 'with intent to disturb public order'.

The actual existence of such intent obviously precludes any precise verification, and it remains subject to the discretion of the court and prosecuting authority.

Identical words can, in one case merely expose a person to criticism, while in another situation they could involve a court case; everything depends on the way in which the court and the prosecution judge the intentions behind the utterances.

Hostile intentions are ascribed to people who have already come into conflict with official Party positions.

According to the Yugoslav law on misdemeanour, a thorough search can, in exceptional cases, be carried out without any written warrant. In political cases, the exception has become the rule. The law provides no sanction whatever against a search carried out under circumstances.

On the public prosecutor's authorisation the police can conduct an

interrogation; without any justification or motive they can hold a person in prison for three consecutive days, during which they can most certainly conduct an interrogation. The presence of defence counsel at these interrogations is not allowed.

The practical application of these laws leads to a restriction of people's rights and liberties.

Political trials take place in a small courtroom. This only violates the principles of public justice. Contrary to the law, the public is barred from such court proceedings. The witnesses for the defence are systematically challenged; only the witnesses for the prosecution are given a proper hearing. The habitual formulae of the courts are assertions like 'it is not necessary to listen to the defence witnesses as the court has a clear picture of events'. The role of the defence is purely a formal one. The accused is often heard without the presence of defence counsel, no matter how much he may protest against this. If the accused refuses to speak, he is put under insistent pressure and is even threatened. Defence counsels are interrupted right from the start of their summary speech while the accused is deprived of the right to speak at the moment he attempts to explain his actions in a larger political context.

Here are some examples to demonstrate the application of the texts we have cited.

Mihailo Djuric, professor in the law faculty, took the floor at a public meeting organised by the Belgrade law faculty and spoke of constitutional amendments which were the theme of the discussion. Later Professor Djuric was summoned by the faculty to clarify his ideas. As these ideas led to a negative evaluation, Professor Djuric was sentenced to nine months in prison, which he has now served. On leaving prison he found himself without any chance of employment.

An assistant professor at the same faculty, Kosta Cavoška, received a suspended sentence for the same reasons and was expelled from the faculty.

The student Vladimir Palancanin received ten months in prison for having read out at a public meeting the decision of a Yugoslav court. Apparently there were ideas judged to be hostile in this pronouncement.

The student Vladimir Mijanovic

received a year in prison for having told someone, 'strictly between themselves,' a joke about the President of the Republic. The only witness was the person to whom he had spoken. The accused denied having told the story, but he had to sit out his sentence. His wife, Liliana, received six months in prison for insulting the person of the President of the Republic. Again, the only witness was her listener. She denied the charges. Nevertheless she was found guilty. As she was pregnant she asked for a postponement of the sentence. Her request was denied and she had to have an abortion to serve out the sentence.

Students Pavlusko Imsirovic and Milan Nikolic, along with the architect Danilo Udovicki, received two years' hard labour in prison for having, among other things, received magazines and journals containing articles hostile to Yugoslavia. This means that they were condemned simply because these journals were found in their homes. Moreover, the searches were conducted without a warrant. The architect Danilo Udovicki was sentenced chiefly because he had received a letter from Professor Ernest Mandel in which the latter had commented unfavourably on another political trial that was taking place at that time in Yugoslavia. In effect, he was convicted for having such a letter in his home. There are countless examples of this kind of occurrence.

First of all, the person to be tried is selected, then a search is made of his home and, starting with whatever is found, a charge is constructed. Agents provocateurs also have their part to play, as witnesses to the things that are said 'just between the two of us'.

The court's argument is of a standard type. The crimes with which the accused stands charged are described as 'evident', 'beyond any doubt', and so on, without any proof being submitted by way of confirmation. The entire defence of the accused is distilled into one phrase: 'the court is not authorised to believe the accused's defence, which is unconvincing and calculated merely to evade his criminal responsibility.' These judgements, with their illegally foregone conclusions, profit from Party support.

The Republic's President himself, in a speech delivered in 1972 during the time of the Croatian nationalists' trial,

warned the judges 'not to cling to the law like a drunkard to a fence.'

Politika, the Belgrade daily, on March 18, 1977 admonished certain judges for their 'apolitical' sentences.

The lawyer Srdja Popovic was sentenced because, while he was defending a man accused of propagating lies about the Socialist Republic, he tried to prove that the case had nothing to do with lies and he suggested that the court first procure proof from competent state institutions. He was arrested for 'propagating lies with the aim of disturbing public order.'

Creative freedom is stifled by the ban on books, journals, magazines, exhibitions of painting, etc., the ban being formulated by the courts or by those mechanisms described above as 'self-managing'. As a result, we have a ban on the books of, among others, Belgrade university professor Mikhail Popovic, sociology professor Zagorke Golubovic, Ivan Ivanovic's novel *The Red King* (a novel about the football world!), Mica Popovic's exhibition of painting entitled 'Spectacles' (a depiction of the President of the Republic accompanied by the Queen of Holland, drawn from photographs of the royal visit). Also banned are journals like *Vidici*, *Student*, *Filosofija*, *Studentski List* and many more.

The methods used by the executive organs would require a separate chapter on the violation of individual liberties in Yugoslavia. This has to do with the actions of the police either before or after the judicial procedure, as well as those cases which never see the court.

Bugging and shadowing cannot be proved, but it is certain that these methods are used systematically on a certain number of people. When legal proceedings begin, the accused will discover during police interrogation that he was under surveillance, and not only he but also a large circle of his acquaintances. An example is that of some Yugoslav citizens who signed a declaration of solidarity with the Czechoslovak signatories of Charter '77 and who were interrogated by the secret police. Copies of the declaration were confiscated and signatories were showered with legal actions, even though the declaration of solidarity was in no way reprehensible according to Yugoslav law.

The group of sixty Yugoslav citizens who signed a petition to the Yugoslav constitutional court questioning the constitutionality of the passport law faced similar difficulties, even though the constitutional court exists precisely for citizens to use it. One of the signatories, the journalist Misa Vasic from the magazine *Nin* was suspended after a decision of his editorial board. Other signatories (Sonja Jiht, Tanja Petovar, Vitomir Teofilovic, Professor Veselin Civic, Vladimir Milenkovic, Milenko Arsic and many others who can confirm it) were subject to pressure where they worked in order to withdraw their signatures from the petition. Some of them (like Milenko Arsic) were interrogated by the secret police.

When serving their sentences, political prisoners have the same status as convicted common criminals. Conditions of imprisonment are inhuman in winter: the temperature in the cells falls to zero degrees; in Belgrade's Central Prison water seeps through the walls (Milan Nikolic complained about this to the president of Belgrade's departmental court, but nothing came of it); bedbugs are common; the truncheon is used to discipline prisoners put in solitary cells for some infraction of the rules; exercise consists of a daily ten minute walk in the prison court yard in absolute silence (any discussion is automatically cut short with a truncheon) in a column in which prisoners walk round and round, with their hands behind their backs. For their work prisoners received a token sum of five to six dollars per month, even if there is no help from families. Whenever prisoners meet their warders, they have to greet them by doffing their caps. Food is limited to the minimum necessary to survive. All these details have been communicated to the competent authorities (the Minister for legal administration in Serbia) by the lawyer Radmilo Mihanovic, who himself has served one year for giving a journalist from the German weekly *Der Spiegel* information about a political trial in which witnesses testified that they had been beaten during interrogation to induce them to indict the accused. Prison conditions have remained unchanged, and Milanovic has still not received any reply from the Justice Minister.

The case of the eight professors

from Belgrade University, known as the 'Praxis Group'¹, is special, at least in the Republic of Serbia. Since 1968 they have been the objects of incessant attacks from the Party which considers them the kernel of critical thought in Belgrade. In the course of all the accusations, nothing more concrete has been said than that they 'opposed the Party's policies'. Now that every journal with a critical orientation has been banned, since 1971 they have found it impossible to defend themselves against these accusations. It was at this time that people began to call them 'enemies of the state', 'counter-revolutionaries', and so on. When the Party found itself unable to contain a 'self-managing' decree from the philosophy faculty to ban them from the university and force them to sever all contact with their students, a special law (!) was passed to authorise these measures. Dating from 1975 this law concerns higher public education, and through it the Republican Assembly can expel professors without giving any reason if it is in 'society's interest'. What is understood by 'society's interest' is not defined. The Assembly has adopted this decree, and now any kind of scientific work has be-

come impossible. In order to prevent the professors from complaining that their positions have been compromised, they receive a monthly pension. This law is undoubtedly unconstitutional, for it creates a kind of discrimination based on political convictions. The eight professors complained to the constitutional court in the summer of 1975, but to this day their complaint has not been registered, even though the legal period of delay is two months.

Furthermore, this law runs counter to the international agreements made by the People's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which is a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO's statutes expressly forbid any form of discrimination. A communiqué from the office of the President of the Republic (published in *Politika* on March 17, 1977) condemned the intervention of the ILO as a hostile act against the Socialist Republic.

In fact, every foreign initiative aimed at defending human rights and the rights of Yugoslav citizens is labelled as 'interference in the internal affairs of the Republic' and is considered as an act directed against the Republic's sov-

ereignty. However, it is quite clear that the *application of international agreements* is not a matter of a country's 'internal affairs'. Moreover, the rights and liberties of citizens represent an achievement inseparable from our entire civilisation, and not an achievement of one or another social system. It is the minimum guaranteed to all individuals by the United Nations Charter, regardless of the political system in force in the various countries which, within the framework of their own sovereignty, can only enlarge these rights and liberties. Otherwise one might as well conclude that the concentration camps under the Third Reich and under Stalinism in the USSR also concerned only the 'internal affairs' of these countries. This would be a monstrous kind of logic.

The system has betrayed its guilty conscience. Rather than exonerating those accused on demonstrably ill-founded evidence, every means of propaganda method is used to explain that 'things are no better in other countries' – as if that was any consolation for the citizens of Yugoslavia, as if that could prove that the criticisms of the repressive Yugoslav regime were without any foundation.

Political 'criminals'. Some statistical information for recent years

Extract from the manual circulated in the higher offices of the country's internal affairs. (M. Djosic *Criminal Tactics* Belgrade 1975. pp 22-23).

'Chapter 3. Classification of Criminality.

- 1) International criminals
- 2) Professionals
- 3) Specialists
- 4) Pathological delinquents
- 5) Political delinquents
- 6) Criminals by habit
- 7) ...'

'Chapter 5. Definition of Political Delinquents

'... Political delinquency, of all forms of socially dangerous criminal activity, is the most dangerous. The social danger of this category of delinquents lies in the fact that in their criminal activity they attack and sap the foundations of the social and political

regime of the socialist, self-managing society.

'These delinquents are driven by hostility to the socialist regime of our country. Their methods of operating are various, ranging from public expression of hostile remarks, spoken or written propaganda, distributing pamphlets which give a false or tendentious idea of our constitutional system, and including open forms of terrorism and sabotage....

'However, quite apart from the hostility, there are strictly lucrative reasons which impel many political criminals ... this is how intellectuals hostile to the socialist regime have access to significant sums of money for their conferences abroad, their articles in foreign magazines, etc. ...'

[Extract from] Statistical review. (*Jugoslovenski pregled* January issue,

1976. Chapter entitled *Social and Political Regime* p25).

'Classification of people of full age sentenced to solitary confinement with hard labour, according to the type of misdemeanour
'... Misdemeanour against the State and the People (Political activities)

| Year | Total Number |
|------|-----------------|
| 1960 | 458 |
| 1963 | 140 |
| 1966 | 121 |
| 1969 | 697 |
| 1973 | 691 |
| 1974 | 571 (48 women)' |

[There follows a breakdown of events by year to explain the variation above.]

... However, in order to have a complete picture of all these sentences imposed for political misdemeanours during the past years, we should add to the official table (which lists only

'misdemeanours against the State and the people') several thousand minor sentences, ranging from six months to three years, for insulting the dignity of, or of-

fending personalities in the government, or for divulging false or outrageous information harmful to the regime. Such political crimes never appear in the offi-

cial statistics. According to Amnesty International, between six and eight thousand people have been sentenced for such things over the last three years.

[The pamphlet then describes in detail one of the trials and after that lists in detail the place of trial, name, age, profession, charges and sentence passed on 173 people. *Workers Action* has summarised this information below. The pamphlet finishes with a description of prison conditions, followed by a letter from an internee of the psychiatric hospital of the Belgrade central prison. We have not reprinted this information.]

Trials of 'cominformists'²

[Trials took place in Bar, Tuzla, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Split and Banja Luka. 66 people were tried and sentences ranged from 1 to 14 years. The average sentence was 8 years.]

Trials of Croatian 'nationalists'

[Between late 1975 and June 1976 trials took place of Croat groups which were alleged to be 'nationalists' in Zagreb (twice), Tuzla, Gospic, Zadar, Osijek, Dubrovnik, Mostar, Bjelovar, Sarajevo, Titograd, and Sibenik. 53 people were accused. Some were charged with membership, support for or contact with ustase³ organisations. Sentences were generally for between 1 and 12 years with an average of about 7, but there were 6 death sentences, all commuted to 20 years imprisonment.]

Trials against the Albanian national minority

These people are generally accused of 'irredentism', 'separatism' and 'nationalism', and their political tendencies are held to be 'dogmatic' and 'Stalinist'. They appear to lean toward official Marxist ideas in Albania and they call themselves Leninists. . .

[Trials took place in 1975, in Pristina (twice), Skopje, and Pula. 33 people were accused. The charges

were 'threatening the territorial integrity of the state', 'hostile activities', 'hostile propaganda', 'counter-revolutionary activity' and of forming an organisation to carry out these actions. Sentences were generally for between 1 and 15 years with an average of about 8 years.]

Trials for 'slandering the social system'

[Trials took place in 1976, in Sarajevo (twice), Zajecar, Negotin, Bor, Valjev, Stip, Zrenjanun, Biograd, Biliac, Banja Luka and Tuzla. 15 people were ac-

cused. Most sentences were for around seven years, although one was for 13.]

Trials against 'Chetniks'⁴

A Chetnik is a member of the Serbian monarchist organisation which existed between 1941 and 1945. . .

[Trials took place of 6 people in Bilac, Belgrade and Tuzla. The charges at the various trials, in addition to the usual 'hostile activities and propaganda', mainly centre on belonging to or having contacts with a Chetnik organisation abroad. Sentences range from 3 to 15 years, averaging 8 years.]

All footnotes are from the original pamphlet.

1. Praxis is an epithet for an entire school of Marxist philosophy which achieved considerable ascendancy in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and which influenced considerably world Marxist philosophy. Their work achieved recognition through the annual summer school established in 1963. In 1964, the journal *Praxis* appeared in Zagreb and in 1967 a similar journal, *Filosofija*, began in Belgrade. The name 'Praxis' thus refers to a wider circle of Marxist philosophers. Since 1972 the Praxis Group has been engaged in a bitter struggle against official harassment in Yugoslavia.
2. The Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) was created in September 1947 to link the Communist Party of the USSR with foreign Communist Parties. This was a Soviet attempt to centralise control over the international communist movement. Yugoslavia was expelled from it in June 1948. A Cominformist, then, would be one sympathetic to restoring Soviet influence in Yugoslavia.
3. The word ustase essentially means 'rebels'. In reality the ustase stood for extreme Croatianism, extreme anti-Serbianism, extreme anti-Yugoslavianism and extreme anti-democratism. These terrorist Croatian separatists operated out of Italy and Hungary in the inter-war period and during the War they were noted for their collaboration with the German Fascist occupier and for their attempts to exterminate Serbians, all in the cause of establishing an independent Croatia. They still exist in emigration. The fact that young Yugoslavs today are charged with ustase sympathies shows that the émigrés are still active and are able to influence young discontented Yugoslavs, especially Croatians.
4. Formed in 1941 by Serbian Officers of the defeated Yugoslav army who refused to surrender, the Chetniks were hailed as the first guerrilla movement in Axis occupied territory. However, because of internal political divisions the Chetniks decided that communist-led guerrillas were their real enemies. Consequently they reached an uneasy truce with the Axis occupiers and subsequently lost all hope of securing Allied support which went over to the partisans. Largely destroyed in 1945, remnants went into emigration to wage a propaganda war against Tito's regime. ■

Euro-elections and the left

Standing against New Labour

by Richard Price

There's an air of desperate opportunism about the left these days. It's an unfortunate fact that as the ranks of the left have thinned out in recent years, the relative weight of cranks, eccentrics, the genuinely confused and those who have completely lost their political compass has increased. It's a process of natural selection in reverse – the survival of the least fit. While many with an organic link to the working class and its consciousness feel understandably set back by the hegemony of social democracy and the low level of class struggle, the mad, the bad and the true sectarians come into their own in a period like this.

How else is it possible to explain the evolution of the left in the 1990s? One after another, left groups have charged into the political wilderness, reversing the general orientations they had held for years – or in some cases decades. Militant abandoned the Labour Party, launched its open party turn, split, changed its name, and now seven years down the line is approaching meltdown. The formation of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party in 1996 was credited across the left with having broken the mould of left politics. Sectarians of every hue, who previously wouldn't have put a cross in Labour box for fear of contamination, rallied to Scargill's brand of Old Labourism crossed with Stalinism. Three years on and the SLP is a disintegrating rump controlled by people who make most latter day Stalinists look like model democrats.

The list of 'next big things' which were supposed to reorient the left makes depressing reading. There was the wild overestimation of the potential of the BNP in the mid-90s. On the basis of a by-election victory in a single council seat, the thesis that fascism was becoming a mass force was accepted by many groups on the left. After vying with each

other in a kind of anti-fascist hysteria, they got bored after a while, recruited a few members, and moved on. Then there have been the attempts to form permanent strike support committees – in the virtual absence of strikes. There have been the various efforts to form socialist alliances, which in most cases have dwindled to nothing but a handful of already existing left-wingers.

Conjuring 'parties' out of thin air; concentrating on anti-fascism where not even a medium sized fascist party existed; attempting to build strikes outside the trade unions; creating 'united fronts' without mass organisations – these failed projects all have something in common, and it is the failure to orient to the real workers' movement, warts and all.

Finally, when all else failed, most of the left has swung towards taking on New Labour on the electoral front. While it doesn't take a gifted political analyst to understand that this is the terrain on which the left is weakest and Blair is strongest, it does take at least an elementary sense of political perspective – which is more than most of the left possesses on its present showing.

Thus it was that the 'historic' decision was made by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Socialist Party (SP), Socialist Outlook (SO), the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr's Independent Labour Network (ILN) to build a joint slate to contest the Euro elections in London.

At first sight, it was an odd choice of election to contest. The Euro elections, after all, usually struggle to register a pulse in the British working class, and most commentators were predicting a turn out of barely 30 per cent. Moreover, in the general election – widely seen as the elections that really do matter – only one of the groups involved had stood candidates against

Labour. Peer pressure is a powerful thing, particularly in an embattled left, and in our discussions with others on the left the usual charge of 'pessimism' was made against us. We argued that, far from representing a 'historic' unity of the left, the Euro election alliance marked a new degree of desperation mixed with opportunism. For all the pompous talk of opportunities for socialist propaganda to reach a mass audience, it was pretty clear that there was to be no real campaigning activity at all – only an election address. The opportunism lay in the calculation that, given a low turn out and a new electoral system, the Socialist Alliance, as the campaign was to be billed, could hope for the kind of freak result the Green Party got in 1989.

The launch rally of the 'united' campaign, held in Friends Meeting House on March 9, should have dispelled any euphoria at the outbreak of unity. The size of the audience – barely over 100 – already indicated that the SWP was not exactly going to exert itself for the campaign. There was no sign of any support coming in from rank and file trade union bodies, or from London's large number of oppressed minorities. On the basis of a couple of local picket lines, SWP member and UCLH Unison activist Candy Udwin spoke of the period as the best in her experience as a socialist. Having been a shop steward and branch secretary at the same hospital as her for five years in the 1980s, I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry – she obviously thinks it's a better period than, for instance 1982, when 4-500 workers would attend mass meetings at our hospital, hundreds would picket on TUC days of action, and then join demonstrations of up to 100,000. That period, the SWP considered a *downturn!*

While other speakers from SP, SO, the AWL and the CPGB were less ludicrous, they too held up the prospect

of a big opportunity for the left. There was talk unfurling the red banner of socialism and of emulating the Lutte Ouvrière/LCR joint slate in France (then running at close to seven per cent in the opinion polls). Last of a wearily long list of speakers, Pete Brown of ILN asked for a few minutes extension so that he could talk about 'the right to ramble'. Some of us thought he had exercised that right far too much already. Julie Donovan of the SP, who chaired the meeting, then proceeded to close it down without any discussion from the floor. I felt rather like the peasant in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, who on being told by Arthur 'I am your king', replies 'I didn't vote for you'.

King Arthur was in fact looming large in the calculations of the SWP. Within four weeks of the Socialist Alliance launch rally, the campaign began first to unravel, then to collapse. The SWP withdrew on the grounds that the SLP would also be standing in London with Arthur Scargill at the head of its list. SO then withdrew, arguing that the departure of the SWP made it unviable to proceed. The remaining participants all regretted earlier withdrawals and then withdrew themselves, leaving the CPGB to stand alone on a *Weekly Worker* slate.

At least the CPGB isn't under the illusion, peddled frantically by the SWP, that we stand on the eve of mass desertions from Labour to the left. It considers – on the basis of a few none too relevant quotations from the early Comintern – that standing against Labour is not so much a tactic as a principle. It is scarcely to the credit of normally more sensible groups such as *Socialist Outlook* and the AWL that a group with the confused background of the CPGB can have a better handle on political reality. In fact, the decision by these two groups to support the Euro election slate may well mark a watershed in each group's development. It stands in marked contrast to both groups traditional 'labour movement orientation', and points down the SP road of new 'party' building projects. Of course, either group may draw back from this logic – whether as a result of a re-think, or because of the internal tensions such a turn would generate.

The disarray of the left in London is mirrored in the rest of England and Wales. Although Socialist Alliances will be standing in few regions, their weak base looks set to lead to derisory votes except in a handful of cases where a candidate like Dave Nellist in the West Midlands may pull a strong personal vote. In Wales there is no left slate after the disastrous results in the Welsh Assembly elections. In the North West, the SWP withdrew because not enough local 'personalities' could be mustered to support a slate, while the SP claimed to be too busy with the local elections. Elsewhere the SLP electoral interven-

tion is only likely to be a stage in its decomposition, while the efforts of the minuscule CPGB will be almost entirely irrelevant.

Comparisons with the left's intervention in France miss the point. They fail to take into account the very different French political tradition, and the fact that Euro elections are keenly fought in that country. In Britain, electoral interventions by the left in the absence of a serious upturn in the class struggle have wrecked far more groups than they have built. In no case, can they substitute for patient work within the workers' movement as it is. **WA**

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Bernie Hynes (1952-1999)

Comrade Bernie Hynes joined the Labour Party in his hometown of Leicester, where his father was a councillor, in 1968. He joined the International Marxist Group in the 1970s, and remained a member of one or other of the British groups associated with the United Secretariat of the Fourth International for the rest of his life.

In the 1970s, Leicester was a major centre of far-right activity. Anti-fascist work was one of Bernie's first political tasks and a central concern throughout his political life. He was a totally committed comrade, never hesitant about putting himself on the line – always the first to remind us of the need for the physical defence of meetings and marches from fascists, always the first to volunteer.

The Irish national liberation struggle was also very dear to his heart. He was for very many years a member of the Troops Out movement, and served on its national committee. While he adopted the view of 'unconditional but critical support' for Irish liberation fighters, he

always bent the stick towards support rather than criticism.

Although a member of the United Secretariat, Bernie shared many of the same criticisms of that tendency and its British affiliate as those of us who are now in Workers Action. Unfortunately, a rift occurred between him and us in mid-1995, when we analysed the acceptance by the Sinn Féin leadership of the Unionist veto as a key point in the process of sell-out in the run-up to the Good Friday agreement. Later, he came round to our view, but he always maintained the position that we were premature in adopting it.

He carried his uncompromising stance into his trade union work and as a result he had to fight a long anti-victimisation battle against his employer – which he won last year.

Most on the Marxist left are, like Bernie, atheists. However, unlike many he was outspoken in his atheism. This may well be related to his strong Roman Catholic antecedents in Austria combined with his having spent almost all of his life in Leicester, where the secular tradition is particularly strong. It is particularly fit-

ting that the memorial meeting for this working class fighter took place at the Leicester Secular Hall on May 1 – even though commitments elsewhere on that day made it difficult for many of his comrades to attend.

Bernie tended to be even more politics-obsessed than most of those on the left. A conversation with him on almost any topic would slide gently into an examination of its political implications. This tendency was less strong when discussing beer, but the only subject that stood a chance of escaping it entirely was music. Bernie had an encyclopaedic knowledge of folk music, and a particular liking for Irish republican music.

Bernie's strengths were his loyalty to his comrades and his willingness to work with anyone on the left. He was never one to take a sectarian posture on the sidelines. While this could temporarily lead him astray as erstwhile comrades moved rightwards, his understanding of the need for democratic, working-class solutions always brought him back. He was a good and valuable comrade and we will miss him. **Charli Langford**

Sal Santen (1915-1998)

It is not at all to the credit of the revolutionary movement in Britain that it allowed the death of this courageous internationalist to slip by without comment. For although he broke his links with the organised movement over thirty years ago, he continued to call himself a Trotskyist, and his record of bravery and self-sacrifice as an activist deserves better.

Sal Santen was the son of a Dutch social democratic shoemaker who opposed militarism. He married Sneevliet's step-daughter Bep, but broke with him in August 1939 and joined the Bolshevik/Leninist Group, the Dutch section of the Fourth International, writing a forthright criticism of Sneevliet's politics in agreement with Trotsky. Sneevliet and the entire leadership of his group, by then called the MLL-Front, were subsequently arrested by the Nazis during the war, but his last letter to Santen and Bep two days before he was shot in April 1942, was full of affection (a French version appears in Fritjof Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet*,

1988, pp.157-8). In 1942 the Committee of Revolutionary Marxists was set up to organise activity under the German occupation, and Santen was prominent in it (cf *Revolutionary History*, Vol.1, No.4, Winter 1988-89, pp.1-21).

After the end of the war Santen became one of the main leaders of the reconstituted International Secretariat, and was especially close to Pablo during the agitation for the independence of Algeria. He helped set up a clandestine arms factory in Morocco, and was responsible for the concrete arrangements of an audacious scheme to flood the French economy in Algeria with forged banknotes. The man given the task of getting hold of the materials was a police agent who had been a member of the Dutch group all through the war, and Santen and Pablo were arrested on June 10, 1960, and held for over a year. Santen's conduct during their trial in Amsterdam was brave and forthright, if somewhat marred by his devotion to Pablo, whom he compared with the Marxist giants of the past. He supported the split of the Revolutionary Marxist Ten-

dency from the ISFI of Mandel, Frank and Maitan in 1964, describing Pablo's faction as 'the living, most dynamic and valuable part of the International'.

But he gained scant gratitude for his efforts on Pablo's behalf over the years. In 1953 he went off on a tour of Latin America to renew contact between the centre and the sections there, for which he had to borrow the money from needy relatives. On his return Pablo, whose wife was very well off, received his request for expenses with contumely, and in later years, as the film 'Sal Santen, Rebel' makes clear, even refused to see him.

After breaking his formal links with the Trotskyist movement, Santen wrote over ten books, including several novels, a life of his father-in-law (*Sneevliet, Rebel*, 1971) and his own political memoirs, in which he tended to over-emphasise the Jewishness of his background. He was well known in Holland, and only general ignorance of the Dutch language prevented him from being better known abroad. He died of a heart attack in a nursing home on July 25, five years after his wife. **Al Richardson**

Welsh Assembly elections

Labour penalised for installing Blairite leader

by Nick Davies

New Labour's control freaks must be wishing that the 11 million sheep in Wales had the vote. They would be a lot less trouble than the electorate, which, in the form of a massive swing to Plaid Cymru, has just given Labour a huge kick up the backside in the Welsh Assembly elections. On May 6, apparently impregnable Labour strongholds such as Llanelli, Rhondda and Neil Kinnock's old Westminster seat of Islwyn fell to Plaid Cymru, which elsewhere in the south turned safe Labour seats into marginals. Labour failed to win overall control and is faced with having to soldier on as a minority administration. Immediately the results were known, ex-left Peter Hain went on television to complain that local Labour activists had failed to get the vote out – clearly the party leadership was intent on blaming everyone but itself. In Britain as a whole, Labour is well ahead in the opinion polls, so why did it get a bloody nose in Wales?

Although, unusually, it was not raining on polling day, many Labour voters stayed at home. For some, the Assembly has too much power; they never wanted it in the first place. For others, it has too little. Without the tax-raising powers of the Scottish parliament, they see it as a talking shop. Others were recording their verdict on the first two years of the Labour government, on the fiasco over where the Assembly was going to be located, and on the years of sloth, sleaze, corruption and incompetence in Wales, from Labour Old and New. Many Labour supporters were furious at the way Alun Michael was foisted on them as the party's leader in Wales by Millbank in a blatantly rigged election, and it was the issue of interference and arrogance from London that made many Labour supporters go

out and vote . . . for Plaid Cymru.

As the party that was most enthusiastic about the Assembly, Plaid ran an energetic campaign. It got its vote out. It has worked hard to shed its image as the party of the Welsh-speaking, rural north and west, which involved a bit of ducking and diving on its position on Welsh independence. Plaid has recruited some southern trade union activists, and many of its rank-and-file members regard themselves as socialists. Its language can be radical, although compared to New Labour, that isn't difficult. In a TV debate on employment, while Michael spouted his usual mantra about the need to compete in a global economy, Dafydd Wigley, who is on the right of the party, was the only party leader to advocate any form of economic planning to keep jobs in Wales. Plaid also promised to scrap the school league tables and change the funding of education to end competition between schools.

But despite the occasional radical rhetoric, Plaid Cymru does not offer anything fundamentally different from Labour. It is very pro-EU, but does not say how it can square this with the deflationary effects of the Maastricht Treaty. It says it is the party for all the people living in Wales, but does not, and cannot, say how conflicting class interests can be reconciled. Ask someone living on benefits in the Cynon Valley if they have anything in common with the plutocrats of the Welsh Development Agency, and you'll get a very dusty answer.

For years, there has been a democratic deficit in Wales. With very little popular base, the Tories in London ran Wales like a colony. Quangos were stuffed with reliable, unelected appointees. The Assembly is a step forward, but without any real power it is likely, as we argued in Workers Action No.6, to act as a shock absorber, taking the brunt of

discontent against London Labour. Because it did so badly in the election, Labour in Wales may be bounced into the kind of arrangement that Blair would like in Westminster: a convergence towards the centre, which will marginalise any forces to the left.

Many Labour Party members are seething at how, as they see it, Blair and Michael have led them to electoral disaster. There is open opposition to the idea of a deal with the Liberal Democrats; some say a coalition, or looser arrangement, with Plaid is the lesser evil. Superficially, this might seem attractive, as in many ways it would pull Labour to the left. However, it would represent a further shift away from Labour's working class base. Labour Assembly members who claim to stand on the left of the party should prove it by saying no to any deals with the Liberal Democrats or Plaid. They should fight for the Assembly to have real power, for Labour Party democracy and for a break with Tory policies. **WA**

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Livingstone's right to stand for mayor

by David Lewis

Ken Livingstone wants to be Mayor of London. To be sure of getting there he must be adopted as the Labour Party candidate. To achieve that, he seems prepared to do just about anything. In the face of clear signals that they do not want him, and indeed that they might well block him, he has tried to make his peace with the Blair camp and stated that, if selected, he would toe the official political line.

If the selection process were democratic, Livingstone would almost certainly become the official candidate because of his support among the rank and file of the party. But it must be said that the only serious political reason for supporting him is in order to strike a blow against Blair and New Labour. For, ultimately, there is only one principle that Livingstone can be relied upon to uphold and that is: always take care of Ken. He was, after all, the man who pulled the plug on the fight against rate-capping in order to ensure that he would not be disqualified from standing for parliament after the GLC was

abolished, while his comrade Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council, was surcharged and barred from office for five years.

A glance at some of his pronouncements shows that Mayor Ken Livingstone would not attempt to create a GLC Mark 2, even if he could given the very limited powers that the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor will have. On London Underground, he has stated that 'there is no spare capacity . . . and it is therefore not possible to cut fares without overburdening the system' (*Labour Left Briefing*, April 1999). So, no Fares Fair. He has given Tony Blair 'a categorical assurance that, if Londoners voted for me to be their first elected mayor, I would work with your government, not against it. . . . I am convinced that your administration has the potential to be a great reforming government on a par with those of 1906 and 1945' ('Open letter to Tony Blair', *The Guardian*, January 29, 1999). When rebuffed, predictably, by the Blairites, he launched the Let Ken Livingstone Stand campaign, citing amongst other supporters 19 per cent of company directors ('Let

me stand for mayor', *The Independent*, February 9, 1999), with only 5 per cent supporting Richard Branson and Jeffrey Archer. So, that's all right. Vote for Ken, you know he's good for business. In fact, just like . . . oh yes, Tony Blair.

As for Livingstone's views on the war in the Balkans, they won't present any problems for the selection panel. His support for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia puts him firmly in the wrong camp. In a defining conflict of our time, 'Red' Ken is for the New World Order of Bush, Thatcher, Major, Clinton and Blair.

However, there is a difference between Livingstone and the Blairites. Although his politics do not stand up to close scrutiny, Livingstone remains a critic of the government and has voted against it in parliament on a number of occasions. He draws considerable support from the working class, although the main reason for this is historical and rooted in memories of the heyday of the GLC. We support his right to stand for selection and, in the absence of a more consistently left-wing candidate, we would support him becoming the Labour Party's candidate for Mayor. **WA**

Marking time

Richard Price argues that the hours we work ought to be a major item on the trade union agenda

While it is true that the shopping list of demands of many annual pay rounds will contain claims for a reduction in the working week, it is often one of the first to be jettisoned in negotiations. The failure to build militant trade union campaigns around the issue has meant that in most industries, workers' leaders will argue that it is the least important item on the list. Combined with the deregulation of

many sectors of the economy, and the growth of a weakly unionised service sector, the upshot has been that the working week, far from shortening, has been growing over the past decade for British workers.

It is over 130 years since the socialist movement took up the fight for the eight-hour day and 110 years since the demand was central to the founding of the Second International, and yet

many workers in Britain have yet to achieve this elementary right. Karl Marx recognised the political significance of the struggle to regulate and restrict the working day, and considered it such an important phase in the political development of the working class that he devoted three chapters of the first volume of *Capital* to the ten hours movement. Socialist propagandists such as Paul Lafargue in France, Tom Mann in Britain and Joseph Weydemeyer in the United States fought to popularise demands for shorter working hours.

The legacy of Thatcherism in the field of working conditions is striking. Britain was the only country in the European Union in which the number of hours worked *rose* in the decade to

1997. Of the 7 million people working over 48 hours per week in the EU in 1998, over half of them – between 3.5 and 4.5 million – worked in Britain.¹ At the same time, 2.5 million workers were without paid holidays.² The average full-time (i.e., without overtime) working week is said to be 40.3 hours,³ while average hours worked are around 45 hours.⁴ As many as 1.1 million people work an average of over 60 hours per week.⁵ Surveys have shown that British parents, both male and female, work longer than any of their European counterparts.⁶ The social effects of long working hours are similarly well documented, with studies showing a link between long hours and industrial injuries, personal problems and ill-health,⁷ and parents' relationships with their children.⁸ Not surprisingly, while hours worked rose from the late 1980s, leisure time correspondingly fell.⁹

The last major industrial struggle over working hours took place almost a decade ago when engineering unions called out selected factories on strike to demand a 35-hour week. In many branches of the public sector there has been no significant advance for many years, while the growth of shift working in industry and seven-day working throughout the retail and service sector has forced up the working week. Indeed, the only partial step forward throughout this period took place not as the result of trade union action, but with the implementation in Britain of the EU Working Time Directive in 1998. To the extent that the Tories had fought a rearguard action against the implementation of a maximum 48-hour week – warning of dire consequences for the British economy if workers achieved the same minimal rights as their European counterparts – this represents a gain. However, the numerous exclusions and the complex interpretation of the regulations mean that many employers will simply flout the law.

Like the minimum wage, New Labour's Working Time Regulations are a very small step forward. They offer the most exploited sections of workers small improvements, while they leave the bulk of workers unaffected. This avoids alienating its new friends in big

business and Europe, while promoting the government's self-image as both 'modernising' and 'caring'.

The positive rights set out in the regulations include:

- ▶ a limit on the average working week of 48 hours;
- ▶ a limit on night workers' average daily working time of eight hours;
- ▶ the right to health assessments for night workers;
- ▶ minimum rest breaks during the working day, between shifts and per week;
- ▶ paid annual leave.

However, hundreds of thousands of workers – including those employed in air, road, sea and inland waterway transport, fishing and offshore oil and gas industries – are not covered by the regulations, nor are trainee doctors. The maximum of 48 hours is only an average, worked out over a 17-week 'reference' period, which may be extended to 26 weeks in industries requiring 'continuity of service or production' or in the security industry. The limit of eight hours per night is also averaged over a 17-week or longer reference period.

The provisions for minimum rest periods are even more miserly: 20 minutes for a shift of six hours or longer; 11 hours between shifts; one day off per week – all unpaid. Workers are now entitled to three weeks' paid leave, rising to four weeks after November 23 this year. Although this does represent a definite improvement, many employers will seek either to claw the concession back by lowering wages, or terminate employment before the 13-week qualifying period.

So it will be still possible for employers to demand up to 78 hours work per week during periods they deem to

be busy. Many of the regulations will be unenforceable, given the small number of Health and Safety inspectors and Environmental Health Officers. The only redress is to take a case to an industrial tribunal, with whose procedures most workers are unfamiliar.

Because these rights have been granted 'from above', rather than fought for, they don't necessarily mark a prelude to a further advance. In fact, they serve to promote the illusion that good things come from Europe. What is needed is for the traditional trade union case for a shorter working week to be revamped – and fought for. Never mind a 48-hour week – we want a 35-hour week now, with no loss of earnings!

As we have argued elsewhere, the demand in Trotsky's *Transitional Programme* for redundancies to be fought by work sharing with no loss of pay is little more than propaganda in most industries faced with major cutbacks, unless a state of dual power exists in the enterprise. How are workers to enforce such a demand on the employer? Strike action to halt production combined with occupation to prevent the dispersal of assets can prove better mobilising demands under most (i.e., non-revolutionary) situations. And it is also time that another traditional demand – for no overtime working while others are laid off or put on short time – was enforced in the workplace.

Some 'Marxists' look upon bread and butter issues such as working hours with disdain. In fact, if socialists cannot intervene in tangible questions which occupy a considerable portion of every worker's life, how do they propose to interest workers in the finer points of Marxist theory?

1. For estimates of between 3.5 and 4.5 million working over 48 hours see *Times*, Oct 18, 1996; *Observer*, Nov 30, 1997; *Guardian*, Feb 2, 1998; *Observer*, Sept 27, 1998.
2. *Sun*, Oct 6, 1997.
3. *Times*, Oct 1, 1998.
4. *Guardian*, Feb 2, 1998.
5. *Times*, Oct 18, 1996.
6. *Times*, June 9, 1997; *Independent*, June 24, 1996.
7. *Financial Times*, Nov 12, 1996; *Guardian*, Feb 2, 1998.
8. *Observer*, Sept 27, 1998.
9. *Financial Times*, June 21, 1996

GM foods: A rich harvest for the multinationals

by Nick Davies

As ye sow, so shall ye reap: never has this hackneyed old proverb been more apt than as a description of New Labour's predicament over genetically modified foods. In opposition, Labour quite rightly made hay at the Tories' secretive, arrogant and incompetent handling of the beef crisis, correctly accusing them of acting in the interests of producers against consumers. New Labour has found to its cost that when a politician in a suit says that food is 'perfectly safe', millions will automatically make a mental note *not* to buy it, especially if that reassurance comes from a government so obviously hand in glove with the big biotech companies, and so obviously eager to rush genetically modified foods onto the market after a minimum of testing.

Before the war in the Balkans changed news priorities, GM foods were flavour of the month with the media, a clever hack at the *Daily Mail* coming up with the term 'Frankenstein foods', and retailers, perfectly happy to sell the stuff before the outcry, affecting concern for their customers' health and well being. But don't let the fact that GM food happens to be Middle England's latest neurosis obscure the issue: the leading biotech companies are organising a corporate smash and grab raid on the world's food supplies and Marxists should be active in the campaign against them.

No one knows how safe it is, or what the possible side effects will be. Among those scientists with integrity, opinion is divided. In other fields, the possible benefits of gene technology are being recognised. Whether or not food which has been genetically altered is safe, what is beyond doubt is that far too little research or testing has been done before commercial production – because the biotech companies, aided by their friends in government, are desperate to

get a return on their massive investments. What is depressing in the media coverage of this issue is the polarity between 'the experts know best, let them get on with it' and a kind of atavistic hostility to science and technology. This excludes the idea that there can be democratic control of scientific research, with experts and specialists being in some way accountable for what they do. Scientists employed by big companies or by governments may not fiddle or falsify their research, although some do, but research can be conducted and data collected or presented to show a desired result.

The best-known biotech company is Monsanto, which last year launched a lavish, and ultimately disastrously unsuccessful, advertising campaign to promote GM foods in Britain. Monsanto's propaganda made the extraordinary claim that genetically engineered foods would reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides. But Monsanto's flagship agri-chemical product is the herbicide 'Roundup'. Roundup is such a powerful herbicide that too much of it will kill the crop as well as the 'weeds'. Monsanto's solution was to develop, by genetic modification, crops that are resistant to Roundup, called 'Roundup Ready'. Farmers can then use far more Roundup, without destroying the crop. Monsanto can then sell the herbicide-resistant plants, *and* even more Roundup. Monsanto's profits soar, but at what cost?

- Roundup is dangerous to humans and animals. Unlabelled 'inert' ingredients have been shown to cause gastrointestinal pain, vomiting, fluid in the lungs, the destruction of red blood cells, and damage to the mucous membrane and upper respiratory tract.
- Research by the US-based National Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides shows that residues of glyphosate, Roundup's main ingredient, remain active in the soil and have

been found in lettuce, carrots and barley one year after treatment.

- Roundup kills 'weeds' and insects, destroying the food chain and thus devastating whole eco-systems. In Britain, intensive farming, encouraged by CAP farm subsidies, has already reduced parts of the countryside to sterile dustbowls, with an appalling effect on the populations of small mammals, ground-feeding birds and songbirds.
- Organically grown crops, or at least those that are not genetically modified, are at risk from cross-pollination. Field trials have been allowed with barely any environmental safeguards. Even Michael Meacher thought that the barrier around GM crops ought to be six miles. The current limit is 200 metres!
- If Monsanto is allowed to penetrate Third World markets with Roundup Ready soya and cotton, the result will be environmental damage due to the increased use of pesticides. The destruction of 'weeds' will increase soil erosion, and destroy the biodiversity on which the rural poor, especially women, rely for food, animal fodder and medicines.

Last but not least, the introduction of these products is enabling Monsanto to increase its control over farmers. For thousands of years, farmers have saved some of their seeds to replant the following year. But when Monsanto sells a bag of Roundup Ready seed, it charges the farmer a 'technology fee' and makes him or her sign an agreement not to use any of the harvested crop as seed for the next year. These agreements are enforced by Pinkerton detectives and legal action.

An even more sinister development is 'Terminator Technology'. Already tested on cotton and tobacco, it closes off the 'saving seeds' loophole. Put simply, it is a genetically engineered suicide mechanism that makes the next genera-

tion of seeds sterile. This is the key to forcing patented seed products onto farmers – they have to keep going back to the companies for more. Delta and Pine Land Company, which first patented what it calls its ‘Technological Protection System’, has boasted that it will make it ‘economically safe’ to sell its seed products in Asia, Africa and Latin America, thus locking farmers into a chemical-corporate treadmill.

Vandana Shiva, the Indian environmental activist, has identified the activities of Monsanto as the latest wave of colonisation of the South by the North: the biotech companies ‘discover’ the properties of key medicinal or food plants, utilised over hundreds or even thousands of years by farmers. Samples are then taken back to a laboratory in Illinois, men in white coats then ‘invent’ them on behalf of their company, and a patent is obtained giving the company rights and royalties so that it can sell it back to where it came from.

The legal framework for this biopiracy is the free trade regime established by the World Trade Organisation. The only thing that is ‘free’ about it is the almost absolute freedom it affords multinationals, particularly US-based multinationals, to exploit, to destroy the environment, and to push their products onto people who do not want them, cannot afford them or would be better off without them. (The same ‘free trade’ makes it illegal for the EU to refuse to import US beef, which contains a carcinogenic growth hormone, or to refuse to import bananas grown by US multinationals.) The revolving door between the board room and government means that elected governments are easy prey for corporate lobbyists. Clinton and Blair are, of course, free trade fundamentalists and, with a few exceptions, Labour MPs treat the ‘global economy’ as a force of nature. It has been left to the all-party environmental audit committee to accuse the government, and in particular Blair and Cunningham, of putting the interests of multinational companies before health and environmental concerns.

The predatory activities of the biotech companies and their friends in government are impossible to ignore. Its not just a question of consumer choice, or of scanning the list of ingredients and

asking ‘Do I eat this food or not?’ Our food supplies are being altered, possibly irrevocably, using a technology which is new and unpredictable, by corporations which oppose every attempt to label products as containing GM ingredients and which ‘hide’ GM ingredients in processed food. This is being carried out at an appalling environmental cost, and an incalculable cost to the rural communities of Africa, Asia and Latin America, in the name of ‘free trade’, backed by a Labour government.

However, one big question remains, or rather, several closely related questions. Isn’t this ‘progress’, and if it is, should we in Britain oppose on environmental grounds something which might stop people starving? Whether it is ‘progress’ or not depends on whether you believe Monsanto’s propaganda that biotechnology will make food shortages a thing of the past: ‘Let the Harvest Begin’. Nailing the myth that environmental struggles are a self-indulgence for middle-class people in wealthy countries, the farmers of India have shown that, unlike Tony Blair and Jack Cunningham, they do not believe Monsanto’s propaganda. In August last year the Monsanto Quit India movement was launched. Supported by the Karnataka State Farmers’ Association (which represents ten million farmers), and other farmers’ and grassroots organisations, it has organised burnings, or ‘cremations’, of test crops of GM cotton. Demonstrations have called for the Indian government to ban testing, change the law to prevent the patenting of basic crop varieties, and ban Monsanto from the country altogether. The state government of Andhra Pradesh has now ordered that the seven trials in operation there be abandoned.

Of course, we do not idealise the situation of farmers reliant on backward or inefficient agricultural techniques. Monsanto says that biotechnology is the key to increasing food supplies, but food ‘shortages’ are caused mainly by the economic system, by the production and distribution of food for profit, and by the activities of companies like Monsanto. An alternative to the status quo *and* to Monsanto’s sorcery could be agricultural credit banks, under democratic farmers’ control, which could provide interest-

free loans to help farmers buy seed, machinery and safe fertiliser, and so increase efficiency, yields and quality.

The biotech companies argue that their products represent agricultural progress in the same way that the hybridisation of different strains of cereals or vegetables has over the last five thousand years. But GM technology is a new and unpredictable departure; there is a big difference between a hybrid of two strains of wheat, and splicing the DNA of a potato with the DNA of beans or snowdrops. This, allied to Monsanto’s lust for profits, means that the process of discovering how safe GM food is will produce casualties. Of what kind, and how many, we cannot know.

Earlier in the century, Marxists predicted that capitalism would ultimately constitute a fetter on the development of the forces of production. Yet despite three world recessions and the economic collapse in the Far East, genetic engineering is just one area where the rate of development over the last 25 years has been phenomenal. The development of GM food means that the cutting edge of that development is being pitted against third world farmers whose methods and social relations, in many cases, pre-date capitalism. It was in relation to India that Marx recognised that capitalist exploitation by Britain, although extremely brutal, was ultimately progressive. While early, mercantile, capitalism only exploited and destroyed, industrial capitalism exploited but also *transformed*:

‘But the more the industrial interest became dependent on the Indian market, the more it felt the necessity of creating fresh productive powers in India, after having ruined her native industry. You cannot continue to inundate a country with your manufactures, unless you enable it to give you some produce in return.’¹

‘All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is lay down the material premises for both.’² This might be used as a reason to cheer

on, albeit critically, the imposition of GM technology on, for example, India, in the name of 'progress'. But Marx was referring to the era when capitalism was, in historical terms, progressive. Now, capitalist economic relations exist everywhere in the world, often co-existing with pre-capitalist relations of production, and consequently this process of transformation has produced everywhere that force which has the potential to be capitalism's gravedigger – the working class. There is no 'progressive capitalism'. At the same time, capitalism is clearly not an *absolute* fetter on the development of the means of production, and many of the advances made in the past fifty years are of benefit to more than just a small elite. However, the use to which undeniable technological advances are primarily put is to service the interests of the directors and shareholders of US and European multinationals. The results are obvious: inequality, poverty, and recurring crisis. This points to the need for democratic workers' control of research and development into genetic and related technologies, for accountability of specialists and experts, and for a workers' and farmers' plan as to how, if at all, the results of this research can be put to best use.

More immediately, the day-to-day campaigning against GM foods has so far been undertaken by organisations such as Friends of the Earth, grouped together in the Genetic Engineering Alliance (GEA). There is a clear case for labour movement involvement. Workers' organisations should adopt the GEA's demand for a five-year freeze on the commercial growing, import and patenting of GM food and crops. Activists should work for solidarity with farmers in India and other countries threatened by Monsanto, and demand that the Labour government come clean on its links with the biotech companies.

1. K. Marx, 'The East India Company – Its History and Results', in *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin, 1973, pp.314-5.
2. K. Marx, 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', in *op. cit.*, p.323. **WA**

Swedish fascists in shoot-out with police

by Gustav Mowitz

On May 28, three men robbed a bank in a small town called Kisa, in the Östergötland region of central Sweden. As they drove away, they were involved in a shoot-out with police outside another small town called Malexander. In the exchange of fire two policemen were gunned down and one of the robbers was wounded. The wounded man, who left the car and was arrested, turned out to be Andreas Axelsson, a prominent figure in the National Socialist Front, the leading openly fascist grouping in Sweden.

The NSF distributes 'Blood and Honour' magazines and records in Sweden and is linked to the British fascist group Combat 18. During the ongoing 'civil war' among nazis around the world following the ousting of C18 leader Charlie Sargent, who is now in jail, the NSF has allied itself with those who continue to call themselves C18. The other main nazi group in Sweden, Nordland, supports the other side of the C18 split. In the past, NSF members have been imprisoned for a range of crimes including murder, arson, drug-dealing, kidnapping and physical abuse.

On May 31, another of the robbers, Jackie Arklöf, was wounded and captured in circumstances that led to questions being asked about the conduct of the police. Apparently, Arklöf was lying on the ground with his arms stretched above his head when he was shot.

Arklöf is also a member of the NSF, and one of the most violent and despicable Swedish fascists ever, despite being of mixed race – his mother is Liberian, his father a white Briton, and he was adopted by a white Swedish couple. He was active as a mercenary during the Bosnian civil war on the Croat side, and was sen-

tenced to 13 years in prison for war crimes, having tortured many people to death. He was allowed to serve his sentence in Sweden, where he successfully demanded a retrial and was then freed on the grounds of lack of evidence. Arklöf's adoptive father showed the court letters and 'trophies' (blood-stained uniforms of Serbs and Muslims) sent to him by his son. He agreed that Arklöf was guilty but claimed that 'he would be a good kid if he could just get rid of those stupid nazi ideas'.

The third member of the gang, Tony Olsson, fled the country for Costa Rica, where the authorities initially refused to hand him over. According to the newspaper *Aftonbladet*, Olsson declared himself ready to surrender to Swedish police in Costa Rica, but only if his mother were present because he was afraid of getting shot. However, while Olsson's mother was packing her bags for a trip to Costa Rica courtesy of the paper – and accompanied by journalists, of course – the Costa Rican government decided to extradite her son. Interpol officers arrested Olsson in San José on June 6, although it is likely to be several weeks before the paperwork is completed and he is returned to Sweden. Olsson has already served time in prison for numerous crimes, among them being a hired assassin. He is also well known for having acted in a play directed by Lars Noréns called 7:3, in which Olsson and other nazi prisoners basically played themselves.

There have been dozens of NSF-inspired murders in Sweden in recent years. Anti-fascist commentators believe that this is the NSF's way of showing its British friends in C18 that it is 'serious', despite being a legal party that stands in elections, in order to remain the leading distributor of 'Blood and Honour' media in this country. **WA**

London bombings: fascists resort to desperate measures

by Charli Langford

After the sickening scramble by the various splintered organisations of the far right to claim responsibility for the Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho bombings, one man – David Copeland – has been arrested and there have been no subsequent bombings. This tells us something about the state of the fascist groups. It suggests that, while they probably approve of random bombing as a weapon against black and gay communities, they don't have the organising ability, the human resources, or the technical knowledge to maintain such a campaign.

It also suggests that the fascists are becoming more isolated. In the early 1990's the largest fascist organisation, the British National Party, spent a lot of effort trying to gain respectability and was able in September 1993 to take advantage of a low turnout in a council by-election in a poor white area of east London to bounce a member onto Tower Hamlets council. That is far less likely to happen now. Contrary to the view of many on the left, the fascists in Britain today are fringe groups.

That is not to say that they can safely be ignored. Marginalised fascist groups are far more likely to revert to the tactics they employed in the days when the courting of respectability was regarded with contempt. The street attack, the brick through the window, and the lighted petrol-doused rag through the letterbox are still threats to minority communities and left-wing and anti-racist activists. To that list we can now add sporadic bombings.

The *Mirror* on May 24 printed pictures of Copeland at a meeting with John Tyndall and other leading BNP members. Anti-fascist activists recognised him as an active member of the BNP's East London branch. Whether or not he is still a member of a fascist organisation, it is clear that he got his political ideas from them.

It also suggests that while he may have made and planted the bombs on his own, he almost certainly will have had look-outs and advice where to plant the devices from other fascists. The police claim that he was working alone is probably untrue.

Having found the going difficult enough under a succession of right-wing Tory governments since 1979, the election of New Labour in May 1997 marked a further downturn in the fascists' fortunes. No matter that Labour has failed so spectacularly to deliver on its promises, the landslide victory at the polls dealt a heavy blow to far right groups precisely because it was a rejection of the most reactionary, elitist and chauvinist aspects of Toryism in favour of liberalism and the defence of the welfare state. Recognising the realities of a multi-cultural Britain, Blair has proceeded to draw elements of the black leadership into his project to shift the mainstream of politics to the centre – the jet-propelled rightward evolution of Paul Boateng is a case in point. A black and Asian bourgeoisie is rising and must be embraced, if only to help police the black and Asian working class.

This new-found 'tolerance' was on show following the release of the report on the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which condemned the police for their 'institutionalised racism'. For several weeks in March and April, an evening's television viewing wasn't complete unless there had been an appearance by some police chief announcing how tough his officers were going to be on racism in the future. These ritual performances resembled a series of Road to Damascus style conversions, but what is driving the reforms is a Home Office instruction that the police have to gain some confidence in the eyes of the black communities.

There have been similar developments with regard to the gay community, fuelled partly by a greater tolerance of gays within the government and the La-

bour Party. Once again, this reflects changes of attitude in society, changes that are now – belatedly, partially and very grudgingly – being recognised by the institutions of the state.

On the crucial question of immigration control, however, New Labour is repositioning itself to the right, and this is likely to prove another factor in the decline of the fascist groups. If it is passed unamended, the Immigration and Asylum bill currently before parliament will make it even more difficult for refugees to claim asylum, reinforcing the racists' view that immigrants pose a threat to British society and are not welcome here. Why vote for a tiny fascist group when the government promises to carry out similar policies?

At present, therefore, anti-racist activists should concentrate on the battle against the Asylum bill and the various individual campaigns for justice or against deportation, while remaining alert to the danger of further attacks and mobilising against the fascists whenever they put in a public appearance. **WA**

Tories to join fascists?

The Independent (June 7) reported on talks between British Tories and the Italian Alleanza Nazionale (AN) of Gianfranco Fini and Alessandra Mussolini, grand-daughter of *Il duce*. AN, which describes itself as 'post-fascist', is looking for more credibility than its current ally, the French Front Nationale, can supply while the Tories are moving rightward from the 'federalist' European People's Party which supports the single currency, tax harmonisation and faster European political integration. Claiming that the talks were with senior members of the Tory party, not just backbenchers, AN say 'We want to say who they are, but they don't want us to'. **WA**

Debate

As part of an ongoing critical assessment of the theoretical legacy bequeathed by Trotsky and the theory and practice of 'post-Trotsky Trotskyism', we published an article in *Workers Action No.5* called 'Waiting for the Big One: Catastrophism and the Transitional Programme'. Below, we print a response to the article, followed by a reply from its author

Build on the strengths of the Transitional Programme!

by G.S. Usher

In attempting to separate out Trotsky's politics from those of the Old Man's epigones (the 'post-Trotsky Trotskyists'), comrade Davies does ask a pertinent question or two. For instance, Davies, in citing an earlier article on the question of the Transitional Programme (TP) by Richard Price,¹ points out against the 'post-Trotsky Trotskyists' that Trotsky's greatest strength in the TP was the transitional method, which 'links the struggles of the present with the need of the working class to challenge its existing leadership and advance from its present level of consciousness'.² Unfortunately, it is not stated where this workers' consciousness should advance to. Trotsky himself was rather more explicit here:

'It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.'³

A joint slip of the pen on the part of comrades Davies and Price perhaps?⁴

Davies does make the correct point that perspectival problems surrounding how the TP should be applied today rest not with Trotsky but with the 'Trotskyists'. However, Davies's particularly one-sided and negative appraisal of the political situation at the time of the final draft of the TP – 1938 – causes him to resort to sophistry as he sneers at Trotsky's description of what American workers were doing in this period. (For example, 'the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history' is haughtily dismissed by Davies as 'crude determinism'.)

There is nothing wrong with highlighting the instinctive strivings of any group of workers acting as a *class* for themselves. Moreover, the *additional, necessary prerequisite*, i.e., the *subjective* factor in the form of the revolutionary party, was, at the time of the final draft of the TP, being founded on the back of the successful militant struggles of US workers which Davies actually describes. Certainly, there were important set-backs suffered by the European working class during this period – but how Davies can make no mention of the founding of the American Socialist Workers Party (actually not founded until 1938) and the Fourth International (FI) under the guid-

ance of the likes of Cannon, Shachtman and Trotsky himself is quite remarkable, not least when Davies recognises (albeit at other junctures in history) the important question of the respective roles of the *objective* and the *subjective* factors.

Similarly, to label half-sentences abstractly torn from Trotsky's overall text of the TP ('the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus' and 'the approaching historical wave will raise it [the Fourth International] on its crest') as 'crude determinism' conveniently ignores the fact that the great majority of the best active cadres of the FI were killed in the second imperialist war. To fail to acknowledge this, as Davies has done, is not only ahistoricism, it is also somewhat methodologically slovenly and politically vulgar.

If we look at the 'post-Trotsky Trotskyists' Davies is referring to, it is clear that a number of them (not just the Workers Revolutionary Party/*NewsLine*) have reduced the TP to some biblical text to be almost theologically trotted out verbatim, thus gutting one of Trotsky's most important political writings of its *living revolutionary essence*. As well as the barren sectarian treatment given to the TP (to the extent that the Old Man would have great difficulty recognising it), groups such as the British Militant/Socialist Party and the French Lutte Ouvrière have reduced the central concept of the revolutionary TP to a confused listing of radical *reformist* demands which may stand for a number of things – not least, proof that opportunism is still at large in the European labour movement. However, where the question of a revolutionary methodology is concerned, neither the sectarian nor the opportunist epigones of Trotsky have strengthened the revolutionary essence of the TP. So what of Davies?

Method

Davies is right to talk about the greatest strength of the TP being the transitional *method*. Unfortunately, at a time when clarity in political method and thought is needed, he only succeeds in clouding the issue. Whilst pointing out that part of the problem was Trotsky's 'empirical misassessment of events' due to the Old Man's isolation in Norway and Mexico after 1935 (where we are supposed to presume that there were no such things

as communication, newspapers and the class struggle!), Davies has no problem in quoting Gramsci favourably – and this when the latter had been forced to produce most of his own political writings from the *real* isolation of one of Mussolini's fascist prison cells.

Gramsci was undoubtedly a courageous leftist and a capable thinker to boot, yet even Davies talks of the need to heavily qualify Gramsci's criticism of Trotsky. So why bring in Gramsci in the first place when his main political contribution was the theory of cultural bourgeois hegemony – now chiefly used (or rather bowdlerised and distorted) by a veritable plethora of 'radical' bourgeois sociologists in an effort to rubbish Lenin's crucial writings in *The State and Revolution*? If Davies wants to 'rehabilitate' and defend Gramsci's legacy against the muddle-headed scribbblings of a small army of bourgeois sociologists who are largely holed up in the sterile world of academia – then by all means do! But quoting Gramsci's (heavily qualified) belief that Trotsky had not fully broken from the mechanical Marxism of the Second International doesn't really get us anywhere.

'Civil society'

Davies's remarks concerning the supposed strength of support amongst intellectuals and workers in eastern Europe also needs addressing. Is he seriously suggesting that the general concept of 'civil society' had never entered the head of a single person in eastern Europe before 1989? Has comrade Davies never heard of radical democratic pluralist eastern European writers such as Ferenc Féher, Agnes Heller or György Marküs, all of whom gave sections of the eastern European intelligentsia a decent 'head start' in such liberal bourgeois matters – if indeed such a milieu needed one! – well before 1989? When Davies talks of dialectics and mechanics as he does in his article, he has surely accommodated himself to the latter in this situation. And surely, by no stretch of the imagination can it be believed that the eastern European Stalinist censor machines were never breached by such ideas. Here, to simply blame the 'post-Trotsky Trotskyists', of whom Davies, after all is said and done, claims to be a part, will surely not do.

Furthermore, if we are to build on

the strengths of the TP and re-evaluate its weaknesses, where comrade Price correctly pointed to its lack of anything of real substance regarding questions such as special oppression (or social oppression – after all, what is so special about it?!), racism, united fronts in non-imperialist countries, etc, etc,⁵ why mention H. Ticktin, whom Davies, by implication, does not regard as having added anything to the development of Marxism? Here, rather than add anything to the discussion, Davies merely 'pads out' his article with the flabby, and largely meaningless, remarks of, in the case of Ticktin, an intellectual minnow with precious little, if anything, to offer militant workers.

Davies concludes his article with the

modest admission that it raises as many questions as it answers. Unfortunately, whilst he has raised some legitimate questions in terms of the need to re-elaborate the TP for the needs of an eve-of-millennium proletariat and peasantry greater in numbers than when the TP was drafted (something the LRCI made a serious attempt at in the late 1980s before, unfortunately, they began to make adaptations to the 'democratic' imperialists on some questions as the 1990s progressed), and in partially different conditions (although in the same *epoch*), Davies has, in attempting to offer 'a far more critical and questioning spirit', lumbered himself (and possibly Workers Action) with a document that provides *no* answers.

1. See R. Price, 'The Transitional Programme in Perspective', in *Workers Action* No.2 (April 1998).
2. N. Davies, 'Waiting for the Big One: Catastrophism and the Transitional Programme', in *Workers Action* No.5 (Nov/Dec 1998).
3. L.D. Trotsky, 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder, 1977, p.114. Emphasis in original.
4. Davies's position can be seen as a crafty, opportunist, sleight-of-hand attempt at smuggling out the essential cutting edge of Trotsky's argument. Price's own position is a little better grounded, if somewhat convoluted. See Price, op. cit.
5. See Price, op. cit.

Whistling in the dark

by Nick Davies

'Waiting for the Big One' sought to make three principal points. The first is that post-Trotsky Trotskyism is imbued with a millenarian catastrophism, with disastrous results for its attempts to interpret the world and to change it. The second is that this weakness does not arise solely from the inadequacies of Trotsky's epigones, but is derived from weaknesses in the Transitional Programme itself, namely a tendency towards determinism and, in turn, catastrophism. The third is that these weaknesses were not the result of an aberration on Trotsky's part, but were rooted in a method that was in evidence at least as far back as 1921. G.S.

Usher appears largely to agree with us on the first point (although the Trotsky-cults are easy targets for satire), disagree with us on the second point, and avoid grappling with the third point altogether. But look again at Trotsky's report to the third Comintern congress and, in particular, his scheme of the five distinct periods of capitalist development, stagnation and crisis.¹

His idea of the fifth period, beginning in 1914, as being the period of the destruction of the capitalist economy indicates an essentially teleological approach to history and politics, inherited from the Second International and, in turn, from Hegelianism. Trotsky's somewhat schematic periodisation, qualified in 1921, and apparently hardened by 1938, suggests that his break from the method-

suggests that his break from the methodology of the Second International was not decisive. If comrade Usher disagrees with us, then he should ask himself the following questions. If 1914 opens up the epoch of wars and revolutions, and the premise for revolution is the impossibility of further developing the productive forces, is the socialist revolution rendered impossible because of the subsequent development of the productive forces? Or does he deny that the productive forces have developed since 1914?

As for Gramsci, he is 'controversial' because of the use to which he has been put by Eurocommunists and bourgeois academics. What is surely not controversial, in most of Europe, as well as in North America and Australasia, is his assertion that the ruling class uses consent as well as coercion in order to rule, that it exercises a cultural hegemony as well as the rule of an armed body of men, and that therefore, in the West, a different revolutionary strategy is required from that in Russia:

'In Russia, the state was everything . . . in the West, when the state trembled, a sturdy structure was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.'²

The essential point to be made here is that socialist revolution is necessary, but not inevitable. The belief that it is both inevitable and straightforward is used as an excuse for not developing a strategy to achieve it.

Comrade Usher is whistling in the dark, frankly, if he regards our appraisal of the political situation in 1938 as one-sided and negative. Doesn't he connect the weakness of the European working class and the imperialists' preparations for war? The struggles in the USA held great potential,³ but by 1938 the heroic days of the CIO were over. Due to the misleadership of Reuther, Lewis and the Stalinists, there would be no break from the Democratic Party.⁴ Our appraisal was not of what might have developed over the course of the decade, but what confronted Trotsky in 1938.

Workers Action numbers 5 and 6 contain an admittedly brief assessment of the politics of the US Socialist Workers Party ('Revolutionary Socialism in the Belly of the Beast' and 'Fighting Against Catastrophism' respectively). The SWP's stubborn adherence after 1945 to Trotsky's

pre-war perspectives and its refusal to engage critically first with Shachtman and then with the Goldman-Morrow opposition suggest that it rapidly became part of the problem rather than the solution.

Comrade Usher's reference to the founding of the Fourth International is ambiguous. It is unclear whether he is referring to this event as an example of a positive aspect of the class struggle at that time, or as an example of the 'additional, necessary prerequisite, i.e., the subjective factor'. In any event, he is wrong. Trotsky never said that the conditions for the founding of the Fourth International were favourable. However, he believed the coming world war created an urgent need for a revolutionary pole of attraction, assuming that the Second World War and its immediate aftermath would be an approximate re-run of the first. On the other hand, in the midst of a profoundly unfavourable period, simply to proclaim the existence of an organisation and ascribe to it the operation of the 'subjective factor' seems an act of heroic but desperate voluntarism. Contrast this with the genesis of the Third International – the split in the Second International after the First World War would probably have taken place whether or not Lenin and Trotsky wanted it.

As for comrade Usher's accusations of 'ahistoricism' and worse, the rhetoric employed by Trotsky in the *Transitional Programme* would have been crudely deterministic had the pre-war Fourth International been ten times stronger than the group of quarrelling, self-referential sects which it largely was. This is not a slight on the personal courage of those militants who lived under or became victims of the Nazis or Stalinists, it is to say what was. They were not without ability, but they were few in number, and isolated from the labour movement. Regarding Trotsky's isolation after 1935, how otherwise could someone of his obvious intellectual powers and iron principle buy

the story that in Finland the invading Soviet Army was, by implication, implementing some sort of land reform by expropriating the big landlords?⁵ In fact, land reform had already been carried out in two phases: at the end of the nineteenth century, to benefit wealthier tenant farmers, and in 1921-22, when erstwhile landless labourers were the beneficiaries.

Now, to the question of the transitional method, and the 'bridge'. There is no joint slip of the pen here. In the present period, the 'bridge' cannot lead to the conquest of power, but it can lead to a higher level of consciousness. If, in the present very low level of class struggle, there is a response among rank-and-file workers to demands which link the struggle to defend jobs and living standards against New Labour to the need to defy the anti-union laws, to throw out the new realist trade union leaders and to turn the unions into fighting organisations rather than purveyors of credit cards, then that will be a great leap forward from where we are now. When the political consciousness of workers is low, it is an ultra-left fantasy to imagine that a set of demands *in itself* can form the bridge to the socialist revolution.

Finally, comrade Usher's footnote accuses 'Waiting for the Big One' of being 'a crafty, opportunist, sleight-of-hand attempt at smuggling out the essential cutting edge of Trotsky's argument'. Unfair! It attempts a critical reevaluation of an important document. It is, of course, incomplete, and others can improve on it. Comrade Usher is entitled to agree or not with it, without ascribing any ulterior motives of 'craftiness'. The cutting edge is not Trotsky's rhetoric, but the transitional method. Opportunist? Why? What to? Livingstone is supporting NATO's blitzkrieg on Yugoslavia because he wants to be Mayor of London. That's opportunism! Here the word is being used, as so often, as shorthand for something comrade Usher doesn't quite like the look of.

1. A detailed discussion of the 'Waves' theory, taken up in different ways by Kondratiev and Mandel, is obviously beyond the scope of this brief reply.
2. A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, p.238.
3. Comrade Usher's reference to the 'instinctive strivings of any group of workers acting as a class for themselves' seems odd. Doesn't acting in this way require more than just 'instinct'?
4. In fact, in the 1940 election, Lewis endorsed the Republican candidate, Wendell Wilkie!
5. L.D. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, 1981, p.57.

Marxism and the problem of productive forces determinism

A critique of catastrophism

by Jonathan Joseph

This article tries to address some of the problems that are clearly apparent on the left in its understanding of economic crisis, revolutionary conditions and, more generally, basic historical materialist analysis. These problems became very clear during the economic crises of 1998 when whole sections of the left were reduced to a crude catastrophism, claiming that the end was nigh, or at the very least, that a crash of 1929 proportions was about to be repeated. The majority of these leftists failed to back up their revolutionary proclamations with any kind of analysis. Despite claiming that 'Marx was right' very few of them referred to Marx's economic analysis or even bothered to read him. Their understanding of the situation was not informed by economic theory, but by political motivations which willed a revolutionary situation when no such possibility existed (with the exception of areas where the subjective factor was completely disorganised). These latter cases – like Russia and Indonesia – pose the further question, if a dramatic economic collapse occurs, does a revolutionary struggle automatically ensue? The answer is surely no, yet most of the left hails the news of economic crisis as the answer to all their prayers, as if it will solve all the problems of their years of insignificance. We therefore need to address the root problem of this kind of catastrophist approach to economics and politics (the belief that there will be a fatal collapse of capitalism followed by revolution). This lies in a simplistic, mechanical reading of Marx coupled with the frustration generated by years of isolation that the far left has suffered in most countries. The irony is that this same left claims that Lenin broke decisively with the mechanical politics of the Second International, and

Trotsky with Stalinism, while time and again it repeats these same errors when it tries to apply its own politics to the real world.

Trotsky's legacy

It is easy to condemn the fatalistic Marxism of the post-war Trotskyists as a product of their own peculiar fantasies and schemas. The eccentricities of Healy, Taaffe, Cliff et al lend themselves well to this conclusion. Unfortunately, however, we have to face up to the fact that a lot of post-Trotsky catastrophism owes a certain amount to Trotsky himself and the epochal analysis contained in the Transitional Programme. Having made this charge, we must, however, distinguish two aspects of the problem: first, any consideration of the specific political and historical context in which Trotsky was writing; and second, the tendency towards catastrophism and sweeping generalisations in Trotsky's work itself, problems which should not be hidden from view, but which should be compared with some of Trotsky's other, non-deterministic views.

The inter-war period described by Trotsky was indeed an uncertain period of booms and slumps, which included the dramatic Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Great Depression, a world slump in industrial production and mass unemployment. These economic conditions were accompanied by serious political upheavals including, most dramatically, the rise of fascism in Europe. However, Trotsky combined these factors to argue that capitalism itself – i.e., capitalism as an economic mode of production – had reached the end of the road. This is despite the fact that even at the time, periods of crisis were interspersed with periods of steep economic growth. In fact, during that period, industrial production *rose* by 80 per cent!¹

In hindsight, we can say that

things did not turn out as Trotsky predicted in the Transitional Programme. Capitalism had not reached the end of the road, but resolved the crisis of the period through class struggle, war and then post-war restructuring. Yet the Transitional Programme is entitled 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', wherein Trotsky argues: 'The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate'.²

The problem with Trotsky's analysis is this. He mistakes a period of serious economic and political uncertainty for the final death agony of capitalism. He equates the political phenomenon of fascism with the argument that, economically, capitalism has no answers – 'The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries where it has already been forced to stake everything upon the card of fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe.'³ His pronouncements on the death of capitalism as an economic system are driven by political (rather than economic) perspectives. He therefore addresses the problems of capitalism from a conjunctural rather than a longer-term perspective and from a political rather than an economic angle.

As a piece of socialist propaganda, an attempt to rally the masses into struggle, the Transitional Programme has few equals. As an outline of the method by which socialists can intervene into the class struggle, it is one of our seminal texts. But we should dispense with the view that this one pamphlet contains the essentials, not only for understanding today's period, but even for understanding the problems of Trotsky's day. In fact, the problems of analysis contained in the

Transitional Programme are not unique but are a common feature of these kinds of manifestos that attempt to combine propaganda for the masses with some kind of analysis of the period. Another example can be found in Marx and Engels.

The Communist Manifesto and the 1848 revolutions

Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto as a way of practically intervening into the existing workers' movements at a time of social upheaval. After a great economic crisis of 1847, they anticipated further convulsions, which would lead to a successful revolution in Germany.

The revolutions of 1848 actually turned out to be *bourgeois* revolutions that stabilised the political and economic system and led to massive economic growth. Marx and Engels admitted their mistake – the 1847 crisis was *a* crisis, not *the* crisis. They had absolutely incorrectly argued that the productive forces could not be further expanded. In his 1895 introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, Engels explains that when the February 1848 revolution broke out he and Marx thought that it would end in the final victory of the proletariat. However, he continues, 'History has proved us, and all who thought like us, wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the continent...'⁴

Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto as a rallying call, not for revolution as such, but for the organisation of a revolutionary organisation – the Communist League. Ninety years on, Trotsky's manifesto for the Fourth International was designed to do the same thing. History also repeated itself. Not only did socialist revolution fail to occur, but instead a new, even more stunning, post-war boom took place. Perhaps, therefore, it is time to stop premising the argument for socialism on the probability of economic collapse.

The Manifesto, although not the

most 'scientific' of Marx's writings, actually contains good arguments as to why capitalism cannot be expected to come to a complete standstill or point of permanent stagnation or decline. It argues that unlike feudalism and other former modes of production, capitalism is a dynamic system. The bourgeoisie cannot afford to stand still. It must constantly revolutionise the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and the whole relations of society. It also requires constantly expanding markets. In just 100 years, the Manifesto argues, capitalism has created more massive productive forces than all preceding generations put together.⁵

Therefore, if capitalism is to survive, it cannot allow the productive forces to stagnate. This is not to say that there is not a *tendency* within capitalism for the productive forces to stagnate. But capitalism has to find ways of overcoming this tendency if it is to survive just as a plane has to find a way of overcoming the law of gravity if it is to get off the ground. This helps explain the concrete *social* history of capitalism – not as the abstract development of economic laws, but as the concrete relations and struggles between capital and labour, between competing capitals, between different countries, between states and markets and so on. These attempt to overcome some of the inherent contradictions of capitalism and, let's face it, so far they have just about managed it. Until the wings drop off, we have to say that capitalism has been able to maintain enough thrust and dynamism to stay in the air.

Mandel and Post-Trotsky Trotskyism

The post-war Fourth International ludicrously continued to propagate Trotsky's theory of historical impasse. Mandel wrote that there was no reason to suppose that capitalism was about to stabilise while Healy argued that the revolutionary masses would surge towards the Labour Party.⁶ Meanwhile, anyone who dared question the theory of the impending collapse of capitalism was (with impeccable dialectical logic) declared a 'reformist'. The Haston-Grant majority leadership of the British RCP correctly opposed the line of the Fourth

International, but in almost total isolation.⁷

Geoff Hodgson's insightful if flawed book *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism* offers a good overview of the theoretical problems besetting Trotsky's heirs and correctly relates the positions of these comrades to their own insignificance in the workers' movement: 'The politics of waiting for the big capitalist crash are a manifestation of the isolation of the movement, and of its failures. The fatalistic hope for the big explosion to come reveals an incapacity to intervene effectively in the conditions of the present.'⁸

Perhaps the only post-Trotsky Trotskyist to make any significant theoretical contribution to Marxist economic theory at all was Ernest Mandel. Unfortunately, for all its sophistication, Mandel's work is still trapped in a mechanical viewpoint. Combine this with Mandel's use of Kondratiev's 'long wave' theory and we find that Mandel is in fact a step backwards from Trotsky – who criticised Kondratiev for attempting 'to invest epochs labelled by him as major cycles with the same "rigidly lawful rhythm" that is observable in minor cycles', leaving little room for the class struggle.

'The periodic recurrence of minor cycles [i.e., boom-depression-crisis – JJ] is conditioned by the internal dynamics of capitalist forces, and manifests itself always and everywhere once the market comes into existence. As regards the large segments of the capitalist curve of development (fifty years) which Professor Kondratiev incautiously proposes to designate also as cycles, their character and duration are determined not by the internal interplay of capitalist forces but by those external conditions through whose channel capitalist development flows. The acquisition by capitalism of new countries and continents, the discovery of new natural resources, and, in the wake of these, such major facts of "superstructural" order as wars and revolutions, determine the character and the replacement of ascending, stagnating, or declining epochs of capitalist development.'⁹

The correctness of Trotsky's point must be qualified, however, in that he seems

to limit these 'external conditions' to events of a very dramatic nature. The list could be extended to include, among other things, the effects of the class struggle and the various forms of state intervention in the economy such as nationalisation, privatisation, protectionism, deregulation, social spending, etc.

Mandel's argument is that capitalist development passes through long waves of some fifty years (decisive dates being the mid-nineteenth century, the 1890s and post-Second World War). They are described as 'revolutions in technology as a whole',¹⁰ progressively transforming the whole system of machines and therefore the social process of production too.¹¹

Mandel's approach takes productive forces determinism to a technologically driven extreme. Of course, developments in technology are a very important part of capitalist development – implicit in the need to revolutionise the means of production and to raise the productivity of labour. None of this is denied at all, but are developments in the technological means of production the *primary* aspect of modern history as productive forces determinism implies? Mandel states clearly that they are. We have:

– the long period from the end of the 19th century up to the crisis of 1847, characterised by . . . the handicraft made or manufacture made steam engine . . . the long wave of the industrial revolution itself.

– the long period . . . until . . . the 1890s, characterised by the machine made steam engine . . . the first technological revolution.

– the long period . . . to the Second World War, characterised by the general application of electric and combustion engines . . . the second technological revolution.

– the long period, beginning in North America in 1940 . . . characterised by the generalised control of machines by means of electronic apparatuses . . . the third technological revolution.¹²

Mandel is obviously right to point to these developments in production as very important. But surely it is ludicrous to make them the primary driving force

of history. Such a view leaves little room for class struggle. Undoubtedly the Industrial Revolution was a major event in capitalist development. But we also have to also ask, why did it occur, and why did it occur in Britain first? The view that developments in productive forces determine political events cannot answer these questions. It does not allow for the crucial role of political events like the English Civil War or the Enclosure Acts, which surely played some role in facilitating economic developments.

Likewise, did the post-war period described as late capitalism result in electronic machines taking over industry and reorganising it? Or are these developments in technology part of the overall reorganisation of production? These would include, not only technological developments, but various production line techniques, new managerial structures and wider social features like incorporating social provision and leisure time into work, co-opting trade unions in the workplace, pay-bargaining and so on. As a point of fact, these features, commonly described as Fordism, and its predecessor, Taylorism, started in the US well before the 1940s. And it is virtually impossible to give an asocial description of them. Yet this is what we would have to do if we accept the theory that productive forces have historical primacy and that social relations are basically determined by them.

Mandel's *Late Capitalism* has a historical schema based on productive forces determinism. The title itself implies that capitalism passes through certain definite stages and that it has now reached its last stage. This is all predetermined for us, although why this period should be *late* capitalism is never made clear or backed up with any evidence.

Mandel's schematic view of history minimises the role of politics and class struggle. History is a sequence of technological, not social, developments. Even Mandel has to start adding some political factors to his analysis. Therefore, the history since 1945 is that of a long wave with an expansive rate of profit, based on a weakening of the working class by fascism and the Sec-

ond World War.¹³ This is a slight step forwards although it is still very general. It is true to say that the post-war boom was dependent on the mass destruction of capital caused by the Second World War. But even if this laid the basis for the post-war boom, it could only have been developed through the active role of politics, class struggle and the state. But instead of analysing these, Mandel continues to argue that the spheres of production and accumulation have become largely 'technicised' and self-regulating,¹⁴ and that the post-war boom is based on developments in these areas rather than anything more social.

Base and superstructure, forces and relations

The crude versions of Marxism employed by the far left extend out of all proportions the metaphor Marx uses about society having an economic 'base' and a political and ideological 'superstructure'.

Production itself entails a whole range of social relations that are not *purely* economic – education, training, law, the family. With production comes surplus product and this in turn entails social relations of appropriation and distribution. These, in turn, have an eminently political character and affect all aspects of the society. It therefore makes no sense to see the economic base and political superstructure, or the forces of production and relations of production, as separate things except on occasions when a more abstract analysis of specific social relations is required. Even on these occasions, it is always necessary to return to the socially concrete. Thus Marx's labour theory of value identifies labour power as the only commodity capable of producing surplus value, but while this is stated in the abstract, Marx then goes on to talk of *socially* necessary abstract labour – i.e., labour that includes such things as subsistence, training and so on.

Instead of conceiving of society as having two levels – a determining economic base and a determined political/ideological superstructure, we need a more complex model based on numerous levels, structures or relations. This does not undermine the primacy of the

economic mode of production, but it sees it in a more complex set of relationships with other social structures.

For example, is it really possible to fit our understanding of social structures and relations such as patriarchy, race or nation into a simple base/superstructure model? To say that patriarchy belongs to the superstructure and is determined by the economic base is the worst kind of economic reductionism as practised by groups like the SWP. At the same time though, we know that patriarchal relations (which cannot be reduced to capitalist relations) are nevertheless hugely determined by the capitalist form of property relations. This should indicate that it is possible to view society as more socially diverse and structurally complex than the base/superstructure model allows, while not abandoning the Marxist stress on the primacy of economic relations and the mode of production.

Likewise, if the distinction between economic base and political superstructure causes problems, then so too does the attempt to absolutely separate forces of production and relations of production. Yet this is what is done when Marx and subsequent leftists claim that:

'At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of a society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.'¹⁵

The problem with such statements is that they imply that forces and relations are indeed two entirely separable spheres. In reality, there is no way that forces and relations can be separated like this. A simple question poses the problem here – what are the productive forces? Lumps of matter or raw materials? Complicated bits of metal or machines? Biological organisms or human labour? Lots of noise and smoke or factories? And further, what do these humans, machines and factories do? They do not simply operate, not even to make profit at all costs. There are social considerations and intentions behind them. Is it not precisely this social form that makes them means of production, rather than lumps of inanimate material?

Again, in *The German Ideology* Marx writes:

'In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money)'¹⁶

The most striking thing about statements like this is how general they are. It would be very hard indeed to pinpoint the 'stage' at which money and machinery come into being and cause their mischief. They are an inherent part of the capitalist system. And while they cause contradictions (e.g., machinery is linked to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall) they also advance capitalism and facilitate further capital accumulation. And in any case, is money a productive force in the sense of being a 'thing'? Surely the point of Marx's later analysis of capital is to show that money and other commodities are not mere 'things' but are social relations.

A key aspect of a productive force such as a machine is the purpose that society intends to use it for. To separate it from social relations is to reduce it to an inanimate 'object'. Indeed, not only do leftists do this, they imply that these inanimate, asocial things have an autonomous law of development through the ages, but unfortunately society gets in the way of them developing and fetters them so that they stagnate.

The theory that after a certain stage of capitalist development the productive forces stagnate relies on a mechanical theory of development and a simplistic division of the world into productive forces and productive relations, and base and superstructure. In fact, this picture of the world is very similar to that of Stalin and renegades of the Second International like Plekhanov who argue that history passes through very definite stages, based upon the development of the economic base in a rigid base-up structure. It gives productive forces primacy over social relations, arguing that the main historical role of these relations is to act as fetters to further development. If today's leftists really want to defend the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky, they should begin by throwing out this kind of mechanical materialism.

The idea that the social relations fetter the forces of production gives the false

impression that there is some kind of autonomous logic to the development of the productive forces that can be separated from social relations. These forces of production develop in an autonomous way, only later coming up against social relations again, when they outgrow them. The reality is that productive forces are nothing outside of their socially organised form. Capitalism is different from feudalism not because it has different productive forces, but because it has different social relations that have developed these productive forces. And different phases of capitalist development occur, not because of revolutions in technology, but because of the wider social conditions within which these advances occur. We can still say that massive technological advances occur under capitalism because intrinsically capitalism is required to revolutionise the means of production. But how this occurs is a social matter, and social events will have a decisive impact on how technology develops.

But is it in Marx?

The majority of problems concerning these problems stem from a particular reading of the above quoted work, Marx's 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. As well as the fettering quote, Marx writes about the economic foundation of society and its economic and legal superstructure. He continues: 'No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the old society.'¹⁷

This viewpoint is uncritically adopted by the 'Trotskyist' left despite the fact that it is one of Trotsky's main theories that contradicts this most strongly! Surely the theories of combined and uneven development and permanent revolution stress that workers' revolutions can take place *prior* to the full maturing of bourgeois society, before material conditions have fully developed?

These passages from the 'Preface' also produce another error. As well as saying that the productive forces must have *fully* developed before revolution can take

place, they also lead to the view held on the left that if revolution can take place, then the development of the productive forces can no longer take place. Therefore if 1914 opens up the era of 'wars and revolutions', this must mean that, from then on, the productive forces can only stagnate!

The 1859 'Preface' replaced the more sophisticated 1857 'Introduction' (which can now be found collected in the *Grundrisse*. This change was because Marx considered it 'confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated',¹⁸ although getting the work past the censor also played its part. Today the far left virtually ignores the original 'Introduction', the *Grundrisse*, *Capital* or anything else. By contrast, the over-simplified and schematic 'Preface' enjoys a significance way beyond its meagre four and a half pages.

There is no point denying that Marx's work contains mechanical interpretations of history. They are there for all to see. The real question is whether it is possible to sustain a Marxist theory of society and history without the mechanical element.

A simple (but time-consuming) test might help answer this question. Start reading page 1 of *Capital* Volume 1 and stop when you come to a passage on the conflict between forces and relations of production. It is fair to say that such sweeping statements are entirely missing from the historical application of Marx's method in *Capital*. Yet no one complains that *Capital* is wrong because it does not refer to this essential matter.

In the few lines where it is discussed, Marx's formulation is more acceptable. The generalisations of the 'Preface' are gone, replaced by an emphasis on the historically specific and the conjunctural:

'Once a certain level of maturity is attained, the particular historical form is shed and makes way for a higher form. The sign that the moment of such a crisis has arrived is that the contradiction and antithesis between, on the one hand, the relations of distribution, hence also the specific historical form of relations of production corresponding to them, and, on the other hand, the productive forces, productivity, and the development of its agents, gains in

breadth and depth. A conflict then sets in between the material development of production and its social form.'¹⁹

In terms of how to read these statements, the fettering statement from the 'Preface' cannot but be read in a deterministic way – the mechanical development of the forces of production comes into conflict with social relations. The passage from *Capital*, however, mentions agents, productivity and distribution. Within this passage it is possible, for example, to see class struggle as shaping the process of history. The view of the 'Preface' is that the process determines class struggle.

The stagnation thesis

One of the odd things about the stagnation thesis is that it takes as its starting point (usually 1914) a *political* event – the outbreak of the First World War. Sometimes the starting point is taken to be the 'epoch of imperialism', which according to Lenin began in the 1890s. Yet this epoch is also defined by a number of dynamic changes within capitalism, taking it to a new and 'higher' stage. This cannot be squared with stagnation, unless imperialism was dynamic for a maximum of two decades and has subsequently suffered eight and a half decades of stagnation.

Defenders of the stagnation thesis usually attempt to turn the tables by claiming (often without justification) that if you doubt their position on the productive forces you must to some extent or other hold that capitalism still has a politically progressive role to play. If this position means anything, it presumably means that the expansion of the productive forces must be linked to a politically progressive regime within capitalism. Why?

In fact it is riddled with contradictions. Was capitalism politically progressive up to the point where it began stagnating? This means that the development of imperialism was progressive! While apparently believing – at least negatively – that a growth of productive forces must be allied to a progressive political regime, the productive forces determinist now predicts more and more repressive regimes (as typified by the Healyite tradition). This in turn is held to be the hallmark of . . . revolutionary optimism! 'Pessimism' on the other hand is a

belief that the world is not about to end!! (Food for thought!)

There is no empirical justification for the thesis that the productive forces have stagnated. As the appendix on GDP shows, total GDP for OECD countries has risen dramatically in the so-called highest or late phase of capitalism (i.e., the 'sick' phase of stagnation and decline). In 1900, the total was \$603,134 million. By 1913, it was \$881,343 million. For those determinists who are unable to think independently and rely on the great works of Lenin, 1914 is often taken to be the end point of growth. Not so! By 1950, the GDP figures had more than doubled to \$1,950,315 million!

Undaunted by this, the stagnation theorist turns to the great works of Trotsky. Surely, by 1938, humanity stood on a precipice? The highest point of capitalist development had been reached. From now on, only stagnation was possible.²⁰ People still argue this today and it is true, of course. Unless you look at the figures which show a rise of more than 175 per cent to \$5,459,168 million by 1973! Surely there is some way out of this nonsense. Surely the post-war boom was only a temporary aberration, capitalism's final long wave. Everyone knows that since 1973, the world economy has been in crisis. But not in crisis enough to stop GDP rising to \$7,759,337 million.

Perhaps this helps show the foolishness of trying to claim that at a certain point in history the productive relations fetter the growth of productive forces so that only stagnation can ensue. Those who cling to this formula first tried 1914, then 1938, then 1973 and the end of the post-war boom; they keep getting it wrong because it is not possible to say that at a certain point stagnation occurs. There is no scientific reasoning to this statement; it is a schema left over from Hegel's theory of history.

Confronted with this reality, an attempt is often made to switch the argument to a moral one. Mandel quite rightly argues that the hallmark of late capitalism is not a decline in the forces of production: 'In absolute terms, there has been a more rapid increase in the forces of production . . . than ever before.' This growth can be measured by figures for physical output or productive capacity, and those for the size of the industrial pro-

letariat.²¹ However, he still tries to cling to the spirit of the stagnation thesis by claiming that the real measure of decay is the parasitism and waste accompanying this growth.²²

Mandel says that: 'The idea that the epoch of the structural crisis of capitalism . . . should somehow be characterised by an absolute decline or at least an absolute stagnation of the forces of production goes back to a false and mechanical interpretation of a sentence from Marx's famous "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* . . . in which he gave the most summary sketch of the theory of historical materialism.'²³

He then turns this into a moral argument against capitalism. Actual facts obviously do not allow us to defend the theory that the productive forces have stagnated. What Marx's statement really means, says Mandel, is that 'capitalist society has developed all the productive forces "for which it is sufficient" . . . It means only that from this epoch on, the forces of production which are further developed will conflict ever more intensely with the existing mode of production and tend towards its overthrow'.²⁴

Mandel's talk of 'absolute' stagnation is revealing. Of course the productive forces have not declined in absolute (i.e., real) terms, but there is implied some other sort of stagnation, a stagnation, if not of quantity, then of quality. The question is, how do you measure this? Was early capitalism really less wasteful and more humane? Not for those who worked in the factories for 12 hours a day or who died from breathing in coal dust. Millions do starve in the Third World today, but they were hardly treated well by the British or other colonial forces. The way that Mandel and others have tried to salvage something of the stagnation theory by turning it into a moral statement that society is qualitatively worse really does not help us at all, especially if we are trying to win over workers in the west who own cars and electrical goods and go on foreign holidays.

Politics and economics

These confusions stem from an inability to distinguish politics from economics. This is a particular problem when the left

attempts to use the classical Marxist literature on imperialism.

In Lenin, Bukharin, Hilferding and others, imperialism is seen as the era of a) monopoly capitalism, b) finance capital, and c) overseas conquests and inter-imperialist rivalry. As economic conditions develop, the political picture becomes one of states becoming integrated with monopoly capital, of competition transferring from the national to the international arena, of tariff walls existing between states and of capital seeking an expansion of national boundaries through colonial conquest, and consequently of inter-imperialist rivalries which lead inevitably towards war.

The problem with analysing this material is that it comes from a particular *period*. We cannot say that exactly this situation exists today. For example, today's imperialism does not have the same level of tariff barriers, something that was seen in the early part of this century as a central aspect of imperialism. Direct colonial conquest is clearly no longer the means by which states attempt to overcome the limits of their territorial boundaries. The extent to which we can talk of 'state monopoly capitalism' is questionable.

Such arguments were central to the view held by Lenin and others that imperialist rivalries lead to international conflict and war. This view is not being questioned. But is it correct for today's leftists to argue that imperialism plus crisis equals war, when imperialism has different characteristics – most notably a shift away from direct forms of colonial occupation, a less nationally based capitalism (multinationals, deregulated markets, etc.), and the huge threat posed to all humanity (ruling class included) by modern warfare and so on?

Today's leftists talk about imperialism without clearly defining what it is. The classical definition of monopoly capitalism, the dominance of finance capital and inter-imperialist rivalry, gives us some kind of framework, but the content that is then given to this is drawn from Lenin's description of the imperialism *of his time*. When it comes to updating this, confusion reigns – is it a new period, a new epoch, what is globalisation, etc?

This suggests a serious confusion over the economic and political aspects

of imperialism. Is it the dominance of finance capital, or military aggression? When we talk of the struggle against imperialism is this the struggle against military aggression or multinational dominance? If it is both, then does this mean we have state monopoly capitalism – i.e., the state's military apparatus as a direct tool of the multinationals? When we defend Iraq against imperialism, are we defending it against Belgium or against Toyota?

The post-war Trotskyists failed to see that economic and political factors were combined in Lenin and Trotsky's views on imperialism. They confused the imperialism *of that period* with imperialism in general. The periodic aspect of imperialism – colonial conquest and war – was turned into an epochal aspect. Consequently the political catastrophes of that period of imperialism became characteristic of the entire imperialist epoch. They failed to see that war, through the mass destruction of capital, could create the conditions for economic revival. Instead, imperialist rivalries could only ever lead to war and crisis, political instability, Bonapartism, and fascism, and this in turn made the conditions ripe for socialist revolution. Somehow, this does not seem to explain today's imperialism very well.

Finally, we need to start distinguishing the development of imperialism, not only historically but also geographically. While post-war imperialism has brought expansion and a growth in the 'productive forces', this has been based on the exploitation of different parts of the world. In many areas production and living standards are below the level at the turn of the century. Side by side with this there may be factories producing cheap materials for western multinationals. Social relations exist on a world scale and affect not only the development of the productive forces, but also how they are distributed.

So what are we saying?

We are arguing two quite straightforward points.

1) Models based on simple oppositions like base/superstructure and forces/relations of production are simplifications used by Marx to get his point across in a popular way about fundamental contra-

dictions in society. However, they cannot provide the basis for an adequate examination of the complex features of capitalist development or crisis.

2) We should stop using statements like 'the social relations fetter the development of the productive forces' to the point where 'the productive forces can only stagnate', implying that no further development of capitalism is possible and that the world is ripe for revolution. Not only is this theoretically questionable, it is demonstratively false empirically. Productive forces have not been stagnating since 1914.

Does that mean we reject Marx's writings? Absolutely not! We are simply insisting that economic processes need to be seen in their actual social context and cannot be viewed in isolation or according to some definite, worked out schema.

We can continue to defend and develop the main points of Marx's analysis. This includes the central notion that capitalism, as a system, contains essential, internal contradictions, both in how it is organised and how it functions. Competition leads to innovation, which in turn leads to an increased proportion of capital spent on machinery and constant capital rather than labour (variable capital). Since labour power is the source of value, there is a tendency of the rate of profit to drop. This is something intrinsic about capitalism that we should stand by (and which is wrongly rejected, for instance, by Geoff Hodgson).

However, if we are to remain true to Marx we should see the falling rate of profit as a *tendency* and not an iron law. While the process is analysed by Marx in the abstract – i.e., as a mechanism operating in isolation – in the concrete world, the tendency operates alongside other tendencies and processes which may (temporarily) offset it. For example, competition forces innovation, thus increasing the proportion of constant capital in relation to variable capital (rising organic composition of capital). But what happens when there are monopoly conditions, or when that industry/company is nationalised and held by the state? Clearly these concrete conditions affect how we understand an abstract law.

Above all, our stress has to be on the *social conditions* under which capitalism operates and from which it is

inseparable. Capitalism does have inherent tendencies towards crisis, but we should not therefore expect some sort of catastrophic breakdown to unfold. Often there will be catastrophes, but these will be socio-political ones that attempt to resolve the economic problems – most dramatically things like wars and fascism. The Second World War should show that capitalism did not reach a standstill but, through the mass destruction of capital, regrouped and rebuilt, organising capitalist relations on a new, more integrated basis (state regulation of markets and capital, welfare systems, the rise of social democracy, etc.).

Of course there can be a complete breakdown of state authority leading to economic anarchy, e.g., Somalia in the mid-'90s. But this was a structural collapse within a given state, not a generalised economic collapse.

If we deny that capitalist relations have an essentially social rather than economic character, then we effectively give up on class struggle. We are reduced to saying that capitalism has an autonomous economic logic and at best, all we can do is take advantage of the breakdown when it occurs. Our view is that we ourselves have to make the breakdown happen, and that this breakdown will involve a crisis of social and political legitimisation.

Trotskyists advocate the end of history!

The right-wing philosopher Francis Fukuyama made a name for himself in 1992 by announcing that with the US victory in the Cold War, the capitalist model had triumphed and that therefore it was legitimate to talk about 'the end of history'.²⁵

This message obviously appals the left. But ironically Fukuyama is like an unwanted sibling who, like many of the Trotskyists, has been brought up by his Hegelian grandparents.

From Hegel and his mechanical Marxist son most of the left has inherited a schematic view of history, a mechanistic view of the relation between economy and society, and a catastrophist theory of capitalist breakdown. We have argued that this *objectivism* concentrates on the forces of production at the expense of politics, class struggle and the 'subjective' factor.

However, this does not square with the voluntarism and subjectivism of much of the left, which in fact takes its lead from Trotsky. It still holds the mechanical view that history is determined by the development of the productive forces, but that since 1914-38 (!) these have stagnated. Therefore, since 1914-38 the state of the productive forces graciously allows for revolution. Once this is allowed, the subjectivist viewpoint can take over. Or as the Transitional Programme puts it: 'The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition . . . Mankind's productive forces stagnate.' And owing to this objective situation, the emphasis can be placed on voluntarism: 'The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.'²⁶

The far left has been trapped into a view of history that is not all that different from Fukuyama's. Whereas Fukuyama argues that the collapse of Stalinism and the 'triumph' of capitalism means that *all* history has come to an end, most of the left holds the view that *capitalist* history came to an end once the productive forces started to stagnate in the early part of this century.

It sees no further progress for capitalism, only decay. The mechanics of development have run their course; from now on everything stagnates. The objective conditions are ripe; all that is missing is the subjective factor. Most of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists have declared the end of history and are waiting to play their allotted role.

Unfortunately capitalist history has decided otherwise. It is not the productive forces that have stagnated but 'Trotskyist' theory. And it is not the world economy that is in crisis but the small forces of the left.

The notion of the end of history is a smug right-wing lie. However, the Trotskyist theory of economic stagnation is also a lie and, worse still, it is spread by those who cannot afford to be smug.

This is not a time to despair, but it is a time to do some serious rethinking in order to rid ourselves of useless dogma. The current crisis is *our* crisis and as capitalism continues to exist, we have to ask ourselves, can we prevent the end of Trotskyism?

Appendix

Total GDP in international dollars (1980 prices) 1900-87,
adjusted to include impact of boundary changes

| \$ Million | 1900 | 1913 | 1950 | 1973 | 1987 |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Australia | 10,934 | 16,344 | 35,891 | 103,929 | 154,398 |
| Austria | 9,859 | 13,432 | 14,721 | 48,812 | 66,488 |
| Belgium | 14,293 | 18,443 | 26,908 | 67,556 | 86,479 |
| Canada | 9,864 | 21,775 | 66,240 | 206,386 | 329,525 |
| Denmark | 4,435 | 6,699 | 16,627 | 39,397 | 50,818 |
| Finland | 2,709 | 3,920 | 10,464 | 31,752 | 47,049 |
| France | 65,154 | 80,636 | 123,051 | 388,908 | 527,602 |
| Germany | 53,259 | 77,864 | 125,361 | 470,687 | 606,404 |
| Italy | 44,718 | 64,066 | 108,657 | 371,649 | 515,518 |
| Japan | 29,840 | 41,102 | 93,342 | 719,530 | 1,198,943 |
| Netherlands | 11,036 | 14,794 | 35,950 | 104,211 | 134,420 |
| Norway | 2,717 | 3,848 | 11,218 | 28,011 | 48,711 |
| Sweden | 7,610 | 10,106 | 27,447 | 65,435 | 86,403 |
| Switzerland | 6,852 | 9,559 | 24,672 | 67,994 | 78,268 |
| United Kingdom | 107,502 | 130,623 | 210,041 | 416,686 | 520,270 |
| United States | 222,352 | 368,132 | 1,019,725 | 2,326,225 | 3,308,401 |
| OECD total | 603,134 | 881,343 | 1,950,315 | 5,459,168 | 7,759,337 |
| Bangladesh | 10,131 | 11,780 | 14,265 | 20,874 | 38,661 |
| China | 160,434 | 176,260 | 184,855 | 682,557 | 1,869,945 |
| India | 88,789 | 100,553 | 129,111 | 297,236 | 521,772 |
| Indonesia | 20,060 | 25,457 | 35,182 | 97,627 | 204,928 |
| Pakistan | 8,152 | 8,756 | 14,693 | 39,315 | 89,917 |
| Philippines | 5,259 | 9,242 | 18,022 | 55,583 | 86,582 |
| South Korea | 4,816 | 6,264 | 11,584 | 61,054 | 176,116 |
| Taiwan | 1,240 | 1,571 | 4,144 | 32,202 | 92,757 |
| Thailand | 4,579 | 5,666 | 12,704 | 52,789 | 122,430 |
| Asia total | 303,460 | 374,549 | 424,560 | 1,339,237 | 3,203,108 |
| Argentina | 6,028 | 13,546 | 39,865 | 93,560 | 104,004 |
| Brazil | 7,839 | 12,325 | 55,709 | 250,014 | 480,752 |
| Chile | 2,844 | 4,382 | 14,316 | 32,756 | 42,362 |
| Colombia | 2,438 | 4,161 | 16,174 | 52,322 | 89,297 |
| Mexico | 8,829 | 12,313 | 32,002 | 132,678 | 216,434 |
| Peru | 2,364 | 3,693 | 10,296 | 33,817 | 49,397 |
| Latin America total | 30,342 | 50,420 | 168,363 | 595,147 | 982,246 |
| USSR | 98,029 | 154,134 | 407,840 | 1,265,598 | 1,683,764 |
| 32-country total | 1,034,965 | 1,433,235 | 2,951,078 | 8,659,150 | 13,628,455 |

Source: Angus Maddison, *The World Economy in the 20th Century*, OECD Development Centre, Paris, 1989.

Notes

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